

August 29, 2018

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

My Summer at Youth Law Center in San Francisco

I write with gratitude as I reflect upon my summer experiences at the Youth Law Center in San Francisco. YLC has advocated on behalf of disadvantaged children for over forty years. My projects and the range of work were truly inspiring. Over my months at YLC, my projects involved children separated from their parents at the border (YLC was one of the firms that had negotiated the *Flores v. Reno* Settlement Agreement and shared responsibility for enforcing the consent decree), foster youth, youth with disabilities, and youth in juvenile detention facilities.

YLC has a long history of litigation, as evidenced by its involvement in the *Flores* case, but in recent years has broadened its advocacy efforts to include policy work as well. I was excited to be able to work on both litigation and policy projects. I worked as a paralegal before law school so I knew that I loved litigation, but I was curious to see whether I would enjoy policy work. I am happy to report that my summer confirmed for me that my heart lies in litigation, but I found policy advocacy to be fascinating!

My main litigation project involved helping to draft an *amicus* brief supporting Disability Rights California in opposing the opening of a segregated school in Central California. Kern County is in the process of opening a permanent facility, Aurora, that will exclusively educate children with severe emotional and behavioral disabilities. The plaintiff is a mother who is concerned that her son might get assigned to this school. Sadly, students who attend Aurora won't have any opportunities to participate in extracurriculars such as clubs and sports, and the academic curriculum is significantly inferior to what they would receive in a general education setting. Moreover, Kern County violated multiple statutory regulations in opening the school. Our brief supported the legal claims and included an argument regarding the fundamental right to education in California. We filed the brief shortly before my internship ended, so I have asked my supervisor to keep me posted as the case develops.

My main policy project involved drafting model legislation to create an entitlement for California youth educated in juvenile detention facilities to have access to educational supports such as tutoring, counseling, and mentoring. My first step was researching proposed and existing legislation all over the country to see if any state had previously passed such a bill. Unfortunately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, no state has yet done so. After conferring with my supervisor, I decided to model my legislation off of a California bill from 2015, A.B. 854, that had created a similar entitlement for foster youth in California. My model legislation

thus identified the demographic and statistical similarities between foster youth and youth in juvenile detention facilities, and argued that educational supports would benefit both populations. YLC is hoping to find a senator or assemblyperson to sponsor the bill during the upcoming fall season.

In addition to drafting model legislation, I also did other policy work over the summer. During one memorable day, I accompanied YLC's policy advocate to Sacramento as she testified in support of one of YLC's bills. A.B. 2448 would create an entitlement for foster youth to have reasonable access to computer technology and the Internet, which has important educational consequences. Additionally, these resources will allow foster youth to remain connected with distant family members. I am pleased to report that the bill passed the Senate and is now pending in the Assembly.

Let me close this letter by reiterating my gratitude to Equal Justice America in helping me spend my summer working in a public interest capacity. This internship opened my eyes to the systemic injustices that disadvantaged youth must endure, and I am so glad that I was able to spend my summer advocating on their behalf. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Caroline Hirst
Stanford Law School
J.D. Candidate 2020

August 3, 2018

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Re: Caroline Hirst

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I had the pleasure of supervising Caroline Hirst in an EJA supported fellowship this summer at the Youth Law Center, a non-profit organization that advocates across the country to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems so that young people can thrive.

Over the course of the summer, Caroline worked on several matters including advocacy to stop the school to prison pipeline and to support the successful transition of juvenile court involved youth to young adulthood. Her work included researching and drafting part of an Amicus brief on a case challenging the denial of educational equity for students with disabilities, creating a model statute to create educational supports for youth in the juvenile justice system, and updating several fact sheets on eligibility requirements for foster care benefits, Medicaid, and transitional housing for transition age young people currently or formerly involved in the juvenile court system.

My colleagues and I have been particularly impressed with Caroline's skills and professionalism. She consistently delivered a superior work product and was always personable, conscientious, poised, articulate, efficient, and reliable. We truly appreciate Caroline's contributions to YLC this summer and EJA's support.

Please let me know if you need additional information.

Thank you.



Maria F. Ramiu
Senior Staff Attorney