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Yale Law School, J.D. 2018

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Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
13540 Easy Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112  
Dan@EqualJusticeAmerica.org

Re: EJA Fellowship 2016-2017

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I write to thank you and Equal Justice America for your fellowship support of my work as a student director of Yale Law School's Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) Project.

As you know, the Project has a number of goals regarding its relationship to New Haven and the Yale Law School community. These can best be broken down as directly assisting applicants who want to apply for TROs at the New Haven Courthouse; engaging the law school community with issues related to intimate partner violence; and working with advocates to find ways to improve domestic violence services and the legal processes surrounding TRO applications. Over the course of my fellowship, I was involved with each of these, and each offered an important angle on the problem of intimate partner violence.

The most tangibly rewarding experiences of my fellowship were, of course, the opportunities I had to work directly with applicants for TROs. Applicants differed broadly in their backgrounds, experiences, and reasons for seeking restraining orders. Yet universally, all applicants found some aspect of the TRO process confusing or daunting—which was why they came to our office. Sometimes, we could help them by straightforwardly walking them through the basic application form or explaining how to give forms to a marshal to be served on the respondent. Other times, our office helped applicants to interpret some of the more convoluted parts of the process, like applying for a TRO to cover the applicant's child, or seeking an "order of maintenance" to stop the respondent from cutting off the applicant's heat or electricity. More than once, I was able to connect the New Haven Legal Assistance Association (NHLAA) with applicants who needed additional legal support due to language barriers or other obstacles to going through the process *pro se*.

With each applicant, however, I realized that our office played an even more central role than explaining complicated forms or accompanying applicants to the clerk's office. Oftentimes, the most important role I could play was as someone who was ready and willing to listen to each applicant's story without judgment or skepticism, and then help the applicant work through concrete steps to address the issue. I had one particularly memorable experience where a

nineteen-year-old applicant came to the office seeking a TRO against her boyfriend. It was not clear from the conversation how much support her family or friends were giving her as she went through the process, and she seemed incredibly relieved just to be able to share the situation with someone who would help her do something about it. She had come prepared with phone and text records and billing information, and we were able to help her incorporate some of that information into her affidavit, while explaining that she could bring everything with her to a hearing if a hearing was ultimately granted. Above all, she made clear that it was comforting for her just to have someone there who was willing to sit, listen, talk through her affidavit, and offer her peace of mind that the forms were being filled out correctly.

Beyond my individual work in the office, I was in charge of recruiting and retaining law school volunteers. In this capacity, I worked to educate new students about the TRO Project's work and encourage them to volunteer beginning their first semester. I also arranged trainings for new volunteers, during which the student directors walked interested students through the application process and theoretical approaches to intimate partner violence. This experience allowed me to work with a variety of people who were committed to the TRO Project's mission, and to get fresh perspectives on what parts of the process seemed the most confusing or intimidating.

Finally, the student directors worked with lawyers at NHLAA to consider ways to improve the Temporary Restraining Order Project and resources available to applicants. This year, we streamlined the referral process and clarified for volunteers when they should refer applicants to NHLAA, which likely resulted in more applicants getting the legal assistance they needed. We also worked to develop a Domestic Violence Clinic at the law school, which will work in tandem with the TRO Project to assist domestic violence victims in a variety of legal actions.

Again, thank you so much for EJA's generous support. It enabled my fellow student directors and me to continue running and developing the TRO Project, which in turn allowed the TRO Project to assist hundreds of applicants in applying for and obtaining temporary restraining orders.

Sincerely,

Allison Douglis  
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