

August 28, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Overall, my experience at Lawyers' Committee for Better Housing (LCBH) and with the Equal Justice America program has been very rewarding. The knowledge and practical experience I have gained throughout the 10-week fellowship has been invaluable. I have gained insight into the Cook County eviction courts, specifically the barriers to justice faced by tenants in these courtrooms. I have enjoyed working directly with clients in eviction court and through conducting initial client interviews, as well as providing indirect services through the foreclosure counseling hotline and help desk.

During my fellowship, one of the larger projects I was involved with was an appeal to the First District Illinois Appellate Court. I assisted with drafting the reply to the Appellant's Brief, which required much planning and research. Our client was a low-income renter who resided at the same rental unit for over 5 years. Our client knew of the landlord's pending foreclosure, but was assured by his landlord that nothing immediate would happen. However, unbeknownst to our client, the foreclosure sale was eventually confirmed, transferring ownership from the former landlord to a successor-in-interest, a large financial institution. Without any inquiry into the identities of the tenants residing at the newly acquired property, the successor-in-interest filed an action in forcible entry and detainer, commonly known as eviction, against "Unknown occupants" only. Our client was eventually removed from the property without any notice of the final hearing, and without being served with process. The client contacted our organization late in the process, but was grateful for the assistance we were able to provide. This experience was very rewarding because it not only addressed a common practice that repeatedly goes unchallenged, but it also allowed me to research new areas of the law and write in a persuasive tone.

Additionally, during my fellowship, I had a chance to work on a variety of smaller projects and tasks. Having fellows and interns at LCBH during the summer months greatly expands the scope of services the organization is able to provide. Many of the staff attorneys do not have the time or the funding to provide brief services for non-litigation clients. I, however, was able to provide these services during my fellowship and had one great success story. Ms. B was a single parent who lived with her daughter in a small 2-bedroom apartment for over 3 years. Ms. B is completely deaf and communicates over the phone through a sign language interpreting program. Ms. B reached out to our office after receiving a "termination of tenancy" notice from her landlord. The stated reason for the termination was a lease violation, which Ms. B was unaware of prior to reading the notice. Further, once Ms. B became aware of the problem, she immediately cured the alleged breach. I was able to draft a cease and desist letter to the landlord

that explained our client's position. The letter further provided that no further action should be taken against Ms. B. Luckily, the letter was effective and not only preserved Ms. B's credit against an erroneous filing, but also saved her the time and money of defending the eviction case. Although drafting the letter was a simple task, it had a huge impact on our client's ability to preserve her housing.

Working at the legal information desk for tenants in foreclosure allowed me to reach out to numerous tenants who would otherwise defend their case without any idea of their legal rights. At the desk, I was able to refer several defendant-tenants to our office for intake and brief services. For those who did not qualify for assistance, I was able to provide information about the property and pending foreclosure, provide a realistic timeline for the tenant, and give information about the federal, state, and local laws that provide protections for these tenants.

The practical experience I gained this summer through my Equal Justice America Fellowship was invaluable. Having a funded position took away the financial burden of summer loans and allowed me to perform rewarding and meaningful work. I appreciate having been given this opportunity and the amount of help and support I received from both the EJA and LCBH staff.

Sincerely,

Sarah Barnes
Chicago-Kent College of Law
Expected Graduation May 2015