

**MARISOL CONDE-HERNANDEZ**

August 31, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I doubt whether this letter can adequately convey the magnitude of my appreciation for being selected as an Equal Justice America summer fellow. I had an once-in-a-lifetime experience interning at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau this past summer, one that could have not have possible without the generosity of donors who provided me with the grant that allowed me to relocate to Cambridge, Massachusetts for three months.

At the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, I worked on both Wage and Hour and Housing cases. The Bureau afforded my colleagues and I an unexpected degree of autonomy complemented with careful guidance and supervision Harvard Law clinical instructors. I wrote several motions and argued most of them in court. I assisted a colleague with two impending trials by drafting an opening statement, working through evidentiary issues, and preparing for direct and cross examination of witnesses. I also engaged in several negotiations with opposing counsel for my clients and for tenants at Attorney for the Day, where we provided same-day limited representation in Boston Housing Court.

I was most excited to represent three tenants' association cases. The tenants were members of City Life/ Vida Urbana, a respected, long-standing and effective grassroots community organization that advocates housing justice and fights against displacement. Through this work, I engaged in a model of community lawyering. I wrote a negotiation/demand letter, drafted discovery requests, and negotiated with opposing counsel on behalf of an association. I performed research on real estate purchases and buyers/investors for City Life; and I made myself available to them as much as I could to maintain and develop the collaborative spirit between HLAB students and City Life.

All of my clients were Spanish-speaking and as such, I expanded on my Spanish legal vocabulary and developed my ability to explain legal procedures in Spanish. I also "counseled" my clients significantly to ensure that my clients understood and felt included in the legal process. My clients expressed a sense of relief to be represented by counsel that was culturally aware and sensitive to their concerns and needs.

One of my clients was a member of a tenants' association who faced eviction after about a decade of living in dilapidated conditions. My client lived on the top floor of the building and endured a severe rodent and insect infestation, pervasive mold and gaping holes in the ceiling that allowed water to pour inside her apartment whenever it rained or snowed. The landlord

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sought to evict my client and the other tenants in the building to attempt to sell the property amidst allegations by a real estate agent that he could sell it for a ridiculous amount of money.

In assessing my client's potential claims against the landlord, I inquired whether she ever had her son tested for lead since there was no evidence that the building was lead-compliant. In initial conversations, she stated that her son, who does have developmental disabilities, was tested for lead and that he tested negative. I revisited the issue later in the summer and asked her to please ask her son's doctor directly about the issue and to explain that there may be lead in the building to which he could have been exposed. Unfortunately, in my last week of the internship, we both learned that yes, her son's blood contained high levels of lead in 2009, when he was six years old and that he still had lead in his system despite years of treatment.

I felt devastated by the news.

The Bureau was able to refer her out to a private attorney who specializes in lead cases and who would represent her son pro-bono. This particular experience illustrated how powerful and beneficial it is for attorneys to develop and employ emotional intelligence because lawyering requires much more than just legal research and writing in the abstract; lawyering, especially when representing minority, indigent and/or immigrant individuals, necessitates cultural sensitivity to effectively elicit critical information from clients.

I left the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau feeling empowered and far more prepared to provide direct client representation. Thank you, immensely, for the grant that made this experience possible for me.

Sincerely,



Marisol Conde-Hernandez  
Juris Doctor Candidate- Class of 2017  
Rutgers School of Law- Newark