

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

September 24, 2019

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Every day that I walked to my internship placement at The Children's Law Center this summer, I knew the day ahead of me was truly unknown. To the best of my ability I tried to brace myself emotionally for the stories I would hear from my children clients themselves or the crime reports or petitions I would read. Of course, there were quiet days full of legal research and not much else. But, generally, those quiet days were the exception to the rule that working as an Attorney for the Child in New York City family court is a grueling emotional job. Empathy can be both the key to doing your job effectively but also the characteristic that grounds you down to a nub the quickest.

I enjoyed the work that was investigative the most. For instance, twice I attended a panel that a custody client's father was a part of to see if the father was following a court order. A year earlier the student had two suicide attempts and he felt very strongly that his father not share that information publicly in family court, civil court, or to the public. However, the father was now starring in a documentary and seeking fame for some hurdles he came over in his personal life. The father did not tell his son about the documentary and we had to be the ones to break the news to our client that he could be featured in a documentary. My supervising attorney worked all day to make sure that safety plans were ready if the client reacted negatively to the news. The counselor and school were alerted, and his mother promised to watch him for 24 hours. The child ended up being very upset and he asked that we file something in court to stop his father about talking about the mental health of his son. This was a precarious ask of the court given the First Amendment, but we spent another day researching how we could. I found case law in family court where parents were barred from sharing hurtful information about their children to the public. With this case law, we

were able to have an order to restrict the father's speech about his son's mental health and give his son a little bit of peace of mind. And, as I mentioned before, I attended two panels after this order to ensure that the father did not break the court order.

The other aspect I liked the most was working with young adults. I began helping a 19-year old woman with a broken adoption issue. Every year, thousands of adopted children are kicked out of their homes or forced to leave because of the strained relationships they have with their adoptive parents. When this happens, the adopted child has no support from the state, but the parents are still paid an adoption subsidy unless the child fights for their subsidy. I met many clients from broken adoptions but one stuck with me. She had fled her home because her adoptive mother fed her last, clothed her last, and would not tell her that she loved her even though she told her biological children that she did. My client had felt like a second-class family member. When my client left her home before high school ended, the adoptive mother was hurt and refused to offer any monetary support even though she was receiving roughly \$900 a month in subsidy adoption from the state. Most kids from broken adoptions do not seek a lawyer. But when they do, they are in a significantly better situation to receive the adoption subsidy themselves. It requires a lot of documentation collecting, timeline creation, and narrative development, but it is possible for them to fight back. I learned a lot from them as a legal intern trying to help them take the next step in their lives as adults separate of their adoptive family.

EJA was a tremendous help to me during my time as a legal intern. It provided me the financial support to not babysit part-time so I could instead focus on my work that often needed me in the office after 5:00 pm or would drain me emotionally enough that I needed an entire evening to recover. Thank you for that peace of mind and extra time.

Sincerely,

Sylvia Precht-Rodriguez
NYU Law, Class of 2021