

August 23, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you to Equal Justice America for supporting my work this summer with LAF Chicago. I worked with the Housing Practice Group, a placement I was very excited about when it was offered to me. Ever since working as a paralegal with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Housing Practice Group, I knew I wanted my professional and legal experience to focus on housing issues for low income people. Equal Justice America's support allowed me to pursue this goal with my summer internship at LAF Chicago.

While working at LAF Chicago I was able to apply what I had learned my 1L year of law school in a practical way that moved me toward my goal of ensuring housing justice for low income people. On a daily basis I was involved with everything the Housing Practice Group attorneys were involved with. A sampling of the work I conducted over the summer included: conducting client intakes and presenting cases at weekly case acceptance meetings; researched and wrote memos, including a petition for certiorari and research for an appeal filed with the appellate court; direct service to clients; drafting and responding to discovery requests; and even negotiating an insurance claim with a construction company on behalf of a client.

My work this summer reaffirmed for me how important legal service attorneys are for low income people, and my passion for working with the clients to resolve their issues. However, this knowledge and passion is hard to balance with the shortage of resources available for legal services organizations. The shortage requires hard decisions during the case acceptance process, and even though you may feel strongly about a particular client and their situation, it is not possible to accept every case. The decisions are even harder when you know tenants without representation are more likely to be evicted, or lose their assistance through a voucher program. Legal representation is often the link to tenants remaining housed or homeless.

Although there were a lot of tenants and clients I enjoyed working with over the summer, the client I probably connected with the most was a woman who was proposed for termination from her voucher program over an income verification issue. She received payment from a special program through the state of Illinois that allowed her to be paid for the in-home care she provided to her disabled son. Although she had provided documentation to the housing authority, a language barrier prevented the authority from understanding the source of her income, and from accurately calculating the income for purposes of her participation in the voucher program.

I was able to work with the client to collect and organize documents, develop an understanding of the state run program her son participated in, and drafted a memo to present to the housing authority on her behalf. Unfortunately, my internship ended before her case was resolved, but I am hopeful that her housing assistance will not be terminated and she will not have income verification problems with the housing authority in the future. On the last day of my internship, the client thanked me for my understanding and patience in working with her, and wished me the best.

Working closely with clients such as the one I previously mentioned is what sustains me in my commitment to legal services work. However, my placement this summer provided me more than practical legal experience. I learned about myself in the professional legal setting. Even though I worked professionally for eight years before coming to law school, working as an up and coming attorney is different from anything I have ever done before. In my placement, I learned about meeting deadlines, which required putting aside my perfectionist tendencies. I also learned about what it means to trust myself and my abilities, and what it looks like to work confidently in an environment that can be stressful, quick paced, and often does not allow for a lot of feedback. These are skills and experience that will benefit me in my growth as a future attorney, and can only be improved with future professional experiences.

In closing, I would like to again say thank you to Equal Justice America for supporting my goal, providing me with this opportunity to learn about myself, and allowing me to provide professional legal assistance to low income clients.

Sincerely,  
Jenelle M. Dame  
Juris Doctorate Candidate 2016  
Chicago-Kent College of Law