

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I interned with Sanctuary for Families in New York City, at the Manhattan Family Justice Center. Sanctuary works with survivors of trafficking and domestic and gender-based violence, providing holistic social and legal services. New York City has Family Justice Centers in every borough, which serve as walk-in centers for survivors to access a range of services in one location. The attorneys from Sanctuary for Families who I worked with at the Family Justice Center worked primarily on family law issues, such as divorce; child custody, visitation, and support; spousal maintenance; and orders of protection.

The best part of my internship by far was working directly with clients. For some of the people who came into the Family Justice Center, legal intake was the first time they had told anyone what had happened to them. Some clients had pretty serious experiences with physical violence, but for many, it was the constant mental, emotional, and psychological manipulation that their abusers used to control them. Over the course of their case, I saw several clients grow in their confidence as they named the behavior and regained power of their lives. One client sobbed as I helped her prepare for her first hearing as she realized the toll that years of verbal and physical abuse had taken on her. When her temporary order of protection was granted, she kept smiling and talking about all the changes she was going to make now that she had her apartment to herself again.

I kept thinking about the privilege that law school gives me to be at ease in these intentionally intimidating spaces and with these confusing systems. My supervisor and the staff attorneys were great at inviting us to observe court as often as possible. The hours we spent in the gallery helped familiarize me to both the procedures and the soft information, like which judges prefer what approaches, or where to wait with a client so they do not have to see their abuser before the hearing. Even for a system like New York's orders of protection, which are meant to be accessible and a process that people can complete pro se, having professional legal help makes an incredible difference. As an intern, I could provide detailed information about what was likely to happen. Moreover, our clients had people who believed them, who told them that they did not deserve the abuse they received, and who were willing to stand up for them.

I'm grateful to the Equal Justice America Foundation for helping me be there and stand up for our clients as well. Going into this summer, I knew I was interested in direct services, but these ten weeks showed that this is the right path for me.

Sincerely,

Madison Koenig
New York University School of Law