

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Working at the East Bay Community Law Center gave me the opportunity to use the law to help clients in need. I came to law school because I believe that the law is a powerful tool that can improve lives, and over the summer at EBCLC I was able to see the positive impact it can have on individuals.

Laura, my first client, was going to lose her Section 8 voucher. During our preparation, I asked what the voucher meant to her. Without any trace of melodrama, she said, "I would be homeless, my entire life and health depends on my Section 8. I would be lost". And it was true.

Laura's disability prevented her from being able to keep track of time or tasks. She sleeps most of the day. I had to go to her apartment and wake her up for important appointments. Her sister used to be her In Home Support Services worker and help her with daily tasks, but she had abandoned Laura without warning. Laura's building had been foreclosed on four times in the last two years and she missed a Housing Authority deadline to move to a different unit.

Despite the challenges she faced and the clear toll the stress of the possible loss of her housing took on her mentally and physically, Laura was always friendly and kind. She spoke with affection about her friends and took great pride in the small tasks she accomplished.

I went to her home a few times to prepare for the hearing when she was too tired to come to the office. She was gracious and grinned when we talked about her cats. Seeing the place we were desperately trying to keep gave me additional perspective. The appliances didn't work, it was moldy and there were cracks in the walls, but any home is better than none at all. It was full of personal touches, calendars with Minnie Mouse, her favorite cartoon character, and a huge bowl of lemons because she likes the way they smell.

The Housing Authority was moving to terminate Laura's voucher on two grounds: It had not paid rent on her behalf in over six months, and therefore presumes that she does not need government assistance, and because she did not comply with the deadline to move after her apartment failed city inspection. She had never previously requested a reasonable accommodation for her disability.

The Housing Authority held a meeting where I was able to present our evidence. My supervisor at the East Bay Community Law Center let me present the case we had all built. I drafted doctors' letters and spent hours preparing Laura to testify. I felt nauseous even though we had a strong case to present. I was terrified we would lose and my client would have nowhere else to turn. Afterwards, as we were walking to the car, Laura turned to me and said, "Julia, you will make an excellent attorney. Thank you." She knew what was at stake and I should have been the one reassuring her, but her genuine gratitude reminded me why I choose to come to law school.

A billion dollar case at a corporate law firm would never mean as much to a client as my first case meant to Laura. Serving low-income clients, advocating for mere dollars a month, may seem trivial, but its impact on clients' lives is much greater than the biggest business deals. It is vital not for the competitive edge of a business, but for survival.

I started my summer at EBCLC expecting to have a rewarding summer experience. Instead I learned life-long lessons, and I'm going to continue working there this fall. At East Bay Community Law Center I can devote my time to work I believe in, and in the process meet amazing, resilient people. I am grateful to have had such a rewarding experience.

Sincerely,

Julia Parish  
UC Berkeley School of Law, 2011