

August 28, 2013

Matthew Boaz
Georgetown Law
JD Candidate 2015
Washington, DC

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Midlothian, VA

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

I am writing both in gratitude for the Equal Justice America Fellowship that allowed my work this summer to be possible, and to describe some of the outcomes that I was involved with at the Mississippi Center for Justice. While there are three branches of MCJ (one in Jackson, another in Biloxi, and the last in Indianola, my post), each handles a distinct set of issues. Jackson, as the hub, handles the greatest variety, but tends to focus on predatory lending practices, foreclosures, and access to healthcare. The Biloxi office centers around coastal issues, primarily those involved in rebuilding the community post-Katrina. The Indianola office revolves around issues that concern community members of the Delta, the poorest and most rural region of Mississippi. Two of the attorneys worked almost exclusively on issues pertaining to access to education and a third, a Skadden Fellow, worked with clients to combat discrimination toward those with HIV/AIDS. Her duties have since been transferred to the Jackson office and she is now working as a clerk for a judge on the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.

As the only legal intern in the Indianola office this summer, I assisted each of the attorneys on a variety of cases. While I primarily did legal research, I did have the opportunity to interact with clients by discussing various approaches to their cases, and also through some interaction with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project (MVLDP). The most concrete and enlivening example of my work this summer started out as a simple divorce case, accepted pro-bono from MVLDP by the lead education attorney in our office. I wrote all of the necessary pleadings, and I met with the client to become better informed about her desires in resolving the divorce. She was sporadically employed and thus unable to afford the filing fee for the divorce she sought from her incarcerated husband.

To our dismay, the County Chancery Clerk did not accept the filing. The Judge had apparently issued a moratorium on all *in forma pauperis* affidavits and would not allow any submissions unless the court fee could be paid. The attorneys in the office were livid and requested that I write a memo citing the Mississippi statutes that required acceptance of the filing. I submitted the memo and I met with the Judge, but she was not particularly eager to proceed with allowing the submission,

despite the legal requirement that she require her clerk to do so unless there were doubts about the truthfulness of the affidavit. Since our client was truly indigent, there was no recourse but to accept the filing. Disconcerted by the Judge's dragging feet, we contacted another attorney in the Coastal office. After conferring with him on the best approach to follow (which at one point included a writ of mandamus), he got into contact with a Justice from the Supreme Court of Mississippi, who had been working with the Access to Justice Commission to ensure that all Mississippians had equal access to the courts. The Justice personally contacted the Chancery Judge and informed her that she would be accepting the filing, would accept all future filings, and that her clerks, as well as those in the surrounding counties who had been following similar practices, would all undergo training for the next year.

I am proud to have been involved in this process. What appeared to be a rote case turned out to be a battle and eventual victory against a gross injustice that had largely gone undetected or ignored. Though this was not a typical case for the MCJ, it reflects on the values of the attorneys who work there. They were willing to take on the extra time it took to fight against this denial and ultimately ensured that future individuals would have access to the courts that had been previously denied. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked at MCJ and also for the generous financial support from EJA that made this work possible.

Sincerely,

Matthew S. Boaz

Matthew Boaz

Georgetown Law

JD Candidate 2015

10
YEARS

MISSISSIPPI
CENTER
FOR JUSTICE

Advancing Racial and Economic Justice

August 30, 2013

Dan Ruben
c/o Katie Toman
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I want to thank you for the generous contribution that Equal Justice America provided to the Mississippi Center for Justice by connecting Matthew Boaz with our work. Through the invaluable contribution of summer interns like Matthew, the Center gains additional capacity and resources that allows us to expand our current efforts and to finish projects we otherwise would have been unable to complete. I was impressed with the dedication, commitment and energy Matthew brought to every assignment. Not only did he appear every day prepared for each challenge, he took the initiative to learn more about the surrounding community and often contributed his time and energy to them as well.

Matthew worked in our Indianola office located in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. This office primary focuses on education and healthcare. Matthew's first assignment involved reviewing a voluminous record provided by a family in Vicksburg, MS who had been advocating for their autistic son in an attempt to require the school district to provide accommodations their son needed in order to be a successful student in a public school setting. Matthew organized the record and did research on the issue of the unauthorized practice of law allegation the family made against an employee of the school district's legal counsel. Matthew had an opportunity to meet the family and participated in a conference to discuss the case in more detail and to gather additional information. Based on the research conducted by

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Matthew and his review of the record, we were able to make a final decision regarding our position in this matter.

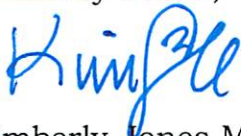
Matthew also did research on an issue involving the bullying of an HIV positive student that occurred as the result of his status being disclosed by school personnel. Matthew participated in the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Program pro bono counsel project wherein he drafted pleadings for families who could not afford an attorney. Most importantly, Matthew assisted with the primary policy issue the Center for Justice has been tackling for years, the underfunding of public schools by our State legislature. Matthew reviewed the constitutional language and funding suits in other states and prepared a brief outlining his findings. This brief was provided to a national law firm who has agreed to partner with MCJ in filing a similar funding suit in the State of Mississippi.

Lastly, Matthew took extra time to assist me personally with my community talk radio show. I produce a talk show for a local community radio station entitled, "LegalEase". The idea is to provide easy to understand explanations for legal issues that are a concern to our community. Matthew researched and provided an easy to follow outline for two of my shows.

We really enjoyed Matthew. He maintained a positive attitude and possesses the personality that aligns with our mission and vision. I have no doubt he will make an excellent attorney, but most important he is already an exceptional human being. I hope this letter provides a sufficient highlight of his assignments to assist you in understating the outstanding contribution Matthew provided to MCJ. If you need additional information, please phone me at (662) 887-6570 extension 302, or email at kmerchant@mscenterforjustice.org.

With best personal regards, I am,

Sincerely Yours,



Kimberly Jones Merchant
Managing Attorney, Delta Office
Director of Education