

July 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

As an Equal Justice America Fellow, this summer I had the opportunity to engage in public interest law and support Public Counsel—an organization that does invaluable work for the Los Angeles community and beyond. Specifically, I interned in the Appellate Law Program and worked primarily with a team of attorneys on the appeal from a denial of a writ of habeas corpus for a detainee held at the U.S. Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Working on this case was both enlightening and heart breaking. Learning how to draft convincing arguments and witnessing how the appeal process works, particularly in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, was a creative and intellectually stimulating experience. Moreover, working with my supervisor was a wonderful opportunity to apprentice with an outstanding and highly regarded appellate attorney. Nevertheless, it was frustrating to try to pierce the seemingly impenetrable wall of negative opinions rendered by the D.C. Circuit, especially knowing our client has languished in prison for nearly a decade with no formal charge or conviction. And, it was every more discouraging to learn that our client himself was despondent about his chances of ever returning to his home because of the court's jurisprudence on this issue.

Yet, this experience also exposed me to a team of lawyers across the country each one of whom works tirelessly in the name of equal justice. Even though the record is ominous for any attorney that takes on a Guantánamo habeas defense, these individuals have enormous compassion for the plight of detainees they have only met perhaps a handful of times. This was inspiring and showed me how a commitment to justice is so important in a public interest career.

In addition to my research and writing work on the habeas appeal, I also provided direct legal services as part of the summer clerkship program at Public Counsel. I participated in Homeless Court, which was spearheaded by Public Counsel as a way to give vulnerable individuals the chance to rectify minor violations of the law while engaging with the legal system in a positive manner. I interviewed and presented to the judge two clients for whom the resolution of unpaid citations meant the difference between homelessness and a brighter future.

As part of the General Relief Advocacy Project, I supported several individuals who were attempting to receive their benefits at a social services office. Here, I encountered clients who were mentally ill, homeless and, in some cases, simply unable to ask for the very basic needs they were lacking. Yet, I was able to help a homeless man receive bus tokens so that he could go back and forth to his appointments with his caseworker. I also aided another mentally ill man get a new EBT card after his had been stolen. And, in the most difficult case, I was able to convince the social services office to provide a bus ticket home to Michigan for man who had ended up in Los Angeles without a home or any contacts. These experiences—while trying—showed me how just a little advocacy on my part could make a huge difference in the lives of others.

Altogether, my experience at Public Counsel allowed me to engage with passionate and dedicated attorneys, all of whom work to make their clients' lives better through the law, and in the name of equal justice. This experience has shown me how rewarding public interest work is, even when the chances for success seem slim. I hope to be lucky enough to engage in this kind of work throughout my career as an attorney.

Thank you for this opportunity,

Melinda Kuritzky
Harvard Law School
Class of 2013