

August 29, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to thank you for the support from Equal Justice America this summer for my work with the Legal Aid Society of Columbus. I had a deeply moving experiences working with clients facing foreclosure, mounting debt, and unfair lending practices. I was inspired by the attorneys I worked with, their dedication to serving those most in need. Our legal system is difficult if not impossible to navigate without adequate representation. On a daily basis, I talked with clients confused and overwhelmed after receiving papers from the court. I was able to play at least a small part in guiding them through the process and reaching solutions in their disputes.

In Ohio, foreclosures can often be avoided through mediation, a court-ordered meeting between the defendant and a representative of the mortgage company. Most of the clients facing foreclosure were doing all they could to improve their finances, eager for a second chance to make the mortgage payments and keep their homes. One client lost her job after being diagnosed with terminal cancer; she was undergoing chemotherapy, but she was determined to work again once she felt well enough. Another client had lived in his house for many decades, paid off the mortgage years ago, but fell behind in paying property taxes. He was confused by the lawsuit against him, but met with a housing counselor and realized he could arrange a reverse mortgage and pay off his debt. With guidance, many defendants can resolve such disputes without going to trial. But without help, many do nothing, and default judgment is entered against them.

The attorneys were not always able to help, but I was surprised how often they would accept a case in which the odds seemed stacked against the client. In my second week, I met with a man who was being sued by a university for damage to their property more than ten years ago. He claimed to have no part in damaging the school's property; he dropped out in the middle of a semester after being sentenced to prison for a drug-related offense. His family received a bill from the university and protested, but made some payments for fear of legal action. The university ceased communication, and the client moved on with his life, started a family and

completed his degree. He was stunned that a lawsuit was filed against him after so many years had passed. I listened to his story sympathetically, but doubted we would accept his case. I was wrong--by the end of the week, he had signed the retainer and we were vigorously researching his defense.

Arthur Vanderbilt, former Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, once said, "If citizens have respect for the work of their courts, their respect for law will survive the shortcomings of every other branch of government; but if they lose respect for the work of the courts, their respect for law and order will vanish with it." When citizens are left in the dark as to the workings of our legal system, how can we expect them to believe there is any justice to be found in our courts? Our society needs passionate advocates, such as those I met at the Legal Aid Society, to ensure all citizens are treated with fairness and compassion.

My internship experience this summer was invaluable, no matter what area of law I eventually practice. As a result of my time at the Legal Aid Society, I intend to pursue pro bono work and community service throughout my career. Lawyers are privileged to have a thorough understanding of our nation's legal system, and that knowledge comes with a responsibility to serve our communities and advocate for those who feel the system is against them. Thank you for making it possible for me to learn this firsthand.

Sincerely,

Jeff Hobday
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