

Matt Barno

June 3, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I want to thank Equal Justice America for providing me with a generous legal fellowship this past summer. The fellowship allowed me to spend my summer with the CORI & Re-entry Project at Greater Boston Legal Services, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The CORI & Re-entry Project focuses on providing legal services and representation to indigent clients who are interested in sealing their criminal records. Most of these clients are formerly incarcerated individuals who are facing difficulties in obtaining employment and housing. Their criminal records keep them trapped in a cycle of poverty that undermines any efforts they make to successfully reintegrate into society and begin building better lives for themselves. Sealing these records is an important step in helping these individuals to become productive and contributing members of their communities.

Our office assisted one client, John, who had done several stints in state prison for various drug convictions in the 1990s, but who had since begun to turn his life around. He successfully completed an in-house drug treatment program while incarcerated at South Bay House of Correction, and upon his release he began to volunteer extensively with Narcotics Anonymous (NA). He started several NA meetings throughout the greater Boston area and served as vice-chair of NA Hospitals and Institutions, a program that works to bring the NA message to those who cannot attend regularly scheduled meetings because they are confined to a hospital, rehabilitation facility, or penal institution. Several community leaders wrote letters demonstrating their appreciation for his efforts at combating drug addiction, including a police officer involved in local drug awareness programs. Despite these efforts to put his criminal history behind him, John still found it very difficult to find employment and housing. He had been rejected from several jobs and housing organizations because of his criminal record, and as a result he spent most of his nights at a homeless shelter operated by Pilgrim Church in Dorchester.

John's story is a perfect example of how a criminal record can continue to plague an ex-offender who is taking meaningful steps toward re-entering into the community. John recognized that he had done wrong in the past, but he was working hard to rehabilitate himself and help others to avoid making the same mistakes that he had made. All he wanted was a fair opportunity to get a job and become self-sufficient, but his criminal record continued to hold him back. Helping John seal his records in Roxbury court was one of the most fulfilling experiences of my summer, and it really showed me how important re-entry services are to indigent ex-offenders who are trying to put their lives back on track.

It would not have been possible for me to work with the CORI & Re-entry Project without the assistance of Equal Justice America. I am so grateful for the opportunity to spend my summer doing public interest work for an organization that would otherwise not be able to afford hire help. There is such a strong need for legal services amongst disenfranchised and underprivileged populations, and I am so happy that Equal Justice America gave me the chance to contribute.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Barno', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Matt Barno
Harvard Law School
J.D. Candidate, 2015**