

Elise Wander  
Yale Law School  
Class of 2019

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a third-year law student who received an Equal Justice America grant last year to support my work as a director of the Temporary Restraining Order Project. I volunteered for the TRO Project in my first year as a law student and it was through the TRO Project that I first stepped foot into family court. In my capacity as a director, I coordinated with New Haven Legal Assistance, the clerk's office, and the law school faculty and staff, trained new volunteers in initial trainings and in their first shifts, made sure that the office was stocked with supplies, and of course staffed the office to assist applicants.

The clients I served as a TRO Project Director were individuals affected by domestic and gender-based violence. Throughout my two years at the TRO Project, I was blown away by the resilience of the applicants we served, who had often faced violence and threats of violence to themselves or their children. I remember one young woman in particular who was at the courthouse to get a restraining order against the father of her unborn child. She was seventeen. Our role as volunteers was critical, not only to help applicants make their case to the judge, but also to listen to and validate their experiences—particularly because both private and institutional actors (including courts) can be skeptical of survivors' narratives.

It was extremely rewarding to help guide TRO applicants through the court system. The number of barriers to access in the court house is incredible: frequently, applicants who were disabled or whose native language was not English would bring a translator with them, but others were alone. Some applicants had children that needed to be entertained as they filled out applications. Most applicants had no experience in the courthouse, and it is not at all clear where they needed to go and how they would feel on the day of their hearing. It was gratifying to be able to remove some of these burdens. Last year in particular, I was glad to be able to call applicants to follow up, explain what the possible outcomes of their hearing might be, and answer any questions they had about what would happen during the hearing. Most applicants I spoke to on the phone expressed gratitude, and said at the end of the phone call that they felt more comfortable with the upcoming hearing.

I am very glad to have served as a TRO Project Director, and thank Equal Justice America for funding our work. I will continue to volunteer for the TRO Project this year.

Sincerely,

Elise Wander