

August 31, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

With the help of Equal Justice America's Fellowship, I worked this summer at Legal Services of Northern Virginia in Alexandria, VA. While I focused primarily on family law matters, I also worked on issues regarding housing, consumer, and elder law. The internship was an incredible experience for me, allowing me to learn not only about the practical aspects of a legal career, but also about the lives of our clients, and even about myself.

Beginning in my first week and continuing throughout the summer, LSNV allowed me to take on a great deal of responsibility. With my third-year practice certificate, I was able to fully represent clients under the supervision of an attorney. I conducted intake interviews, helped select which clients our office chose to represent, researched relevant case law for clients, drafted motions and court orders, wrote trial outlines and questions, and eventually represented a client in court. I learned what it meant to manage a caseload, and was able to witness firsthand the nuts and bolts of an attorney's day-to-day work. For perhaps the first time in my legal career, I gained a concrete understanding of what it means to be an attorney working in this field.

The most rewarding and invaluable aspect of the internship was working directly with our clients. I helped with many clients' protective order cases, but one in particular stood out for me. In this particular case, our client was a young woman who had been sexually assaulted and stalked by a man in her apartment complex. The man was a police officer and had used his position of authority to manipulate our client. He was facing an internal police investigation in addition to our protective order case, and so he had hired an exceptional private defense attorney. Our client was extremely nervous about testifying, and so I continuously checked in with her to make sure she felt ready and confident for the day of the trial. That morning, she was very anxious. She had a hard time sitting still during the court's preliminary matters, asked me questions I had answered for her many times in the days prior, and often dabbed at her eyes with a tissue. But when she took the stand, she took a deep breath and delivered her story more eloquently than any of us had expected. The trial was difficult, but she maintained her composure. And in the end, she was granted a six-month protective order. After trial, it was incredible to witness her relief in the fact that her ordeal was finally over. I learned that day the importance of client counseling, and how the human element of connection between an attorney and client can make all the difference in presenting a client's case.

Though I went to LSNV expecting that family law would be my area of choice, one of my most rewarding outcomes came from a housing law case. We represented an elderly woman who was HIV-positive and suffered from recurrent nosebleeds due to the disease. She lived in subsidized public housing, and had been forced by the housing association to sign a supplemental lease agreement, which required her to take additional, costly measures whenever she experienced a nosebleed. I prepared a memorandum explaining her rights under our anti-discrimination laws, and detailed the duties of the housing association in such matters. We filed a complaint with the Fair Housing Board and prepared her for the investigation and deposition. At the end of the summer, we were notified that the housing association would dismiss the supplemental lease agreement, and that our client would be able to continue living in her apartment. I'm so glad LSNV allowed me the opportunity to work on a variety of cases, so that I could help this woman keep her home, and see the effects of legal representation in this important aspect of our clients' lives.

I could never thank Equal Justice America enough for allowing me to take advantage of the opportunity to work with Legal Services of Northern Virginia this summer. It was an incredible learning experience, and solidified my commitment to spending my career in the public interest field.

Sincerely,

Sharon Fieldman

George Washington University Law School
J.D. Candidate, May 2014