

KATE WALSHAM

October 3, 2012

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

Dear Dan,

My fellowship at NCLR this summer was fantastic. I had the opportunity to work with 47 helpline callers from across the nation who were facing difficulties because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The majority of these people identified themselves as low-income and/or on public assistance. Their legal issues were diverse, ranging from prisoners seeking assistance improving their conditions of confinement to lesbians suffering through custody battles with their ex-husbands and ex-wives in states unsupportive of custody for lesbian mothers or non-biological parents. As the intake staff for these questions, I was also responsible for following up with my clients to get additional information to ensure that my responses were accurately addressing their questions and crafting responses to those questions. A particularly difficult helpline issue I worked on involved a non-biological, non-adoptive mother in New York where there are no presumptions of parentage and therefore it is nearly impossible for people so situated to obtain custody.

In addition to assisting helpline callers, I completed twenty research projects. The first major project I received was to research behavior that is statutorily defined as “unprofessional conduct” for licensed California medical doctors as a parallel for the sort of unprofessional conduct label psychologists would face if the California bill currently in the legislature that would forbid licensed mental health practitioners from engaging in so called “reparative therapy” (attempting to change a person’s sexual orientation) on minors. A second research project I worked on was on behalf of a transgender girl in Texas who was experiencing excessive bullying from teachers and students, so I conducted research on Texas school districts’ tort liability for personal injury to children and learned that Texas has waived almost no sovereign immunity for its schools.

The most fascinating projects I worked on were prisoner-related. I heard from prisoners across the country who were often in solitary confinement conditions (sometimes referred to as administrative segregation) because they identified as gay or lesbian or transgender. I directly interacted with these folks by corresponding via phone and email to inform them of their rights and to provide information about the laws in their states and federal law that protects prisoners from certain confinement conditions. In addition to the direct services work I was able to do with prisoners, this summer there was the first ever Senate subcommittee hearing on solitary confinement. I researched and drafted what ultimately became NCLR’s testimony for that Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution and Human Rights hearing. It was fascinating and meant that I felt I was helping my clients not only on an individual basis but also on a national scale.

EJA's support the summer really meant that I got to assist LGBT people from across the country with family law issues. If it was possible for me to be more committed to social justice and public interest law, I am thanks to EJA's two years of support.

Sincerely,

Kate Walsham
UC Hastings class of 2013