

August 30, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank you for accepting me into the Equal Justice America Fellowship for the summer of 2016. I was blessed to work with Juvenile Law Center on important juvenile justice matters. My experience with Juvenile Law Center was eye opening, impactful, and has led to me securing a position next summer with Community Legal Services to work on their Youth Justice Project.

While at Juvenile Law Center, I conducted research and wrote a memo on the unconstitutionality of sentencing juvenile defendants to jail time for not being able to afford their court fines and fees. These are instances where otherwise the young people would be placed on probation or put into a diversion program. In the adult system, this prison pipeline has been held unconstitutional in seminal cases like, *Williams v. Illinois*, *Tate v. Short* and *Bearden v. Georgia*. Safeguards have been set into place to protect against this unconstitutional judicial decision-making. For instance, judges are to hold indigency hearings to determine the defendant's ability to pay. They are also supposed to consider alternatives to jail time such as community service, payment plans, and reduced costs. My argument, was that, we know that in the adult system it is unconstitutional to jail defendants for being poor and there have been safeguards set in place to protect against this, however, we also know that psychological research regarding children's development used in important Supreme Court litigation won by Juvenile Law Center (see *Roper*, *Graham*, *Miller* and *Montgomery*) has proven that children are different and deserve greater protection. For this very reason, Juvenile Law Center has helped pass Rule 151 in Pennsylvania, which presumes that juveniles are indigent and have a right to counsel. This is a progressive step in the right direction and the rest of the nation should follow suit.

Another juvenile justice assignment I had the pleasure of working on looked at the weakened Fourth Amendment rights of students once they enter the public school setting. We know that school administrators are allowed to search and seize a student's person and property without a warrant and probable cause. Instead, they are afforded a lower burden of proof, which is reasonable suspicion in order to maintain school discipline and safety. We also know that School Resource Officers who serve a police-like function work in schools in an official capacity. Since then, student conduct that used to be handled through official school disciplinary procedures are now being reported as criminal, thus funneling students into the school-to-prison pipeline.

I was also able to do some work on the child advocacy side of Juvenile Law Center's mission and work by looking at the issue of free exercise of religion for children and families in the child welfare system. There were are a lot of different dynamics to

consider such as the child's rights to practice their religion independent of their biological parents or foster parents beliefs, the biological parents and foster care parents rights in relation to one another, and more. In the end, my supervisor was pleased with my research and the drafted arguments I was able to compile.

These are just some of the many high quality assignments I had the honor to work on. I want to thank you again for affording me the ability to take advantage of this summer and use it to figure out what I want to do in the law profession. I loved my time at Juvenile Law Center and it has confirmed for me that public interest work is what I want to do with my law career. I am excited to continue exploring my interest in juvenile justice and child advocacy next summer.

Best,
Tracie Johnson
Temple James E. Beasley School of Law, 2018