

October 5, 2018

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I had the good fortune of working with Legal Aid of North Carolina's Raleigh Office. I served as a law clerk for attorneys who worked in many different areas of law, including landlord/tenant law, family law, and unemployment law. The attorneys at the Raleigh office were more than happy to assign meaningful, engaging, and substantive work this summer, and I feel like I experienced a wealth of personal growth while providing a needed service to the people of Wake County.

One of the most memorable events of this summer was the opportunity to successfully represent a client in an unemployment benefits case. Under attorney supervision, I conducted the intake interview, prepared her for the hearing, and conducted the direct examination and closing argument. The most important thing I took away from the experience is how much legal services organizations are needed. Even as someone trained in the field, putting together the evidence and organizing arguments was overwhelming. Organizations like Legal Aid are necessary for giving people in need a fighting chance at obtaining fair outcomes in the legal system.

On a more personal level, the unemployment benefits case was uniquely helpful in improving my legal skills. Getting feedback from attorneys at Legal Aid was instrumental in my growth, and I was able to better understand my strengths and weaknesses in both written advocacy and oral advocacy. The opportunity to learn by doing was invaluable, and I greatly appreciated that the attorneys were willing to let me work on my own but were also willing to provide amazing advice.

Another memorable case was an attempt to secure a protective order for a victim of domestic violence. In that case I conducted the intake interview, examined the evidence, and participated in the negotiation with the other side regarding a consent order. What stuck out to me about that case is how much fear can permeate someone's life. Viewing the evidence of abuse secondhand is jarring enough, and I see now how much courage it takes for victims to confront the perpetrators in a court setting.

I observed many non-Legal Aid hearings while working these cases, and they further demonstrated to me the need for a more widely-accessible legal system. When a party has an attorney as opposed to not, the change in atmosphere is incredible. One case that stood out to me was a domestic violence case where both parties were pro se. Neither parties were well-versed

in the rules of evidence, yet they were bound by those rules. Both parties had very important testimony disregarded because they were unable to phrase their terms correctly.

Ultimately, this summer was a great experience. Legal Aid is an organization that helps people navigate a complicated system when they are at their most vulnerable, and my internship really helped me learn what kind of difference legal services can make. Further, I was able to grow my skills by performing meaningful and substantive work. I could not have imagined a higher-quality internship for my 1L summer.

Sincerely,
Kristopher Fernandez
Duke University School of Law