

May 19, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Working with the Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) Project has been one of my most rewarding experiences in law school, and I am so grateful for Equal Justice America's support.

The TRO Project staffs an office in the New Haven County Courthouse that offers assistance to pro se TRO applicants. Law student volunteers help applicants to complete forms, compose affidavits, troubleshoot service issues, and navigate courthouse procedures. As a student director of the TRO Project, I recruited law student volunteers; trained students on the TRO process; and liaised with the family court clerks, Yale Law faculty, and New Haven Legal Assistance attorneys.

My work with the TRO Project has shown me how difficult and inaccessible legal relief can be to those who cannot afford professional representation. Many TRO applicants do not understand what a TRO can and cannot provide, do not appreciate the importance of service, or struggle to compose a coherent affidavit. The TRO Office gives pro se applicants these tools and empowers them to engage in self-advocacy. This is not only crucial for the purposes of fulfilling short-term needs—with our help, more applicants successfully receive TROs—but the TRO Office also serves the important function of making the legal system more accessible to those individuals it is meant to serve.

The TRO Project serves a diverse population of individuals with a wide variety of cases. I have found that the most difficult cases fall into two categories: individuals who suffer from

mental health issues, and individuals who are seeking a TRO for the first time against a long-term abuser. Both of these situations have challenged me to provide compassionate, professional advice without stepping out of my role as a law student. I have learned how crucial it is for lawyers to familiarize themselves with community resources and to make those resources available to clients. But the lawyer is not—and cannot—be a social worker or a counselor. And the lawyer cannot force a client to seek the assistance of those professionals. One of the most difficult lessons that I have learned through my time in the TRO Office is that a lawyer's utility is circumscribed; the law can solve many, but certainly not all, problems. It has been a lesson in humility.

Law school can feel like a very self-centered three years, and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to engage with and assist the New Haven community. The TRO Project provides a vital service to pro se TRO applicants, and I am so glad to have been part of its work. Thank you again for EJA's support of our efforts!

Best,

Sarah Weiner
Yale Law School
Class of 2017