

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

I spent this past summer working exclusively in housing law at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. All of my clients were individuals facing eviction. The problems facing my clients included non-payment of rent, fault, and no fault grounds. Each of these types of evictions presents challenges, however, the most interesting area involved post-foreclosure clients.

Due to the bank foreclosure crisis, this was a particularly busy summer in the area of housing; I had two clients that were directly impacted by foreclosures. One reason that this type of eviction is interesting is because the landlord made no initial allegation of wrongdoing on the part of the tenant. For instance, in your typical non-payment of rent or fault grounds, the landlord is alleging that the tenant has done something wrong, and as a result, "deserves" to be evicted. No such allegation occurs in a post-foreclosure case.

Another reason why post-foreclosure cases are interesting is because of opposing counsel. In one case I dealt with an attorney who represented the bank that was attempting to evict my client. This attorney was unaccustomed to dealing with individuals as opposing clients; he was also unaccustomed to dealing with legal service organizations. This interaction proved to be challenging; discovery was particularly

difficult because opposing counsel had a lot of experience and was less than forthcoming with information. This, in turn, required creative strategies on my part in order to best represent my client.

Another challenge that I faced at the Bureau was working with clients suffering from mental health problems. In particular, I had one client who struggled to function at even the most basic level. Her inability to make appointments, communicate clearly, or take an interest in her case proved to be very challenging. Moreover, this client illustrated how the practice of law differs from the study of law. A law school exam hands a student the facts; with this client, it was a constant struggle to determine what facts were useful to her case. Additionally, this client was probably in most need of help from the Bureau; she faced the loss of her Section 8 voucher, which would impact not only herself, but also her disabled husband and three children.

My work at the Bureau was very rewarding. I enjoyed getting exposure to litigation and I enjoyed taking the lead on cases. While client interaction was often challenging, this area was the most rewarding because I was able to see the impact my work had on people in my community.

William Sprouse
Suffolk University Law School