

November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019

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

Dear Dan Ruben,

I hope this letter finds you well. I thought I would take the time to share some reflections on my work this past summer (2019) with the Legal Aid Society of Eastern Virginia (LASEV). Of course, my time with LASEV was generously supported by a grant from Equal Justice America.

My work with LASEV this summer can be described in one word: varied. However, I did primarily focus on several ongoing housing cases that LASEV was and, for some cases, still is, involved. Within these housing cases, I was tasked with assisting in all aspects of legal research. Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of the issues involved – housing discrimination, environmental racism, administrative law, and school segregation (just to name a few) – this preliminary research effort took on a broad shape. I spent considerable time developing GIS maps which allowed a comparison of historical Norfolk housing practices and zoning initiatives.

In addition to the still-ongoing projects I was tasked with, the overall environment of LASEV's offices has proved to be highly influential. Outside of my specific duties, I was also able to assist other attorneys and staff within the office with tasks such as returning client calls, assisting clients with intake paperwork, and providing scheduling support. Again, these experiences echoed my initial interest in community law, as I had an opportunity to engage in client-interaction and adhere to the community law principle of "meeting people where they are."

Working with LASEV attorneys, I was able to help low-income people and their families navigate the often-unfriendly maze that is the legal system. Often, clients coming into the LASEV offices were seeking help with relatively straightforward legal issues. However, even the simplest of housing, employment, or custody problem can (and often does) create ripple effects that have truly destructive impacts on families. From pursuing remedies for unfair evictions to researching possible claims against unscrupulous landlords, I helped LASEV attorneys secure justice in these areas.

As I continue my legal education, the impact of a summer spent with LASEV can hardly be overstated. The attitude and ethos of the organization has shown me that service-oriented legal groups can have a measurable impact on clients' lives – in both the short and long term. Moreover, LASEVA exemplifies what I view as the proper approach to this kind of work – namely, a client-attorney relationship that is centered on equity and communication – not a patronizing power imbalance.

As I begin to plan my next steps, the work of this past summer has proven influential. I remain deeply committed to a legal career that involves serving the public – preferably on an individual client basis. In addition, my work surrounding housing and environmental law has made me even more interested in the ways these areas overlap. To that end, I am currently seeking a position for my 2L summer that expands upon this work, with a focus on environmental issues as they effect distressed communities. Wherever I end up next, I can sincerely thank my summer at Legal Aid as a milestone experience.

I am very grateful for the support of Equal Justice America towards this endeavor. Your organization's support was critical to allowing me experience true, on-the-ground justice services. I am sure that the Summer of 2019 will prove pivotal for the remainder of my legal career.

Again, thanks to your organization for the support.

Sincerely,

Matthew Woodward  
William & Mary