

August 31, 2012

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director, Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thanks to my Equal Justice America scholarship, I was able to volunteer at the Center for Disability and Elder Law (CDEL) this summer. CDEL is an organization that provides a variety of direct legal services to low-income senior citizens and people with disabilities.

One of my roles with CDEL was assisting with Senior Center Initiatives. The program involves conducting workshops at senior centers, helping seniors and people with disabilities draft power of attorney documents. I helped dozens of individuals, explaining the forms and filing them out, to ensure that their affairs will be in order if something unexpected were to befall them. All of the participants gain peace of mind once they left with their documents in hand.

Another of my responsibilities was working at the Adult Guardianship *Pro Se* Help Desk at the Daley Center in Chicago, IL. At the help desk, I assisted *pro se* petitioners seeking guardianship over family members no longer able to care for themselves. I instructed petitioners on how to fill out the forms, how to file their petitions, and helped them navigate an otherwise daunting process. The courts are intimidating to anyone untrained in the legal profession, and the people I helped were generally grateful for any assistance I was able to provide during a stressful and trying process.

I also assisted at every step of the intake process at CDEL. I conducted screening interviews, intake interviews, reviewed potential clients' documents, and wrote referral letters to candidates we were unable to assist. I heard dozens and dozens of stories from people in need of help, and I think just being a receptive ear at the other end of the telephone, being someone who would listen, helped in a way.

In sum, I had an incredibly rewarding experience this summer. Working with people who have little to no access to legal assistance and being able to offer help was incredibly fulfilling. This experience cemented my resolve to work in public service for the rest of my legal career. I am very grateful for the opportunity that Equal Justice America provided.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Ridella  
Chicago-Kent



# CENTER FOR DISABILITY & ELDER LAW

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August 25, 2012

Mr. Dan Ruben  
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Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you very much for allowing the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL) to host Stephanie Ridella's fellowship for Summer, 2012. Ms. Ridella began volunteering at CDEL earlier this year, conducting client new client screenings and we were thrilled when she was granted an Equal Justice America fellowship. I was Ms. Ridella's direct supervisor and coordinated her fellowship this summer. I have been impressed with her work and her dedication to CDEL while she was with us this summer, so impressed, in fact, that we have asked her to stay with us on a part time basis this Fall.

Since 1984, CDEL, a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) legal service organization, has been dedicated to serving the legal needs of low-income residents of Cook County who are over the age of 60 and/or those with a permanent disability. As a volunteer-based legal service, CDEL is always looking for law student fellows/externs to support us in this mission. We are pleased to work with partners such as Equal Justice America in providing opportunities for deserving law school students to obtain practical legal experience while still in law school.

Ms. Ridella was a prominent part of our most successful summer program to date. Ms. Ridella worked on a number of important legal matters at CDEL, including assisting with the representation of low income tenants in landlord/tenant actions, worked with clients in consumer and collection matters and drafted advance directives for low income seniors. Ms. Ridella worked with CDEL on a number of projects, including CDEL's Senior Center Initiative (SCI), Senior Tax Opportunity Program (STOP), and Pro Se Adult Guardianship Help Desk located at the Circuit Court of Cook County.

In particular, I want to highlight Ms. Ridella's work at the Guardianship Help Desk. Ms. Ridella worked at the Help Desk over the summer and her work there was exemplary. In fact, I had Ms. Ridella conduct a training session with me for our late Summer and Fall Help Desk volunteers. She was able to provide a real "insiders" guide to working at the Help Desk, which proved to be very beneficial for the new volunteers.

Thank you, once again, for allowing us to host Ms. Ridella's fellowship. We look forward to working with Equal Justice America in the future. If you have any questions, please feel free contact me.

With regards,

Thomas C. Wendt  
Legal Director