

Dan Ruben
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Equal Justice America
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Re: EJA Fellowship 2016-2017

September 14, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you and the Equal Justice America team for all of your generous support for our work as Student Directors of the Temporary Restraining Order Project at Yale Law School this past academic year. Over the past two semesters, the TRO Project continued to work hard in our office in the New Haven civil courthouse to serve as many applicants as possible, in addition to growing and making some important changes. This year the TRO Project met with numbers of domestic violence victims, listened to their stories, helped them complete their temporary restraining order application forms, essentially telling the judge their story, and helped guide them through the remainder of the process. The TRO project, working with Steve Wizner and the NHLAA attorney, also led a seminar. Students in the seminar commit to six shifts in the office over the semester, in addition to two class sessions and a courthouse observation.

In addition to continuing TRO's mission, we also made some important changes this past year. The manual, given to all volunteers during training, was redone, making the process as accessible and helpful as possible to volunteers of all backgrounds and with all levels of experience. Importantly, we also made an effort to strengthen our guidance on the post-TRO process. The semester prior to my becoming a Student Director, I participated in the seminar mentioned above. As part of the experience, I attended a courthouse observation and was disturbed to notice how confusing and difficult the process was, in addition to the problems that led applicants to see a restraining order in the first place. Immediately, my reaction was to think about what else could be done to assist applicants, since we are no longer a part of the process once a TRO hearing is granted or denied. As a consequence of that experience, I, along with the other Student Directors, worked on training our volunteers in this area, equipping them with the necessary information to pass along to applicants to make the process at least somewhat smoother and less intimidating. This was one of the reasons I wanted to be a Student Director of the TRO Project. I wanted to be an integral part, with the ability to improve when I saw issues, of the team, which runs a project that was so important to me, and I am incredibly grateful that I was given this opportunity to do just that.

Not only, however, was being a Student Director important to me, but I naturally wanted to keep spending shifts in the office working with applicants directly. As a Student Director, I was given the opportunity to help the project run, but as a volunteer, during my shifts in the office, was when I got to be reminded each shift, of the significance of the project's work. It is in the office

where I got to meet the bravest, kindest people, going through terrible things and remaining strong. It is in this role that I am able to really feel the importance of the project, and to actually, personally, play a, albeit very small, role. As an example of this, one woman who came into the office was quite frightened. She had an abusive husband, who she had thankfully found safety from for the time being, but she was particularly worried because she needed safety not only for herself, but for her special needs daughter. It complicated things that her daughter was above the age of eighteen, making her not includable on the application. Without any of this information, the applicant may have simply filled out the forms and her application, at least to the extent that it covered her daughter, likely would have been denied. In the process of helping this woman, I was able to spot this issue, talk through the problem with her and get some guidance on what we could and could not do from the clerks. We ended up referring her case to NHLAA due to the complications, and I felt grateful that I had been in the office to help this woman navigate the process. Without the generous support of Equal Justice America this, and the many other examples, would not have been possible. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

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