

08/10/2021

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
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13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I hope this letter finds you well. Thank you for you and Equal Justice America's support this summer. Your financial support has helped me pursue public interest work this summer with Public Counsel in Los Angeles. Public Counsel is a large pro bono organization offering free legal services in a variety of areas. This summer, I worked with their Adoptions Project and helped families adopting children out of the foster care system in LA County.

Most of my job was conducting intake interviews with clients. During these interviews, I collected information from parents about their foster child, including the child's health history and any required treatment, and all the funding rates the parents had received. LA County provides various tiers of funding for foster and adoptive children, based on the level of care the child requires. The majority of our work consists in advocating for higher rates for our clients, as they often are receiving fewer funds they are entitled under the law. These interviews were often emotionally affecting, as children frequently had experienced immense trauma and had significant health needs, and the parents were resilient and loving. One case that has stuck with me involved a client whose daughter was imprisoned for sexually abusing her granddaughter and was now adopting the granddaughter who she had raised for the past several years. The woman's story was one of immense pain, and I felt honored that she shared her story and strength with me. Moreover, I felt great responsibility to get all of the details and specifics correct, while not retraumatizing her. I was able to talk her through all of the issues and later wrote up a detailed case summary that will be used by our pro bono attorney to finalize her adoption and receive the proper funding. I remain honored that as a young law student I was able to help her with a piece of the adoption that will mean so much to their lives.

In addition to these client interactions, I also had the chance to assist with a complicated international case. One of our clients is a teenager who was born in Latin America, and later moved to the United States. Her birth father still resides outside the United States, and she is now hoping to be adopted by the family she has lived with for several years. This case dealt with numerous complicated immigration and international issues. Specifically, I was responsible for researching the notice requirements under the Hague Treaty and whether the birth father had been properly served notice about the termination of his parental rights. After researching the issue, I completed a research memo summarizing the legal issues and processes that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) must follow to serve a birth parent residing outside the United States.

Developing this memo was an important experience for me, as it helped me better grasp the importance of legal research. During the school year, I strongly disliked legal research and

found it dry and boring. Also, generally, the research was for simulated cases involving corporations and felt detached from the real world. However, as I began my research for this memo, I felt myself much more compelled by the issues and nuances of the law. I knew that my findings would impact a real person, our client, as well as other future clients with birth parents residing outside the country. This understanding helped the issues come alive, and as I read case law also helped me to see all the individuals and families discussed in the opinions as real humans with full, rich lives. I have not spoken with the young woman whose case led to my assignment, but I felt honored to work on issues impacting her life and felt a great sense of responsibility to do my work diligently and be her best advocate, even from afar.

Lastly, this summer I have had the privilege of working on an adoptions case of my own alongside my supervising attorney. This means that I interviewed the family, collected documents, compiled our filings to the court, and have spoken with the family throughout the process as their liaison with Public Counsel. Our clients are an older couple adopting a young boy who has been in their care since he was an infant. The boy was physically abused by his birth parents, and the adoptive parents (my clients) first met him after he went to the hospital after an especially traumatic assault. As a result of these early traumas, the boy has required a large number of medical services and displays a lot of troubling behaviors. In order to support them through their case, I have compiled all of his health records and behavioral reports, which will be used as supporting evidence in our letters advocating to the county that he should be receiving a higher rate of funding. I reviewed all of these documents and categorized and notated them according to their relevant information. Additionally, I conducted the onboarding process with the family and explained all of the representation agreements in order for Public Counsel to represent them.

Throughout this process, I have been extremely humbled. This couple has much more life experience and wisdom than I do, and I often have felt out of place in being their advocate when they are my elders. I have learned to work through this discomfort, and to build confidence in our interactions and my ability to explain the complicated forms and legal processes, knowing that helping them through this will enable them to have more stability in their lives.

Thank you again for all of your support and helping me to work at Public Counsel this summer. It has been a very meaningful and fulfilling experience, and I am grateful for all your assistance.

Sincerely,
Jacob Maddox
Stanford Law School