

August 25, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Over the 2009 summer I worked at the Blue Ridge Legal Services (BRLS) in Harrisonburg, Virginia. This legal aid covers a variety of areas of law, including housing, public benefits, employment, education law, bankruptcy and consumer law. I was very fortunate to work with a variety of different attorneys in the office on many of these different areas.

On more than one occasion, an attorney in the office would tell me that to be an effective attorney I needed to have a variety of tools on my tool belt. By observing the attorneys in the office, I realized precisely how true this is. Not every situation needs to be litigated. Sometimes a negotiated settlement is far more successful for a client than a long drawn out trial would be. Often, the clients would simply need advice as to their rights and how to best handle a situation. For example, many clients do not know their rights when it comes to a landlord tenant issue. They are not aware that a landlord cannot turn off their water in an attempt to evict them and they are not aware that if there is an issue that needs to be corrected, they must inform their landlord in writing of the issue. Simply educating individuals as to their rights and responsibilities will often help an individual in their present situation as well as future situations. Other times, the only solution to a client's problem would be litigation. Every week, the attorneys gathered to discuss their cases and make sure they were using the right tool for the job. This time was extremely interesting to observe because as a first year law student, it was very difficult to recognize that there are all of these different options to help your client.

In particular, I worked with Anne Marie Mauldin, BRLS' in house domestic violence attorney. I went into this fellowship with a vague interest in family law, specifically domestic violence law and victims' assistance. Knowing this, Anne Marie helped me better understand what was involved in this area of law and what an attorney working in a legal aid office could do to help victims of domestic violence. Under her supervision, I interviewed clients and began to get an understanding of what it means to be a domestic violence attorney. I was also able to get a firsthand experience drafting court documents and agreements for clients in order to provide an equitable solution to many tense situations.

Probably my favorite experience was interacting with clients. By watching Anne Marie and other attorneys in the office discuss client's issues I now understand why lawyers are often referred to as counselors. Depending on the client and the attorney, a client could easily get 15

minutes of time with the attorney or hours of time in order to fully understand the issue, counsel the client as to their rights and legal options and hopefully come up with an equitable solution that would help the client. I observed different methods of handling clients and now feel more confident that I can use these methods in my future endeavors to counsel individuals who need help in the family law field.

One client in particular that stands out was an individual who needed help preparing a Medicaid application for his wife. His wife had suffered a stroke and was in a coma and he had wiped out his savings in an attempt to keep her in a nursing home. Under the supervision of BRLS' elder law paralegal, I walked him through the application process and contacted individuals on his behalf to get information regarding his property, taxes, retirement funds and other information necessary for a Medicaid application. We were able to help him turn in the application and I'm hopeful that he will be able to get some funding to help care for his wife.

Another truly unique client involved a no fault divorce. Although I had little interaction with the client, I had to attempt to help her locate her estranged husband to serve him with divorce papers. After many failed attempts to have him sign a waiver of notice, I was able to get in contact with him at his place of employment and he signed and sent in the waiver of notice. Thus, the client will be able to go through her no fault divorce and finally put her marriage to rest.

The entire experience was truly unique. I learned more about being a lawyer than I did in my first year of law school. I was introduced to an office that works hard to help individuals of lower income, who are sometimes just struggling to get by. The dedication to the clients and the art of law at the office was something I hope to continue when I practice law. I would not have been able to do this internship without the help of the EJA fellowship and I am very grateful for the opportunity I was given this summer.

Sincerely,

Rebecca A. Imholt  
University of Richmond  
J.D., May 2011



## BLUE RIDGE LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

204 N. HIGH STREET  
P.O. Box 551  
HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA 22803  
(540) 433-1830  
FAX (540) 433-2202

DANA J. CORNETT  
PRESIDENT

JOHN E. WHITFIELD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
& GENERAL COUNSEL

(800) 237-0141  
FOR CLIENTS ONLY

PLEASE RESPOND TO BOX 551

September 9, 2009

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

Re: Rebecca Imholt

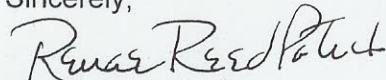
Dear Mr. Ruben,

Rebecca ("Becca") Imholt worked at Blue Ride Legal Services, Inc. this past summer from June through mid-August. She ably assisted our Domestic Violence Prevention attorney by making calls, assisting with interviews, performing research, drafting documents, and preparing for and attending court hearings. She also worked with our Elder Law paralegal in preparing for an Administrative Hearing and attending a Task Force meeting of Public Benefits paralegals and attorneys. She was able to attend a trial with nine defendants on pay day loan cases for which the attorneys had spent numerous hours preparing and which was one of the early victories for legal aid attorneys on these cases. Obviously these are merely examples of the many and varied work assignments and learning experiences Becca encountered here.

Becca attended a number of our case acceptance meetings where all attorneys present the cases for which they performed interviews that week. These are very important for our office because four of the seven attorneys have been in practice for three years or less. Thus, at these meetings basic information was dispensed and case strategies discussed which I believe gave Becca some idea of how to approach cases and clients.

Becca was not only given the opportunity to learn from this experience, she also gave much to this office in her assistance to the attorneys and paralegal. We are very pleased with the experience of having her here.

Sincerely,

  
Renae Reed Patrick