

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am so grateful I was able to use an Equal Justice America Fellowship this summer to work at Cabrini Green Legal Aid in Chicago. I was working in their program that supports incarcerated mothers in family law issues.

The clients were undoubtedly the best part of the job. They were amazing advocates for themselves, first and foremost, and it was humbling to be able to help them in a small way. Even a chance to talk to their child on the phone could make such a huge impact in their day-to-day life in prison, that very often this summer I was able to help someone get an opportunity at some brightness in their days. I am very grateful for that opportunity, as sometimes law can feel very removed from the people it tries to help.

Part of the great thing about my summer internship was the ability we had to interact with our clients. We went to the Cook County Jail regularly, and had visits to each of the women's prisons in Illinois. Seeing our clients where they live their lives, rather than just talking to them on the phone, gave our work a special urgency. It also informed me on the conditions of prison life, and I will always be an advocate for prisoner's rights after this summer. Even though we were doing family law, we would so often brush up against problems with the prison conditions that our clients faced, whether I was health care, being placed in segregation, or lack of resources. Again, being able to help on the personal level with our clients family law issues was very rewarding, but there as a nice balance of also seeing larger civil rights claims that could affect many prisoners in the Illinois Department of Corrections.

One client who made an impression on me was a woman who had been abused for many years and though she had left her husband, lived in fear of him coming back for her. She wanted a divorce, and it had been in progress for many years. I was with her and her family in the courtroom the day it was granted, and her sense of joy was tangible. I was able to have helped support this woman in her freedom from this ill-fated marriage. She even went to change her name back to her maiden name that very day, bit stopping to wait. It was similarly emotional and powerful to help clients get their children back from guardianships after being incarcerated. Reuniting a mother with her child so they can live together can gave me the kind of job satisfaction that makes me smile when I think about it even now, months later.

This summer made such an impression on me. I will carry things I learned and the ways in which my mind was changed with me for years to come. Everyone should

write to people in prison. More people should volunteer or teach to prison communities. More resources should be available to people who have been released from prison.

CGLA is one of the great legal aids in Chicago. The work that they do is so important and greatly needed. The attorneys and staff there were inspiring in their sense of dedication to the work they do, and the ability to look years ahead in the future to change policies in Illinois and the country. I am proud to have been able to work with them and participate in their mission.

Thank you for making it possible.

Best,
Shannon Gross
Class of 2017
Northwestern University School of Law