

September 19, 2013

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My fellowship experience was a wonderful way to connect with the New Haven community and to understand how legal processes actually play out on the ground. I was a co-director of the Yale Law School Temporary Restraining Order Project. Under the supervision of New Haven Legal Assistance (NHLA), we assist applicants for TRO's in navigating what amounts to an onerous paperwork and long waiting process involved in accessing the protection of a restraining order in Connecticut.

In my role, I saw both the ways in which the system worked and the ways in which it was not sufficiently serving victims of domestic violence. On the one hand, most volunteer shifts involve encountering a number of individuals who have not been able to receive protection from the police, and who do not feel safe in their homes and communities. Offering these individuals legal recourse is a powerful feeling, and providing them with both administrative and emotional support is certainly a service that a typical clerk's office does not have the capacity to provide.

On the other hand, the TRO office over the past several years has become focused on measuring our outcomes not only in terms of how many individuals we help through the process, but in the results of those efforts. We have found, thanks to the incredible research of my co-director Ming-Yee Lin, that marshal service was a broken link in the chain connecting TRO applications and relief for applicants. After a series of meetings among the marshal service, the judiciary and our office, we started to problem solve in this area. Although no new policies are in place, I was encouraged by the catalyzing role that the TRO Project and NHLA could play in starting the conversation about improving outcomes for victims of domestic violence.

My role also involved education Yale Law students about how to get engaged in solving these vexing problems, and assisting victims seeking protection. TRO is a huge part of the Yale Law community which the majority of first year law students take part in. As such, it was a chance to encourage students early in their foray into the law to consider how they could contribute to the community and pursue public interest law.

I am grateful that EJA furnished me with the opportunity to not only learn the ins and outs of how restraining orders, marshal service, and the New Haven family courts operated, but also to take on a leadership role in our public interest organization. TRO is a longstanding partnership between Yale Law and the New Haven clerk's that EJA has sustained. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,
Julia Freeland, JD, Yale Law School 2013