

August 22, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to express my thanks for the generous financial support Equal Justice America provided to me this summer. Because of the EJA Fellowship I received, I was able to pursue my goal of working as an advocate for children through an internship with The Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice in New York City. During my time at The Legal Aid Society, I researched and drafted motions, interviewed clients, advocated for children in foster care, and observed the incredibly skilled staff attorneys at work in court.

Perhaps the best experience I had this summer was working with R., age 13, one of Legal Aid's delinquency practice clients. I met R. before his first court appearance, as he sat in the holding cell behind the courtroom. He explained to Brian, his attorney, and me that he had been arrested three times in as many weeks and had another case pending in the Bronx, and with tears in his eyes asked if he would have to spend any time in juvenile detention. Unfortunately R. was remanded and spent almost a week in detention, during which time I researched the admissibility of the evidence against him, namely a civilian identification via a Facebook photo that the complainant's sister showed him.

At R.'s trial, I sat next to his mother, who had been out of town for work during the few weeks that R.'s arrests had occurred. We watched together as Brian, R.'s attorney, cross-examined the complainant, both knowing that the case rested on whether the judge found his story convincing beyond a reasonable doubt. When the judge dismissed all counts of the petition against R., both he and his mother breathed an audible sigh of relief.

R.'s case stands out to me this summer because I was able to participate in the zealous representation of a client who many within the juvenile delinquency system had already found guilty before his trial even began. R. is a young man of color, living in a country where his criminality is presumed, punished for acts that his white, privileged peers can engage in without any fear of the consequences. Legal Aid's victory on behalf of R., and my small role in it, gave me a glimpse at the unique ability that child advocates, whether in delinquency or child protective proceedings, have in affecting change both on an individual and institutional level.

I am so grateful for my time this summer at The Legal Aid Society and the financial support provided by Equal Justice America. My experience this summer has deepened my commitment to public interest law and the pursuit of a career as a child advocate.

Sincerely,

Miriam Schachter
University of Michigan Law School