

Dear Mr. Ruben,

During the summer of 2017, I had the privilege to serve as an intern for the Charlottesville office of the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. I was able to gain valuable skills and directly assist low-income clients with issues touching a broad range of civil law. I feel that I was able to make a difference in the lives of several clients, and I remain interested in pursuing public interest work as part of my future law practice.

During my internship, I learned that, in some cases, a client can enjoy a positive outcome if someone from an attorney's office takes the simple action of making a phone call or sending an email. For example, I learned early on that while some landlords may not be willing to return tenants' phone calls in a timely manner, they will often respond quickly when someone from a legal office calls. In one instance, we were able to get a reduction in rent through a simple phone call to a landlord after the tenant reported problems with essential appliances at her apartment.

One case involved a client who was a war refugee. He came to Virginia after assisting the U.S. military in his home country and receiving death threats as a result. He was renting an apartment that was infested with bedbugs, and his landlord tried to make him pay the bill for the multiple treatments by an exterminator. These payments were in excess of \$1,000, and it was clearly unjust to expect the tenant to foot the bill. All it took was an email and a few voicemails to the manager of the apartment complex, and the client no longer was expected to pay for the treatments. If the emails were not sent from a legal aid office, I do not believe the outcome would have been the same, especially since Virginia law is currently unclear in regards to which party bears the cost of bedbug treatments.

I also assisted an immigrant with limited English speaking ability file a divorce complaint against her ex-husband. She had moved to the U.S. to marry him, and after several years of marriage, he left her abruptly. She was left with familial debt and very little income. Not only did

I help draft court documents for her, but I gave her rides to the office, as she did not own a car. She was very frugal, and was supporting two children on very little income, and I was proud to be given the privilege to offer her assistance.

I also helped my supervisor prepare for a trial involving a custody dispute of a young child. We represented the child's grandmother, who had been granted custody of the boy pursuant to a protective order against his parents. The case involved prior neglect and abuse of the child, and upon investigating the case, we were concerned that the parents were not ready to take on full custody of the child. I spent hours interviewing our client and her witnesses, and worked closely with my supervisor to draft questions for direct examination. I also helped write opening and closing statements for the trial. We were able to secure an outcome that allowed the child to remain in the stable environment of his grandmother's house, while still allowing the parents to exercise visitation. I strongly believe that our advocacy truly protected the best interests of the child, especially since the guardian ad litem was prepared to recommend that the parents be given custody of the child before he heard our evidence.

I also had the privilege of going on three outreach trips with the Virginia Farm Workers Program. We drove to the tobacco-growing regions of southern Virginia and spoke with workers with H2A visas. We helped to educate them on their rights in regards to taxes, worker's compensation, reimbursement for travel expenses, and other issues.

I am extremely grateful for the generosity of Equal Justice America for its support of legal aid in my community. I would recommend a summer internship in legal aid to any law student, as it provides an opportunity to gain hands-on legal experience while making a positive impact on the lives of clients. Thank you for all that you do!

Michael Srstka
University of Virginia School of Law, Class of 2017

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August 29, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 E Boundary Rd.
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

During this summer, Mike Srstka, a law student at the University of Virginia, worked as an intern for the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society's Charlottesville office. As the office's senior managing attorney I oversaw Mike's work, which was focused primarily on civil advocacy for low-income clients. I found him to be compassionate, professional, humble, and hard-working. Mike greatly aided us in delivering legal services to the low-income and vulnerable clients we serve. I would like to thank Equal Justice America for providing him financial assistance during the summer.

CVLAS offers its law students interns the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in client interaction. When a case was first presented to me by our intake staff, Mike would contact the necessary parties to develop a factual record. Subsequently, he would determine, research, and analyze any legal issues presented by the case and provide me with a plan as to how he believed we could best serve a client's needs. Following my review, Mike would act as my direct liaison to the client, and he would articulate to them in plain language their options and any associated risk-reward tradeoff. Mike would continue to keep in contact with clients throughout their case to keep them abreast of any developments. I regularly received positive comments from our clients on how professionally and effectively Mike responded to their questions and concerns. In this regard, having Mike intern at our office allowed for us to provide exceptionally personalized service to our clients.

We were able to utilize Mike in trial preparation as well. This summer, I represented a client in a child custody dispute that went to trial. Mike interviewed the primary witnesses multiple times and helped me develop a comprehensive list of direct examination questions. He also sat in on my meetings with the witnesses and took excellent notes. He collaborated with another law student intern, Sam Yergin, and drafted opening and closing statements. Mike also helped me anticipate cross examination questions. In the end, we were extremely pleased with the result, as we received a positive result for our client following trial. In other cases, Mike also assisted me in various tasks including drafting motions, writing letters to clients and adverse parties, and filing court documents.



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During the summer, I found Mike to be reliable and hard-working. He always showed up on time, met deadlines, and completed the tasks I assigned to him. He never complained about picking up the phone and calling difficult clients or adverse parties. He went the extra mile for our clients, as he was always willing to communicate with them in detail and even providing transportation in one instance. Mike also joined our Virginia Farm Workers Program on multiple trips across the state to ensure that migrant workers are aware of their rights under state and federal law, and that they have access to adequate housing and medical care.

Our office is grateful for Mike's hard work and commitment this summer, and especially for the funding which made his presence possible. We look forward to hosting more Equal Justice America Fellows in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Edwards', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robin Edwards