

September 15th, 2019

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

Dear Dan,

I'm a rising 2L at the University of Chicago and I'm writing to express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for my fellowship this summer and to share some information about my experiences as a Fellow working at Legal Aid Chicago.

Legal Aid Chicago provides people living in poverty with comprehensive free legal services to resolve civil issues. The organization is the largest civil legal aid provider in Cook County, where the need for pro bono legal services is enormous. I worked in the Children & Families Group of Legal Aid Chicago this summer. Specifically, I supported the Family Law Subgroup, whose mission is to support survivors of domestic violence. As you know, Legal Aid Chicago is unable to pay its summer interns for their work. It would have been significantly more difficult for me to accept this internship without the financial support of Equal Justice America. Thank you for supporting my work.

My work this summer was immensely valuable to my legal education. The common path of litigation for our Family Law clients was to obtain an order of protection for the survivor and his or her children, file for divorce, file for child support, and negotiate a marital settlement agreement and parental allocation judgment. Of course, relationships involving domestic violence are fraught with difficulties that make litigation complicated. One of my most challenging roles this summer was supporting our clients throughout the court proceedings. I spent a good deal of time working with clients to obtain information for filings, explaining what the judge's orders meant, and describing next steps. This allowed me to take a deep dive into the world of family law. I was required to be an expert on the facts of the client's case and to understand the strategy behind our filings. The experience was a valuable entry into litigation and was even more substantive than I could have hoped for after just one year of law school.

I hope to build a legal career in Cook County and, as such, being introduced to the Cook County legal system and the network of public interest agencies that support the underserved in Chicago was extremely valuable. For example, one of our clients that I worked closely with this summer was referred to Legal Aid Chicago through Ascend Justice. We worked with this client at the 555 W Harrison court house and eventually transferred the case to the Daly Courthouse. While at 555

W Harrison, I worked with the client's court advocate provided through a separate public interest agency. We referred the client to mental health resources for herself and her kids through Legal Aid Chicago's connections with health providers. We also recommended the client access resources through Sarah's Inn, a major provider of resources to domestic violence survivors. Finally, the case involved issues of jurisdiction over the client's children, property law, and the reach of preliminary injunctions. As you can see, through just one of my many cases, I gained exposure to a variety of organizations, courtrooms, and areas of law. This exposure was an extremely useful entry into the world of pro bono legal services in cook county and I will take this knowledge with me into the rest of my legal career.

The most impactful case that I worked on this summer involved a woman who was trying to escape an abusive relationship that had endangered her safety, her son's safety, and her financial independence. Her boyfriend used not only physical violence, but also threats over social media, a campaign of calls to our client's loved ones, and stalking, to isolate our client. I worked closely with this client to gather the facts in order to obtain an order of protection against her ex-boyfriend for both herself and her young son. The complexity of the abuse translated to a complex case for the order of protection.

In some ways, the case was a success: we obtained an order of protection for the client and I was thrilled to have taken the lead on drafting the petition and preparing the client for testimony. However, the case shed light on the layers of injustice involved in domestic violence cases. While many of the actions by the abusive ex-boyfriend were criminal, the police often refused to take action when our client called them for protection, even when she had an enforceable emergency order of protection against him. Further, our client will not be reimbursed for the phone and laptop stolen by her ex-boyfriend nor will she be compensated for the many hours she spent litigating the case instead of working. Her relationships with family and friends that distanced themselves from her due to the campaign of calls and lies spread by her abuser will take years to mend. Her story is not unique in these ways. I feel passionate that the law can provide further justice to women like our client through policy reform and continued support of legal aid providers.

My work this summer has motivated me to continue supporting survivors of domestic violence through volunteer work throughout the school year and beyond. The impact of abuse, especially on mothers, is far-reaching. I am amazed by the work of Legal Aid Chicago and other service providers in the Chicago area, as I have seen the wonderful impact they can have on survivors of domestic violence and I am grateful to Equal Justice America for supporting my work this summer and helping me to begin using my legal degree for good.

Sincerely,
Casey Jedele