

September 13th, 2013

Dear Dan Ruben:

This year, I was one of the returning student directors of the Yale Temporary Restraining Order Project (“TRO Project”). The primary responsibilities of the directors are to recruit, train, and address concerns of volunteers who staff an office at the courthouse five days a week throughout the school year to assist individuals in filling out TRO applications. This past fall, we had over seventy volunteers, over half of whom stayed on to volunteer in the spring. All of our directors also took on volunteer shifts at the office this year.

Last year, we initiated a research project on service rates of TROs in New Haven. Under Connecticut law, TROs only become effective once a state marshal has properly served the order upon the respondent, and service of process must occur at least five days before the hearing. Many of our volunteers observed through follow-up calls with applicants that a significant number of TROs were not being served. The consequences of this failure are significant: 1. Individuals who are in severe danger are not receiving the protection they need; 2. Individuals must spend hours going through the application process again in order to have another opportunity to appear before a judge. To determine the extent of this problem and identify potential causes, our volunteers helped digitalize one year’s worth of data on all TROs applied for through the New Haven Courthouse and performed several analyses. The data revealed, among other things, that over 40% of the 1084 TROs and hearing orders granted were picked up by the applicant but not served. After seeing the results of our research, several judges, local attorneys, family clerks, and marshals expressed interest in collaborating to improve the process.

This year, a few exciting developments happened. We had two public meetings attended by over thirty judges, state marshals, members of the Marshal Commission, clerks, attorneys, and victim's advocates. We discussed a number of potential changes, ranging from altering respondent profile forms to getting marshals access to language lines and even proposing a bill that may allow police officers to serve civil orders in Connecticut. New Haven Legal Assistance, several judges, and the Marshal Commission have been actively looking into and pursuing many of these changes. The Marshal Commission is currently considering a revised respondent profile form, and the New Haven courthouse is now scheduling TRO hearings on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays instead of only on Wednesdays.

We hope that through efforts such as these, we will be able to lower the procedural obstacles that applicants face in applying for TROs and also give our volunteers the opportunity to make a greater difference.

Participating in the TRO Project has undoubtedly been one of the most worthwhile aspects of my law school experience because it has allowed me to impact people’s lives – whether through directly helping an applicant, training new volunteers to do this important work, or working with different parties to figure out how to make the TRO process even more accessible to those in need. This work has helped me develop many skills and given me greater motivation to become a better practitioner. I want to thank EJA for your continued support over the years and for making this program possible.

Sincerely,



Ming-Yee Lin

Yale Law School
Class of 2013