

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

Dear Mr. Ruben

At Bet Tzedek Legal Services, I was a law clerk for the Family Caregiver Unit. We dealt primarily with dependent adults, ranging from individuals with developmental disabilities to the elderly. A lot of what I did was petition for conservatorships. This means that I would help my team ask the court to transfer the rights of one individual to another, if the individual is deemed to lack capacity due to either a developmental disability or old age.

One example of such an experience was for a client who had been caring for his brother with intellectual disabilities for over 50 years. The brothers were Iranian immigrants who, since coming to this country illegally, had not been qualified for many government services provided to individuals with such disabilities. The care-taking brother decided to seek a conservatorship over his younger brother in order to better care for his medical and other needs as well as to begin several processes that could provide the two with much needed government benefits.

As a native Farsi speaker, I was able to translate for our client in his communications with Bet Tzedek attorneys. Over the course of our communications, we built a strong relationship of trust. Although I was only a summer law clerk, I felt that he trusted I would get him the services he needed. We were able to successfully petition for a conservatorship in this case and I am hopeful that this process assisted our client in getting more benefits and care for his brother.

Recently, the conservatorship process has been subject to criticism by human rights activists that claim it is unethical to strip someone of their rights due to a disability. In response to this criticism, I wrote a legal memorandum for my team on Supported Decision Making, an alternative to the conservatorship process, and weighed the pros and cons of this new decision making format. I had a great experience and look forward to staying in touch with the caregiver unit in the future.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Lamden
UCLA School of Law 2018