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Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Law Student Fellowships
Building 11, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I spent this past summer working in Los Angeles as an intern for the Alliance for Children's Rights, an organization that advocates on behalf of children in foster care in the LA County Foster Care system. I was assigned to the special education project, where I was responsible for a caseload of approximately 30 cases. I acquired educational records, prepared for and observed Individualized Education Plan meetings, assisted an attorney in preparation for a due process hearing, drafted legal correspondence, communicated with school administrators about following statutory requirements, and completed a Compliance Complaint that was filed against a school district.

These experiences gave me an excellent understanding of the issues that special needs foster children face. We had some clients who had been expelled from multiple schools without anyone ever stopping to see why they might be having consistent difficulty. Additionally, we had some who, though they were supposed to be receiving a particular service, were not receiving the services to which they were entitled. Most of our students were well behind grade level; we even had one student who had been sent to "Independent Study" at home for nearly 10 years because he was too difficult in the classroom, but it was not clear he had received any assistance while at home. This experience opened my eyes to the way foster children get lost and forgotten, but it also empowered me to advocate for the clients to whom I was assigned. For many of the clients, their current foster parent calling in was the first time someone had really advocated in the school on their behalf.

In addition to my work with the special education project, I was able to learn about other areas of the law by performing an adoption and working with a client to resolve a public benefits issue. The Alliance for Children's Rights, in conjunction with Public Counsel, a public interest law firm in Los Angeles, hosts Adoption Day. During Adoption Day several law firms in the area volunteer to assist clients with adoptions and everyone comes to dependency court on the same day. When I stepped off the elevator I saw that the entire room was filled with little girls and boys in their fanciest attire and eager to-be parents sitting by. All of the courtrooms on that floor only performed adoptions that

morning. I represented Ronald, a seven-year-old boy who smiled shyly when I introduced myself and then shook my hand. The adoption itself is a simple procedure, but there was nothing more rewarding than seeing Ronald's newly formed family rejoicing; many of the families represented that day had waited months, even years, to adopt these children.

Finally, I also had the opportunity to learn about the Alliance's clients' lives through working on the intake line every week. I had to learn how to tell some people that we could not help them, which was often a heartbreaking experience, especially when they would reply that they had tried so many organizations and had been referred over and over again that they were losing hope. I did, however, get to speak with many clients whose cases we accepted. Though the summer was too short to see too many cases from beginning to end, it was gratifying to be able to tell a client we were taking affirmative steps and making progress in their case. Though the steps were often small, we were moving forward bit by bit.

I would like to thank Equal Justice America for providing me with an invaluable source of funding. This fellowship enabled me to advocate on behalf of poor and indigent children and affirmed my desire to work in public interest law. Without this form of assistance, taking these valuable but unpaid internships would be much more difficult. Thank you so much for making this possible.

Sincerely,

Isabel M. Daniels
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