

August 28, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My Summer Fellowship was spent with the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau in their housing department. I represented indigent tenants in eviction proceedings; because of my background in social work and mental health, most of my cases involved reasonable accommodation defenses for disabled clients.

Although I worked with a variety of clients, in a variety of contexts, there were three cases I prepared for trial, and I worked with those clients most extensively. Their stories were heartbreaking. All were facing eviction from public housing, with no idea where they would go or how they could afford another (non-subsidized) place to live. One case, in particular, spoke to me—Ms. S, a disabled tenant, was being evicted through no fault of her own because the landlord claimed he needed to renovate her apartment. After months of litigation, the landlord eventually admitted that he could do the renovations in the space of one or two days, and that there was no need for eviction. If Ms. S had not retained representation, she would have been forced out of her home. Because the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau was helping her, however, a settlement agreement was negotiated that allowed her to keep her apartment and even choose her own hotel, should temporary relocation by her landlord become necessary.

I like telling Ms. S's story because it highlights what is so rewarding about this type of work. It would have been very hard for Ms. S to relocate, given her disability, and more importantly, *it was not necessary for her to do so*. Although the law grants her the same ability to enjoy housing as anyone else, her landlord wanted to ignore that law. Through HLAB, and legal service organizations like it, disenfranchised individuals find their voices and protect their rights. Ms. S was able to keep her home.

Sincerely,

Kara Hurvitz
Boston College Law School
Candidate for *Juris Doctor*, 2009