

August 29, 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 pleasure of applying my legal skill to further the mission of Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV) in their Alexandria, VA office. LSNV is the largest legal aid organization in Northern Virginia and provides crucial civil legal services to indigent clients in a variety of practice areas. LSNV identifies as a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and receives federal grant funding to provide their services. As a legal intern, I primarily assisted with family law matters, but also worked on cases in housing law and the Second Chances Initiative. My time at LSNV has not only strengthened my desire to work in public service but revealed my potential interest in practicing family law with a focus in domestic violence.

Client interaction was central to my experience working on family law cases for LSNV. I participated in intake meetings with prospective clients and followed their journey through the initial hearing and trial proceedings. Most of our prospective clients are victims of domestic violence seeking protective orders from their abusers. While women are overwhelmingly the demographic of LSNV's dv cases, they frequently have children they wish to include on the order. This opens the door to additional litigation regarding child custody and visitation, child support, and spousal support. Family law, I quickly learned, is different than other types of law in the sense that the inciting incident is only a jumping off point. Litigation seeks future sustainability of a person's safety, which means identifying both a client's long term and short-term goals. The short-term goal may be a protective order which gets their abuser out of the shared living space. Long-term goals may include plans for divorce and child custody proceedings only temporarily addressed in the protective order, along with a source of income, and additional precautions protecting a victim's identity. Potential clients typically come in with just one goal in mind, but I saw the importance of parsing out the goals they had not yet verbalized.

As an intern, I listened to prospective clients tell their story, an emotional process that often involved a translator's services. I then strategized with my supervising attorney and our staff about whether we could take the case. Often this was the most difficult part of the job: turning people away who needed help getting out of their situation. For those that we could assist, preparing them for court was another hurdle. I drafted direct testimony questions for their case and observed my supervising attorney talk them through the process the day of their hearing. Some clients didn't blink an eye telling their story to the court and others broke down as they confronted their abuser. I learned half the battle of dv litigation is providing emotional support for someone who is going through one of the most difficult points in their life. It is a mix

of empathy and honesty, knowing when to just listen, and when to provide advice they may not want to hear.

In addition to client interaction and trial prep, I assisted with legal research for a variety of cases, wrote memo's regarding my findings, watched extensive court proceedings, and developed my trial-advocacy skills. I am incredibly fortunate to have worked in an office with such caring and dedicated attorneys, paralegals, and intake professionals, each of whom mentored me throughout my internship, and taught me so much about serving the clients we serve. It was an environment where I felt comfortable asking tough questions and admitting when I struggled with a case emotionally. My supervising attorneys reaffirmed my desire to help others through the law every day of my internship, and I am excited to see where a career in public service takes me.

Finally, I would like to thank Equal Justice America for your generous fellowship grant. I would not have been able to learn and assist clients this summer had it not been for your financial support. I plan on continuing to pay forward my gratitude through my dedication to serving the community in public service law.

Sincerely,

Kim Rothenberger
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Scalia Law School
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