

July 23, 2018

To Dan Ruben, Executive Director at Equal Justice America:

I'm writing to express my deep gratitude for EJA's award of a 2018 Summer Fellowship. My summer at the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights, New Orleans' juvenile public defense office and an advocate for children's rights across the state of Louisiana, would not have been possible.

Prior to law school, I worked in Washington, Oregon, Arizona and Texas as a youth counselor in a juvenile detention facility, an organizer for an immigrant rights nonprofit, a volunteer with a humanitarian aid migrant desert operation, a case manager with an immigrant shelter, and a Department of Justice accredited representative with a refugee resettlement agency. I found each of these experiences to be tremendously rewarding, and each helped shape the course of my career trajectory and develop my advocacy skills.

However, it wasn't until this summer with LCCR that I found what I really wanted to pursue as a long-term career; something that set a fire in my belly that could sustain the ups and downs of a long-spanning profession. I realize now that juvenile public defense is that for me. It combines all of my most passionate interests (poverty law, juvenile rights, criminal justice) in a setting that allows interpersonal interaction, systemic advocacy and creative problem solving.

This summer I had the opportunity to be paired with two staff members at LCCR: Mary Murphy, Staff Attorney, and Aaron Clarke-Rizzio, LCCR's Executive Director. For Aaron, I wrote several research memos, including a 50-state survey on juvenile sentencing guidelines and also on peer contagion theory in alternative court programming. For Mary, I shadowed her in court several times a week and was able to observe juvenile court proceedings, which helped me to understand just how different they can be from an adult proceeding. In addition, I drafted motions, conducted client intake, service and investigation requests and met individually with teens held in the adjacent youth detention facility.

I came to LCCR because I had long heard that Louisiana is the "incarceration capital of the country," and that juveniles in particular face wildly disparate outcomes in New Orleans. I sought out this experience because I wanted to be able to understand what the worst possible scenario looks like. I think that progressive advocates too often shield themselves in insular, self-affirming communities that fail to acknowledge the tremendous consequences facing marginalized populations who may not be afforded as great of protections. Working at LCCR has demonstrated to me that there are still many people who believe that incarceration is the best tool to improve the lives of youth and protect their communities. However, having the chance to work with teens at LCCR has reaffirmed my vigorous opposition to that kind of thinking.

I worked with teens as young as twelve years old who were kept in handcuffs and leg shackles while they awaited their sentencing. I'm currently working with a fifteen-year-old charged with armed robbery who is facing 15-99 years in prison, and I have had to wrestle with the implications of a system that fails to see a more effective method of protecting communities than locking teens (in New Orleans, 98% of whom are black males) in cages. I am confident that I

want to spend the rest of my professional career working on this issue. I am transferring to New York University this fall because of the school's excellent juvenile defense programming, and I am grateful that this summer provided me the space and opportunity to be able to delve into this work in such a supportive and educational context. I am especially grateful that Equal Justice America made it possible for me to do so without having to feel like I was sacrificing my own financial well-being at the same time.

In gratitude,

Keiler Beers
University of California, Los Angeles School of Law



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August 19, 2018

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Mary Murphy and I am a staff attorney at the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights as one of the public defenders for children accused of delinquent acts in New Orleans, LA. I also serve the role as the coordinator for our legal interns. I was one of two supervising attorneys that worked directly with Keiler over this past summer.

LCCR is a nonprofit law office that defends the right of every child in Louisiana's juvenile justice system to fairness, dignity, and opportunity. Our Children's Defense Team serves as the juvenile public defender in New Orleans, where our holistic advocacy helps our clients achieve their legal and life goals. Statewide, we advocate for law and policy reform to build a juvenile justice system that is fair, compassionate, and supportive of positive youth development.

As a summer law intern, Keiler was assigned to work under the supervision of myself and our Executive Director Aaron Clark-Rizzio. Keiler was invaluable in providing policy research to our ED—he not only is an excellent writer with great attention to detail, but Keiler is already an exceptional advocate and he was able to cold-call public defenders offices across the country to compile information that we will use to improve the juvenile justice system in New Orleans and in Louisiana.

Keiler assisted me in every aspect of my juvenile criminal defense work. He met with clients, assisted with court hearings, did investigation (notably interviewing a complaining witness in a serious and difficult case in Spanish), he wrote case summaries, developed investigation plans, developed social work service plans, and provided essential legal research for my cases. Keiler is smart, hard-working, and has a deep respect for our clients. He is committed to social justice reform and his kindness and humor make him an ideal colleague. I am certain that Keiler is going to be a change agent in criminal justice reform. His work with us this summer made clear that he will be an attorney for whom his clients are proud and privileged to have.

Sincerely,

Mary Murphy
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