

August 30, 2005

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank you for the funding that Equal Justice America provided me for my Summer Fellowship at Legal Services of South Central Michigan. After feeling slightly worn down by my first year of law school, the chance to work in an office with such great camaraderie was refreshing. Moreover, the opportunity to serve vulnerable members of our community reminded me why I came to law school and renewed my resolve to practice public interest law when I graduate.

As a summer clerk, I focused on elder law, though I gained experience in many substantive areas of the law. On a typical day, I conducted one or two intakes from clients. This process consisted of getting the client's personal information as well as information about the legal problem he or she was facing. I also worked on drafting motions, briefs, and answers for individual client cases. I was able to attend court on a number of occasions and also attended several Section 8 termination hearings. Finally, I learned about drafting documents including wills, powers of attorney for healthcare and finance. I also gained substantial experience in dealing with low-income clients, and with other agencies including the Department of Human Services and the Social Security Administration.

Because I requested to focus on elder law, I was able to learn more about the unique issues these clients face as well as some of the professional challenges in assisting them. Specifically, I now know that these include assessing competency and finding referrals for seniors who are having problems that are not legal in nature. The elder law attorney was very frank about how she sometimes agonizes about what is the best course of action for a particular senior. She also talked to me candidly about how alone she can feel in these decisions, since the law can be unclear about the standards for competency. I appreciated her candor and her willingness to share her professional struggles with me.

While the attorneys gave clerks substantial responsibility and a variety of assignments, I never felt overwhelmed. One of the challenges I faced was learning how to balance and prioritize among clients with different needs and deadlines. A particular highlight was the weekly intake meeting where all the attorneys, clerks, and legal assistants would review the cases that came in that week. This was invaluable as it allowed the clerks to participate in the problem-solving process and understand how the office came to decisions on how to handle unusual or particularly challenging problems.

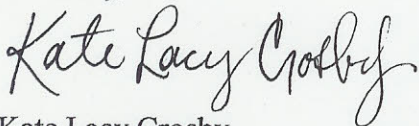


One of the best parts of working at LSSCM is the incredible staff. All the attorneys were helpful, eager to respond to concerns, and many were experienced mentors. They took the time to explain the filing process as well as offered practical research and writing tips. I always had enough independence to figure out how to navigate the process myself, with the attorneys ready and willing to answer the myriad of questions I had along the way. Even as they offered me feedback on my work, they also asked how they could improve the experience for future clerks.

I will always remember how Managing Attorney, Paul Sher, described a "positive outcome." Paul said that he considered a case a success if the client was in a better position than she would have been had she not obtained services through LSSCM. I found this definition of "positive" outcome both pragmatic and encouraging. In a perfect world, our clients would fully triumph over all the legal problems they face. But, in reality, we should not confine our sense of accomplishment to cases only where the client receives a large lump sum payment, or prevails in court. Since we cannot fix every problem for every client, we should embrace the opportunity to share information with clients, to negotiate more time for a client to scrape together rent to avoid eviction, or to help a client navigate a complicated Human Services application, or to simply listen to a client's story. Although these triumphs are not glamorous or flashy, they comprise a substantial part of a Legal Services Attorney's work. After I heard Paul's "positive outcome" definition in an intake meeting, I made a conscious effort to not overlook good work when it happened around me. I found that it was often the fuel that kept me going.

Again, thank you for your generosity and for your willingness to enable law students to have life-changing summer job opportunities. My clerkship at Legal Services of South Central Michigan was a more valuable learning experience than any first year class. I feel renewed in my commitment to practice public interest law, and inspired by the wisdom, leadership, and genuine camaraderie of the attorneys I worked with. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Lacy Crosby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Kate Lacy Crosby  
University of Michigan Law School  
Expected Graduation, 2007