



## Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



**Name:** Scottie Fralin

**Law School:** University of Richmond

**EJA Fellowship:** Central Virginia Legal Aid Society  
Petersburg Office

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### **Entry 1: Week of 6/11/2018**

#EJAFellowUpdate

Over the past few weeks I have worked with the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society in Petersburg, Virginia helping people who are dealing with landlord problems, domestic violence, divorce, and lots of other civil matters. It blows my mind how much need there is here that I was totally unaware of. It's exciting to be able to help people from start to finish and see their issue get resolved. I have also been conducting research on a case that we are filing in federal court, which has been really exciting for me because it's a very niche area of federal law with complicated litigation procedures. I'm looking forward to seeing how that case plays out and assisting with clients throughout the rest of the summer.

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### **Entry 2: Week of 6/25/2018**

#EJAFellowUpdate

CVLAS's Petersburg office continues to be busy! At five weeks into my internship with CVLAS, I am amazed by the volume of cases that we are constantly working on and the breadth of legal issues that we handle. In the past couple of weeks, I have been able to visit surrounding counties to meet with clients and attend court hearings. I have enjoyed seeing the communities of the clients we serve and always enjoy meeting face-to-face with clients. Most recently, I have been researching and preparing to write a memo for a Virginia Employment Commission appeal that we have coming up in an unemployment benefits case. Working on that has taught me about the agency and administrative side of the legal process, and I am hopeful that our work will result in a desirable outcome for our client. Lately, I have also found domestic relations cases interesting to work on. I've always liked working with children, and I am eager to help ensure the best outcomes for children in custody and domestic violence situations.



## Entry 3: Week of 7/9/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

This week, we finalized the False Claims Act case that I have been assisting with since Week 1 of my internship at CVLAS. We filed it this morning in Richmond, which was exciting! I played a role in conducting research on false certifications to the U.S. government, meeting with the client to gather facts, calculating potential damages, and figuring out filing procedures in the Eastern District of Virginia. The most fun part for me was helping to draft the complaint and editing and proofreading up until we felt that it was ready to file. I am so eager to see what happens with this case and hope that all of our hard work will pay off for our client. As I am wrapping up Week 7, I want to mention how much of my 1L curriculum has come into play with my legal aid work. Landlord-tenant law is such a big part of what we do here, and my Property class covered landlord's duties, tenant's rights, evictions, implied warranties, property defects—all of which are issues that I have seen first-hand this summer. I have also been exposed to various federal and state agencies in our housing and employment cases, and last spring's Legislation and Regulation material on judicial deference to agency determinations has been particularly relevant in a voucher termination case that I have assisted with. It was also super helpful to have had exposure to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for the federal case that I mentioned above. And of course, legal research and writing skills have been the backbone of most all of my work. It's been great to put what I learned in the classroom to work this summer with real clients who have very real legal issues. I look forward to what's in store for my final three weeks in the CVLAS Petersburg office!

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## Entry 4: Week of 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Last week, I observed an unemployment compensation hearing at the Virginia Employment Commission for a case I had researched and written a supporting brief for, and it went well but we won't get a decision for a few weeks. On the housing front - clients continue needing assistance with landlord issues, especially regarding their housing assistance vouchers and evictions. Housing cases are by far what has kept me the busiest this summer. Coming up next week, we'll be finalizing a divorce for a client whose case I've been working on since the beginning of my internship. Finally, a local community development and youth leadership organization brought us a client seeking an expungement of a misunderstood arrest and criminal charge on his otherwise clean record. I enjoyed learning a bit about criminal law, and fortunately, the law is on this client's side. It's our hope that our petition for expungement is successful and the charge will not negatively affect the client's employment and educational goals. As my internship comes to a close, I understand more than ever how crucial our work is to underserved communities.



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VIA E-MAIL ([dan@equaljusticeamerica.org](mailto:dan@equaljusticeamerica.org))

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

**RE: Scottie Fralin - Summer 2018 Fellow**

Dear Dan:

On behalf of Central Virginia Legal Aid Society (CVLAS), I want to thank Equal Justice America for funding University of Richmond law student Scottie Fralin to work with us this summer. CVLAS is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal assistance to low income people in civil cases and preventive legal education primarily in the areas of domestic violence, housing, consumer, and employment law. Scottie fulfilled her ten-week commitment in the Petersburg office, which serves the Tri-Cities and the counties of Dinwiddie, Prince George, Surry, and Charles City.

Scottie's strong writing skills, excellent work ethic, and good people skills immediately contributed to our office. CVLAS's Petersburg office only has one attorney to serve the more than 23,000 low income persons eligible for this office's services. With Scottie's assistance, I was able to provide more and better free civil legal services to our community's most vulnerable populations.

During her time at CVLAS, Scottie assisted me with numerous housing, family, domestic violence, unemployment compensation, and consumer cases. With her help, we obtained protective orders, child support and custody orders, and unemployment benefits and we stopped families from being evicted.

Under my supervision, Scottie researched legal questions, drafted correspondence and court documents, interviewed clients, and accompanied me to court proceedings. Scottie demonstrated deep empathy for our clients and did a great job making sure I was prepared to provide them with the best possible representation.

The fellowship also benefited Scottie as she gained significant practical legal experience and saw firsthand the great need for free legal services that exists in the Tri-cities and the surrounding counties. While Scottie grew up in Richmond and the surrounding counties, she had never been to Petersburg.

With Scottie's help in a landlord-tenant dispute, CVLAS obtained a judgment for \$1,800 against a Petersburg landlord to compensate the client for the outrageously high electricity bills she incurred due to the landlord's refusal to make repairs to the house's electrical systems. In addition, the Court

dismissed the landlord's claim that the client owed him \$15,000 in rent, late fees, and damages. Scottie drafted the counter-claim and collected all the necessary facts from the client.

Additionally, Scottie helped me prepare and finalize a complicated federal False Claims Act lawsuit against a Colonial Heights landlord who had been illegally overcharging a disabled woman whose rent is subsidized by the federal government. This landlord collected over \$13,000 in unauthorized payments that he told the client she had to make despite the landlord knowing he could not charge this extra money. While this case is still pending, Scottie's help has been invaluable as I otherwise would have been challenged to prepare this lawsuit and meet the needs of my other clients.

The funding provided by Equal Justice America allowed Scottie to make the commute from Richmond to Petersburg every day without the worry of the added financial costs. The funding counteracts the difficulty of attracting law students to work in Petersburg due to the greater number of opportunities available in Richmond and other cities that do not involve lengthy commutes.

Unfortunately, Scottie's class schedule does not allow her to continue working with CVLAS this fall. However, Scottie has offered to assist me with the False Claims Act case she helped me prepare.

Thank you again for your support. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at (804) 518-2128 or send me an e-mail at [chrisb@cvlas.org](mailto:chrisb@cvlas.org). Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Bernhardt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher P. Bernhardt