

August 24, 2015

Dan Ruben
Executive Director – Equal Justice America
13540 E Boundary Rd.
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I wanted to thank you and the rest of the Equal Justice America staff and supporters for the gracious funding that allowed me to have the summer experience of a lifetime. For ten weeks this summer, I worked as a student attorney at the Family Law Project in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a project I found after conducting research on possible job placements where I could use my extensive knowledge and passion for working with survivors of domestic violence. I worked in an office with two other students, as well as three wonderful and inspiring attorneys, and as a team we were able to assist families throughout Washtenaw County in their family law cases. Under the umbrella of Legal Services of South Central Michigan, all of our clients fell below 200% of the poverty level; additionally, to qualify for services through our organization, our clients self-identified as survivors of domestic violence.

As a student attorney, I was responsible for a variety of tasks. From the earliest moments of a potential client's interactions with our office, I was able to be part of their experience. From conducting initial assessments to more in depth interviews, I was responsible for knowing the factual details of the client's case and reporting them to the rest of the staff during intake meetings. I advocated for these potential clients as the staff decided whether or not we were going to represent this client in their action. Once a decision was made, I would call the client and let them

know how their case was going to proceed as far as our office was concerned. If we decided to represent them, I served as their primary contact with the office, arranging meetings and communication, drafting court documents, and even representing them in court.

Throughout my summer experience I worked on dozens of cases, though I had the lead role on approximately 15. One case in particular that stands out to me was a young single mother with a 5-month-old son. The father was much older than my client with a criminal history as long as a football field. After an incident of severe verbal and physical abuse perpetrated by the baby's father, my client came to our office seeking assistance in obtaining a Personal Protection Order and custody of the child. I was able to meet with her and draft allegations for an Ex Parte PPO and Ex Parte Custody Order, both of which were granted. The father retained counsel and at a hearing on both issues, I was able to represent my client's interests, having the PPO upheld upon the father's criminal case and the issues of custody and parenting time referred to Friend of the Court.

My client gained a sense of security that day, knowing her and her child would be protected. I gained a sense of purpose that day, knowing that through me the law was doing its job, to protect and serve the people. I know that not every case will end in good outcomes for my clients, but knowing that I am doing everything in my power to keep my clients safe and protected is something I look forward to doing for the rest of my life. Thank you again for this wonderful opportunity!

Best,

Melanie Smith
Michigan State



July 28, 2015

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

Re: Summer Law Clerk Melanie Smith
Michigan State University School of Law

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to report back on Melanie Smith's Summer Clerkship with the Family Law Project of Legal Services of South Central Michigan, for which she was given a grant from Equal Justice America. Ms. Smith, like many of our Summer Law Clerks, helped our office in many different ways. We rely heavily on our students to keep our office operating smoothly. We currently have three (3) attorneys on our staff, and very little support/clerical staff, so law students are an integral part of our attorneys managing their large, and often complex, caseloads.

Ms. Smith's work through this summer has been a vital part of our organization. Her duties ranged from meeting with and interviewing clients, drafting a wide range of legal documents (pleadings, orders, briefs, legal memoranda, motions, etc.), conducting legal research and investigations, dispensing legal advice and appearing in Court under the supervision of an attorney from our office pursuant to Michigan Court Rule MCR 8.120.

Ms. Smith performed extremely well at her duties while with the Family Law Project. She was proactive, enthusiastic, organized and thorough. We were grateful for her assistance and grateful for the Equal Justice America grant as well, which helped us to compensate her for her assistance.

Should you have any further questions about this Clerkship or Melanie Smith, please do not hesitate to contact our office. Thank you very much.

Very Sincerely,

Emily Jackson Miller
Staff Attorney

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