

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 truly grateful to Equal Justice America for providing me with a summer fellowship. This grant enabled me to spend a second summer in a row serving the low-income population in Central Virginia at a legal aid office. In addition, this grant also allowed me to continue on the path of becoming a legal aid lawyer by giving me the opportunity to experience how a different office approaches legal aid work. Without this fellowship, this opportunity would not have been possible.

My work this summer at Blue Ridge Legal Services was varied and particularly rewarding. Similar to the nature of any legal aid office, the days were often unpredictable, despite having planned goals and assignments for each day. Many days I was tasked with contacting clients with information I had discussed with an attorney or doing research on issues our clients were facing. On multiple occasions, however, these typical tasks were set aside due to frantic calls from clients or emergency walk-ins. After sitting in on telephone or in-person conferences with my supervising attorney, her and I would discuss and try to untangle the web of legal problems clients were facing. These situations exposed me to a myriad of legal issues low-income populations face and demonstrated how an effective attorney handles these complicated fact patterns and distressed clients.

Undoubtedly, the most impactful experience of my summer fellowship was having the opportunity to represent a client in an administrative decision appeals hearing. Putting my third year practice certificate to use, I was not only able to partake in the entire case process but I also served as the primary representative for our client. Getting to participate in a case from start to finish exposed me to invaluable learning experiences. I learned the imperative skill of how to sift through a multitude of statements—both written and oral—and various other documents in order to discern a clear set of facts. Additionally, I gained valuable experience in composing and executing opening and closing statements and direct and cross examinations. Without question, however, the most meaningful part of the process in terms of both an educational and personally impactful experience was being able to represent my client in front of the adjudicator. Knowing that the client took great comfort in having representation protecting her interests rather than trying to represent herself was truly striking. It is situations like these that affirm my commitment to pursuing a career in legal aid.

Equal Justice America has now given me two summers of extraordinary opportunities in the legal aid community. Through my internships I have learned how to effectively communicate with clients whether in person, by phone, or letter, dissect complicated fact patterns, form and articulate persuasive legal arguments, research with greater focus on discrete

issues, and countless other vital attorney skills. These fellowships have also exposed me to many of the problems low-income individuals and families are facing in the Central Virginia region. With this knowledge and experience I feel more confident than ever in pursuing a career in legal aid. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Noelle Quam
Washington and Lee University School of Law
J.D. Candidate, 2015

BLUE RIDGE LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

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JOHN E. WHITFIELD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
& GENERAL COUNSEL



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September 29, 2014

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
by email to: KATIE@EQUALJUSTICEAMERICA.ORG

Re: Contributions of Summer 2014 Law Clerk Noelle Quam to Blue Ridge Legal Services

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Blue Ridge Legal Services is very appreciative of the work of Noelle Quam, and Equal Justice America's support of that work. Noelle is an intelligent, dedicated person of strong conviction and ethics, and she is a credit to your program.

Blue Ridge Legal Services provides free legal services on civil topics to low-income or elderly residents of the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia. Noelle served as a law clerk with our legal aid office this past summer, 2014. Noelle directly assisted many clients with various legal issues, including unemployment compensation, family law, debt relief, and housing. Noelle also assisted me with virtually all aspects of case management, client counseling, and trial preparation. Noelle easily worked on more than 75 cases this summer. I will outline a few examples of her strong work:

Noelle was very helpful as our office represented two clients who each spoke Spanish as her primary language. Noelle has Spanish skills, which helped her to establish a relationship with these two clients. In one of these cases, our client's landlord had turned off her hot water, failed to reconnect her air conditioning in summer, and further was billing the client an atrociously high amount, allegedly for utility bills. Through a combination of litigation and negotiations with the landlord's attorney, our office was able to get the hot water back on, the air conditioning reconnected, and an early termination of the client's lease without any liability for the utilities. Noelle assisted with many aspects of this case.

In the other case involving a client who spoke primarily Spanish, our office initially hoped to avoid a medical debt for a client. When it emerged that the client did in fact owe the debt, and had no defense, the client wanted very much to establish a payment plan. Normally our office does not have the resources to negotiate payment plans, and instead must send clients pro se to negotiate their own plan. Because we had Noelle with us this summer, though, Noelle was able to negotiate with the collection agency to establish a reasonable payment plan for the client.

Having Noelle available to negotiate the payment plan was particularly helpful to this client, as with her limited English skills the client would have struggled to negotiate a plan on her own.

In addition, Noelle acquired both litigation and administrative-hearing experience under my supervision. Noelle handled a brief district court hearing on a wage garnishment matter. She then took on primary responsibility for representing a claimant in an unemployment compensation appeal. The case called for client interviewing, hearing preparation, and research. Noelle handled the administrative hearing herself with very minimal input from me. Having Noelle available to thoroughly prepare this case allowed me to handle other matters that came to the office. Even though her summer clerkship ended at the end of the summer, Noelle has volunteered to continue with the case at the next level of appeal. While remaining very busy with her law school courses, she is researching and writing a brief in support of her case, and she will represent this client at the next hearing, which is at the highest administrative level.

This summer Noelle encountered two clients with education issues. In one case, a first-grade girl had been bullied to the point where she was wetting her pants and no longer wished to attend school. Noelle helped educate the child's mother on how to advocate for the little girl by talking to the teacher and principal about anti-bullying education and protective measures. In the other case, a client's child had missed school due to a serious medical condition. Rather than working to accommodate the child's medical needs, the school brought truancy proceedings against the parents. Due to limited resources and lack of expertise, BRLS was not able to assist the second family beyond very basic advice. Noelle helped the parents by locating and providing materials designed to teach parents to advocate for their own children. Noelle was able to see firsthand our organization's—and our clientele's—need for additional staff and resources in the education-law arena. Noelle developed a clear passion to assist children and youth with education-law issues. Our office is now working to find funding from sources such as Equal Justice Works and the Skadden program, in hopes that that we can bring Noelle back as a staff member after graduation, with a focus on education cases.

Noelle shows good judgment. She often can see right away how a matter would be best handled. Nevertheless, as a law student she always ran her ideas by me before implementing them, showing that she remains aware that she is still learning and is not yet licensed. Noelle has strong skills working with clients. When I went out of town at the very end of the summer, Noelle worked under the supervision of one of our other attorneys and effectively monitored most of my caseload.

Please feel free to contact me at (540) 433-1830 to further discuss Noelle's work, character, and passion for service to the lower-income families in Virginia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Morton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sarah Morton
Attorney at Law

CC: Washington and Lee School of Law Career Planning Office