

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is John Beck. Due in part to the fellowship provided by Equal Justice America, I was able to spend my summer working at Greater Boston Legal Services as a member of the CORI & Re-Entry Project. CORI is acronym for Criminal Record Offender Information. In short, CORI is the Massachusetts equivalent to a criminal record. The CORI Project is dedicated to assisting low-income individuals seal their CORI records in the hopes that this will better enable them to find jobs, avoid discrimination, and pursue unfettered access to public assistance.

Two cases stand out to me from my experiences this summer. The first was a typical case. My client, who we can refer to as John, had a criminal record that began thirty years prior to our meeting. Even though it had been ten years since John released from prison, he was nonetheless struggling to find employment and public housing. Due largely in part to mandatory criminal background checks required by most employers, John faced an insurmountable barrier in every attempt he took to find work.

John's lengthy criminal record depicted a troubled past mired in drugs and petty theft. Today, John is nearing sixty. He is unemployed. He depends on his adult children for housing and support. When John was served his prison sentence, he was paying for the crimes he committed. Nobody, including John, denies that. However, despite his release, John's sentence extended far into the following years. If the goal of the prison system is to punish the guilty, then John has fulfilled that goal and more. His CORI record continued to follow him not just as a reminder of the crimes he had committed, but also as a ball-and-chain preventing him from rehabilitating his life post incarceration.

For John, the recent reforms to CORI law made sealing his record as simple as filling out the proper paperwork and waiting for it to be processed. For others, it involves attending a court hearing and having a judge order that the CORI record be sealed. At Greater Boston Legal Services, I assisted over thirty Boston residents overcome their CORI record and move past their past transgressions. Whether or not you believe CORI sealing is the right, the impact of CORI sealing on my clients was clear. They were free to pursue employment limited only by the law and not by their past alone. Access to work meant financial independence - an escape from homelessness, poverty, and the welfare state.

The second case I would like to talk about was different from any other case that I encountered over the summer. My client, who we can refer to as Mike, is a recent college graduate. Last year, another man with the same exact name and birthday committed a felony larceny. Unfortunately, due to the shared name and birthday, a warrant was issued for Mike's arrest instead of the man who committed the crime. Once Mike became aware of the problem, he went to a court hearing and had the warrant dismissed. However, when

a criminal record was created for the man who committed the crime, it identified Mike instead. Now that Mike has graduated, he has been searching for employment. This search has come to a complete standstill as a result of Mike's criminal record. The injustice was palpable. Mike was suffering the consequences of a criminal record that was created for a crime with which he had absolutely no connection.

When Mike came to Greater Boston Legal Services, he was out of options. Not only did he lack the resources to hire his own attorney, but he was turned away by every authority that had wrongly saddled him with a criminal record - the police, the courts, and the office of probation. Once I met with Mike, we were able to identify the issue and settle on a solution. Within a week, I had prepared an affidavit and memo to help get Mike's record expunged or sealed. This all happened in my last week at Greater Boston Legal Services. I was able to submit the paperwork, but the outcome has not yet been decided. I am confident that Mike will be vindicated in the end.

CORI sealing is a controversial subject. This is especially true among those involved deeply with the system: Greater Boston Legal Services lawyers, the District Attorney's office, the clients, and the courts. A sealed record does not give full reign to their owners. The CORI law allows access when requested by criminal justice agencies, hospitals, schools, and employers that work with vulnerable populations. Certain egregious crimes can never be sealed. The CORI law itself is reasonably constructed, although it is not always reasonably administered.

Through the Equal Justice America Fellowship, I was able to fund a summer exploring the criminal justice system in my home city of Boston. I helped a wide range of clients and garnered invaluable experience that will stay with me for the rest of my career.

Sincerely Yours,

John Beck
Harvard Law School

EVALUATION OF JOHN BECK

John worked as a law student in the CORI & Re-entry Project at Greater Boston Legal Services from May 27, 2014 to August 1, 2014.

Intern placement description.

The mission of the CORI & Re-Entry Project is to assist individuals from communities of color, particularly in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan, in overcoming barriers to employment and other opportunities caused by their Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) histories.

Supervisors: Attorney Pauline Quirion and Attorney Susan Malouin

Tasks.

John completed many intake questionnaires with clients on the phone or in person at our monthly intake tables at the Roxbury and Dorchester divisions of the Boston Municipal Court. He also worked on cases involving criminal record sealing and did research on consequences of criminal records, such as licensure issues and out-of-state record sealing. He drafted affidavits, motions, petitions and related documents. He assisted us in court and helped us manage clients we were representing at the Roxbury criminal record sealing sessions in both June and July.

Professional, Performance and Related Issues.

John is intelligent and a quick study. He is very mature, highly professional and has friendly demeanor. He has good interpersonal skills which translate well in a public interest setting. He was able to work well with all types of people and has empathy for others. We enjoyed working with him.

John wants to make a difference in the world and we have no doubt that he will.

If you have questions, please contact Pauline Quirion at pquirion@gbls.org or 617-603-1554.