

October 28, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I had the pleasure of working at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF) this summer.

I was assigned to LAF's Immigrants and Workers' Rights practice group, and spent the summer doing employment law work with the many fantastic attorneys in the group. This work exposed me to the beginning of the litigation process to the end, and allowed me to assist many incredible clients.

My first assignment at LAF was writing a complaint for a client who had experienced racial discrimination—namely, he was fired because of his race. While this was my first assignment and the beginning of the long litigation process, it was *not* the start of this client's relationship with the attorneys at LAF. They had handled his unemployment insurance process, ensured he was able to access those benefits, and then made the decision to take on the potentially long, intensive process of litigating his race discrimination claim. So, on my first day of work, I read the client's file and drafted the complaint. Not long thereafter, the complaint was edited and sent to the client to review. It wasn't until I spoke with the client for a final look-over of the complaint that I started to realize what, exactly, this litigation meant to our client. Money damages are a factor, of course, but I diligently explained to the client that damages are limited, not guaranteed, and potentially a long time coming. He did not seem to care too much about this, though. What he cared about was the fact that he was good employee who cared about his job, and he was fired because (his employer claimed) he was not a good employee, and that was not the truth. Our filing of a complaint in federal court to that effect, saying he *was* a good employee and terminated because a supervisor was racist, shows we truly believed him. I have no idea how that case will turn out, but I do know that even filing that complaint meant something to our client.

At the other end of the litigation timeline, I sat in on a settlement conference with a client whose litigation had been pending for many years due to an appeal to the Seventh Circuit. The first thing I learned from that experience was the extraordinary commitment of LAF's attorneys: they had been litigating this client's case for years and were prepared to do so for a many more. Of course, that level of commitment should be the norm for everyone, but until that day I appreciated seeing people setting standards to which all should adhere. But that settlement conference also fully impressed on me the realization I had after writing that first complaint—that what LAF does is about getting money damages for clients, of course, but is also about something more. Our client spoke in terms of his pride, his dignity, his independence—all of

which were wrongly injured by his employer. Whatever measure of justice (in terms of damages, most likely) we could provide by litigation, it also allowed people to re-assert their independence, and maybe the process of being heard helped restore a sense of dignity.

There were many projects, large and small, that I worked on at LAF, from successfully representing clients in unemployment insurance benefits hearings, to researching and briefing novel issues of law. I think, though, the most important thing I learned is the pure importance of access to the legal system. The results of that access are incredibly important, but so too is just having access.

I am grateful to have been part of an amazing organization that helps all people have access to the justice system. My work at LAF certainly reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career in public interest litigation. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Claire Lally".

Claire Lally
University of Michigan Law School
J.D. Candidate, 2017