

August 31, 2015

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II – Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Dan,

I am so thankful for the Equal Justice America funding that I received for my work with the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau this summer. At HLAB, I represented low-income Boston residents who were facing eviction or were being unjustly denied benefits. I had 12 full-time clients, and I also provided on-the-spot assistance to tenants in Boston Housing Court.

During my time at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, I saw firsthand how the justice system does not serve all citizens equally. I saw sick and disabled tenants face eviction, and I saw tenants struggle to understand notices that were purposefully written to be confusing.

One of my clients was a single mother to six children under the age of ten, and she was facing eviction for not keeping her apartment clean enough to meet her landlord's standards. She was depressed and overwhelmed; the weekend before an inspection, she was hospitalized because of an ulcer. I went to her apartment the day of this inspection, the second of four required inspections for the year. I helped her clean up, talked to her about how she was feeling, and took pictures of the space before I left. Two weeks later when the landlord's attorney called, I was glad to have those pictures, along with a positive inspection report, to prove that my client had left her apartment in perfect condition, quite unlike the apartment he described to me when claiming that she had failed the inspection and that he was going to call DCF to have her children taken from her.

Another client approached me in court after having signed an agreement with terms she didn't quite understand. Her social worker had tipped her off that if she were to be evicted for nonpayment, she might not be able to get into shelters; she was worried that the Agreement for Judgment she had just signed would mean she would be on the street once she moved out of her unit. After some back and forth, I was able to convince her landlord's attorney to write a letter that the tenant could take with her to shelters in case she was questioned about the AFJ she had signed.

My clients continue to live with financial instability, food insecurity, discrimination and abuse. But I am satisfied with the work I did this summer, knowing that I was able to make them feel heard and cared for. I arranged for rent payment agreements they could afford, I negotiated incentivized move outs so that they could either have time to find another residence or get funding to help them do so, and I got their landlords to agree to fix hazardous and unsanitary conditions in their homes. The work I was able to do this summer, made possible by EJA, made a difference in the lives of low-income Bostonians

and gave me a glimpse of what it is like to be a lawyer in service to the public. I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for their valuable aid that helped me to help others.

Sincerely,

Jessica Carballo
Harvard Law School
Class of 2017