

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer, and thanks to Equal Justice America summer fellowship, I had the privilege of interning with South Brooklyn Legal Services (SBLS). SBLS aims to secure equal justice for low-income people in Brooklyn, New York by providing a broad range of legal advocacy and information, and helping empower poor people to identify and defeat the causes and effects of poverty in their communities.

During my 10-week summer internship, I worked in the organization's housing unit. Thus my primary responsibility was to work with my supervising attorney in defending low-income tenants who were often in danger of being evicted from their homes. In that capacity I worked with my supervising attorney to conduct client interviews, attend court appearances, and visit clients' homes to assess the legality of their claims. On a daily basis, I also conducted legal research in landlord tenant law, and wrote answers and motions under the supervision of my supervising attorney. In addition, I often accompanied my supervising attorney to tenant organizations' community meetings, whose aim was to change some of the housing court and administrative agencies' practices and policies, which we strongly believe are illegal or highly unfair to low income tenants.

Finally, and as part of my internship, I worked on a project to reform the New York City housing court system, which involved conducting research on past and current reform initiatives and making an assessment of which initiatives are more likely to positively change the lives of

low income tenants in New York City. The project was motivated by a common agreement between housing court lawyers and tenant organizations leaders that the New York City housing court system currently entertains practices which put low income tenants at a disadvantage and contribute to a denial of some of their fundamental legal rights.

Through my work with South Brooklyn Legal Services, I was exposed first hand to the grave problems facing low income Americans who do not have the luxury of being able to hire a lawyer when their basic legal rights have been violated. Many of the client interviews that I participated in were simply heart breaking, and I often had to hold back tears as I met with clients in very vulnerable positions; tenants who were disabled, pregnant, with very young children, very little or no financial resources, and who feared that they could be evicted from their homes in a matter of days. Although most of our clients had legally cognizable claims and defenses, with little or no legal knowledge or assistance, they felt helpless having to fight with their landlords' lawyers. Being able to help these clients keep their homes certainly gave me a deeper appreciation for the work of public interests lawyers. Thus and because of my internship with South Brooklyn Legal Services, I am now even more confident in my decision to pursue a career in public interest law.

Thank you Equal Justice America for encouraging young future lawyers like me to do the work that we deeply care about, while at the same time making a positive difference in the lives of low-income Americans.

With deep gratitude,

Jacqueline Murekatete

Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Candidate for Juris Doctor, June 2012

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Towards justice and dignity for all • Por justicia y dignidad para todos

September 22, 2011

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

Re: Jacqueline Murekatete

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to provide an evaluation of Jacqueline Murekatete's 10-week internship this summer with the Housing Unit of South Brooklyn Legal Services. Ms. Murekatete worked with me in our practice of defending low-income tenants against eviction proceedings. Specifically, she interviewed clients, researched legal issues, drafted legal papers, attended Housing Court proceedings with me, and visited clients at home to speak to them and observe their living conditions.

Ms. Murekatete took a lead role on two cases. One case concerned a tenant facing eviction after she had withheld rent in order to pay for repairs in her apartment; the landlord had ignored requests for repairs for several years. Ms. Murekatete visited the client in her apartment and sat with her at the kitchen table questioning her and listening to her story. Then Ms. Murekatete assembled and organized several years' worth of bills, receipts, and welfare records, which we used to identify a number of rent payments that the landlord had not credited to the tenant. Ms. Murekatete very gently and patiently helped the client reconstruct her expenses, so that we were able to negotiate a settlement in which the landlord agreed to drop the case and pay the tenant nearly \$900.00.

In another case, Ms. Murekatete drafted a motion for summary judgment on the grounds of insufficient notice and res judicata. That case is still pending, but I am confident that the motion will be granted.

Ms. Murekatete also helped draft a motion to dismiss a case for want of prosecution. We then had the pleasant surprise of being begged by opposing counsel in the hallway of the Housing Court to settle the case at any cost to the landlord, rather than litigate the motion.

I also asked Ms. Murekatete to research a number of background legal issues, culminating in her assembling a comprehensive bibliography of law review articles on court reform and access to justice for an emerging tenant coalition for Housing Court reform.

Ms. Murekatete's patience with clients was matched by her perfect reliability and her doggedness, an ideal combination for a legal services practitioner. As I'm sure is evident from her written statements for EJA, she is also a meticulous and moving writer.

Thank you for supporting Ms. Murekatete's work here at SBLS. If I can provide any further information or evaluation of her internship, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Michael Grinthal
Staff Attorney
Housing Law Unit