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

RE: SUMMER FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE AT CAMBRIDGE AND SOMERVILLE LEGAL SERVICES

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I interned at Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) and my experience as a legal intern surpassed any expectation that I could have possibly had. My work at CASLS focused primarily on housing law along with elder and disability rights. Based on the interests I had indicated during my initial interview, I was also granted the opportunity to work on cases involving special education law. Throughout the summer I interacted with a variety of low income clients along with social workers, state agency officials, housing authority officials, and opposing counsel representing landlords and housing authorities in various matters. The most remarkable aspect of my internship, however, was the high level of client contact I had and the great degree of responsibility I was given. The experience allowed me to develop skills that would not be easily developed in a typical classroom, and the variety of cases I worked on broadened my knowledge significantly.

Interning with a legal services organization helped me to better understand the type of daunting challenges that many low income clients face every day and to realize that often the clients we serve are too overwhelmed to adequately assist themselves. Most surprising to me, was the many and varied roles that public service lawyers are expected to play. As a legal intern, I developed close relationships of trust and some measure of dependence with my clients. Consequently, I often found myself playing the roles of social worker, counselor, life coach, and friend. Quite a few of my clients will remain in my memory for a very long time, but two of them stand out significantly.

The first client was a physically disabled elder who had taken custody of his wife's grandchildren following her passing. The elder, who depended on SSDI, had extremely limited means of supporting his new wards and did not fully understand how to receive benefits from the state on the children's behalf. When I first met with him he was overwhelmed, scared, frustrated, and unsure of our organization's ability to be of assistance to him. By the end of our first meeting, the client left our office feeling not only considerably more confident, but also more empowered. As the weeks progressed, the client and I worked together along with the relevant state agencies to secure benefits for his step-grandchildren. During our last meeting while I was closing his case and reviewing everything we had accomplished, the client broke into tears and thanked me profusely for all the assistance I had given him. He was not only grateful that he would be receiving assistance for the kids, but he expressed gratitude to me for being

his 'friend.' This client serves as a constant reminder to me that often even the smallest deeds can truly mean a lot to those we serve.

Another client that I would not soon forget is an elderly, disabled woman with a section 8 voucher who was facing eviction as a result of continuous breach of the terms of her lease. Although the client admitted that she was at fault and did repeatedly breach her lease, she initially refused to agree to a settlement agreement between her and the housing authority. After two unsuccessful phone conferences, I decided to use a non-legal approach to the situation. I initiated a face-to-face personal intervention with the client in the form of a meeting. At the end of the meeting, the client committed to signing a settlement agreement once it had been negotiated with the housing authority and agreed to carry out the steps necessary to convince the housing authority that she was willing to abide by the terms of the agreement. The client was eventually able to keep her voucher and after the settlement had been filed in court, she and her daughter contacted CASLS to thank me for saving her from homelessness and giving her a much-needed 'wake-up' call. Although this client was quite difficult to deal with initially my experience with her taught me about the value of treating those who seek our assistance as more than simply clients with a strictly legal problem.

I am truly thankful to Equal Justice America for allowing my summer internship with Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services to be an affordable one. The extra assistance from EJA was much needed as most legal services organizations lack the financial resources to directly pay the interns they hire. Through the EJA fellowship, I was able to follow my dream of interning at CASLS, CASLS was able to secure me as an intern, and I was able to help clients who would otherwise not be able to afford legal representation.

Warm Regards,  
Melanie Roberts  
Harvard Law School, JD 2015