

Dan Ruben, Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to provide you with information about my experience as a legal intern at Legal Services of Northern Virginia, a non-profit firm that practices civil poverty law. As an LSNV intern, I researched issues in housing law, consumer law, elder law and family law to assist staff attorneys in preparing for litigation; observed intake interviews, drafted and responded to discovery requests, participated in practice group and office-wide case review meetings, and generally assisted with trial preparation; observed court proceedings in the Fairfax County General District Court, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and Circuit Court, filed and retrieved court documents for clients and attorneys, and participated in court-sponsored client outreach programs; interpreted for client meetings and phone conversations with Spanish-speaking clients, and translated documents to and from Spanish for clients and LSNV attorneys.

My most rewarding and memorable experiences of the summer came from direct contact with clients. The LSNV attorneys conduct intake interviews throughout each week to get background information on potential clients' cases and to determine whether the clients qualify for LSNV services. They then consult with their practice groups to discuss whether the cases are within LSNV's priority areas, and decide whether to represent the clients. As one of the only Spanish speakers in the office (apart from the non-legal staff), I was able to not only observe in these interviews but to engage in them as an interpreter. From there, I would either help draft a letter to the client (if the attorney had decided to offer only advice and counsel but not legal representation), or I would assist the attorney in gathering information for the case and preparing for trial if he or she decided to take it.

Many of the most moving client stories were highly personal and sensitive ones in the area of family law, usually involving an act of family abuse and a protective order, in addition to custody and child support if there were children involved. In one instance, a woman and her three children had been abandoned by her husband, and came to LSNV seeking custody and child support. Since the woman was

not a native English speaker, I went through the discovery questions with her, wrote up her answers and helped her gather the necessary documents to send to the opposing party's counsel. I also sat in on negotiations between our LSNV attorney and the opposing party's attorney, which yielded full custody for the mother and child support in the full amount that she had asked for in settlement. The money she was awarded would allow her to support herself and her family without the government aid, such as TANF, that she had previously been receiving. Other clients often came with similar situations, wanting to know what legal recourse they had against an abusive spouse, for example, or another party seeking custody of their children.

Because of the large immigrant population served by LSNV, I felt that the most important things that I did throughout my internship were to help bridge gaps between non-native English speakers and our attorneys, and to facilitate cultural understanding and familiarity with our legal system. By informing people about court procedures, sitting in on conversations with attorneys about their legal options, discussing their specific situation with them, preparing them for questioning at trial, and assisting them in overcoming linguistic and other barriers to seeking out legal aid, I felt that I made a difference in the lives of LSNV clients during my 10 weeks as an intern.

I want to thank you again for supporting me in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jodi LeBolt

GW Law Class of 2015