

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, my second and last summer of law school, I had the privilege to clerk for Legal Services of South Central Michigan. This opportunity was largely made possible by the Equal Justice America Fellowship I received. Legal Services of South Central Michigan is a wonderful organization providing much needed legal services to indigent clients who would otherwise not have access to them.

The bulk of the work the organization does is housing, which makes up approximately 80% of the caseload. It also deals regularly with public benefits law. Although those are the two main areas of law handled by the agency, it does a multitude of work in many different areas. For example, I worked on a few divorce cases with this particular office, but because Ann Arbor is also home to the Family Law Project, our office sees very few of these cases. I also had the opportunity to work on an expungement case. This was particularly exciting for me because I was able to research and take point on the entire process.

As previously stated, I worked mainly on housing cases. It was a completely new experience for me and I had no prior knowledge of the subject, but all of the attorneys at legal services are amazing teachers and I quickly gained the knowledge and confidence necessary to handle these cases. There are so many housing cases that often the clerks are the primary contact for clients. One of the most helpful skills I learned this summer was how to work with clients, and especially the importance of keeping them updated about their cases. For the client, the issue is an emergency and may be the most pressing concern for them at present; it makes all the difference in the world to them to just simply touch base and let them know what is going on with the case and what it means.

Three times throughout my fellowship I worked on cases wherein we were actually able to stop an eviction where a 24-hour notice to vacate had been placed on the client's door. Although legal Services does not have the resources to fully represent all potential clients, especially in these types of situations, we are often able to draft in pro per motions or advocate for the client with opposing counsel or with a social services agency.

One case I worked on involved a client who was being evicted for having a pit bull in her mobile home park. She maintained that her dog was an emotional support animal, and had provided her landlord with documentation, as required by the judgment in her case. I helped draft an ex parte order to stay the eviction and a motion to declare the judgment satisfied. Our motion ended up being granted and the client was allowed to remain in her home. I felt that this case was important not only because the client kept her housing, but also because we often take for granted how important animals are to so many people.

In another case, I worked with several different agencies to find the funds which would allow the client to remain in her apartment; she had fallen behind on rent and had no defenses under the law entitling her to a rent abatement. I spent the entire day working [with] the client and two social services agencies to come up with the funds. Finally, we got the money together, but the landlord would not accept an agency commitment letter. In Washtenaw County, precedent largely established by Legal Services requires landlords to accept commitment letters from social services agencies. I told the caseworker to go with the client and explain to the

landlord that if they didn't accept the letters, we were going to file a motion for relief from judgment on the basis that the judgment had been satisfied and in it ask for costs. Later, I got an email from the caseworker explaining how the letters had been accepted when she explained what we were prepared to do and that the landlord had even told the client that if she ever got behind again, they would be more than willing to work with her to remedy the situation. The caseworker concluded her email by stating that it had been "a win for the good guys!" That day, in spite of it being an exceedingly stressful day, had truly felt like what it is all about. I gained valuable experience with working with other people and organizations to achieve a common end and help the client, which is something you cannot learn in the classroom.

These are just two examples of the many cases I worked on this summer. I have been lucky enough to not only gain valuable experience with the law, and to gain confidence as an advocate in court, but also to become a better counselor for clients. Being a lawyer is about more than looking up the law and drafting legal documents; sometimes it's about working through the options with the client and even telling them things they don't want to hear to make help them make hard decisions. Thank you so much for this wonderful opportunity.

Sincerely,

Aubree Kugler
Law Student
MSU College of Law
Expected date of graduation: May, 2018