

August 10, 2009

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

Re: Equal Justice America Summer 2009 Fellowship

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to you to explain how my fellowship at the Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society has added to my legal education. This summer I had the opportunity to witness the day-to-day operations of a Legal Aid organization, and the important services that Legal Aid provides to people who cannot afford legal representation. My summer internship at the Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society helped me to focus on the law from the distinctive standpoints of the poor, the disabled, and the under-represented.

My fellowship allowed me the privilege of attending court hearings several times a week. Before the hearing, the client and attorney would meet to discuss any questions the client had. This meeting proved very important to our clients, as many were understandably anxious about the prospect of going to court. A number of our clients were disabled, had mental health issues, they were financially unstable, or lacked complete educations. They would frequently enter our office with frustrations and concerns emanating from a misunderstanding of the legal system. We were able to answer questions, explain the law as it affected the individual's case, and smooth over unnecessary fears before the client had to go into the courtroom.

When I attended court hearings, the difference between an individual with and without an attorney became obvious. An unrepresented party could easily come off as untruthful even when being completely honest. Sadly, confusion in courtroom testimony sometimes leads to a

decision based on a person's demeanor in court. Our Legal Aid clients often had special issues that prevented them from effectively representing themselves. The presence of competent representation reduced stress and empowered them to convey their side of the case with maximum clarity. I know that some of our clients would not have succeeded without representation. I was glad that we could be there to provide the necessary legal services so that our clients' cases could be fully presented.

I believe that the clients truly benefited from the work that I did this summer. It was especially rewarding to help domestic violence victims who, without representation, could have been harmed even further by the aggressive questioning of their abusers in the courtroom. The Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society's representation helped shield victims from what would have constructively been a second injury.

I am confident that my work this summer made a difference in the lives of our clients, and I am proud to have had the opportunity to serve them. I truly appreciate your funding that made my summer work at the Southwest Virginia Legal Aid Society possible. Thank you very much for your support of my fellowship.

Sincerely,

Rachel Mack

Washington and Lee University School of Law

Class of 2011