

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I had the amazing opportunity to work at LAF, a non-profit organization that provides civil legal services to people living in Chicago and its suburbs and whose income is below the poverty level. I was placed in the Children and Families Practice Group and worked on family law cases involving divorces, parentage cases and orders of protection. I can't emphasize how much I enjoyed my time there—it was singlehandedly the most rewarding, challenging and eye-opening experience of my entire life. Most days, I listened to heart-breaking stories of extreme physical and emotional abuse, neglect and fraud. I spoke to clients who were confronted with situations that I never had to deal with. Although I have experience with domestic violence training and working with clients who were survivors of domestic violence, nothing quite prepared me for extensive, client work like my internship this summer.

A lot of my clients this summer were women who were victims of domestic violence, who were now looking to separate from their abusers. Most of them had children with their abusers, making it even harder to completely cut off the abuser. In making the brave and tough decision to separate from their abuser, our clients had many barriers ahead of them: finding housing for themselves and their children, paying bills and debts, overcoming what little educational and work experience they have to find employment, fighting to either gain or regain custody of their children, taking parenting classes and successfully completing home visits, and dealing with various disabilities.

All of these barriers were exacerbated by the fact that our clients' husbands and boyfriends would often abuse the legal system as a way to further control, manipulate and hurt our clients. We've seen cases where these abusers quit their jobs to avoid making child support payments, fail to disclose assets in an effort to deprive our clients of marital property, accuse our clients of various misconduct and child neglect, and hire counsel just to hinder or even halt the process of litigation to hurt our clients who cannot wait two, three, four years to separate and move on with their lives.

However gut-wrenching and incredibly hard this work was sometimes, it crystallized the dire need for civil legal service providers. Without these organizations, millions of vulnerable people such as my clients over the summer, would be left with little remedy to correct the wrongdoings done against them. They might be stuck in an ongoing cycle of violence and poverty, they would have no options to leave their abusive families and to stand on their own two feet. I'm so grateful that I got to be a small part of this noble organization, and I'm grateful to EJA for making it possible for me to do this work. Without your funding, and your support, I know that law students everywhere might miss wonderful opportunities and experiences, such as mine this summer.

Sincerely,

Kasey Altantulkuur
University of Illinois College of Law
Class of 2018