

ANNA KIRSCH

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I interned at the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC), a poverty law clinic in Berkeley, California. I would not have been able to intern at EBCLC without funding from Equal Justice America.

Interning at EBCLC was an extremely powerful experience. I enjoyed the work immensely. I gained a great deal of legal knowledge and practical experience, but importantly I left my internship feeling more confident and fulfilled than I ever have.

EBCLC provides legal services for low-income community members in a variety of areas, including housing, immigration and criminal justice. With close attorney supervision and a strong dedication to social justice and community service, the EBCLC summer program fosters a socially conscious approach to lawyering and provides extensive procedural and substantive training to law students from all over the country

I was part of the Income Support Unit. This unit provides assistance to adults and families on welfare and food stamps by helping them overcome the denial of benefits, improve their welfare to work plans and secure other necessary supportive services, such as childcare, transportation and education.

The summer began with a series of intensive training sessions, which introduced me to the public benefits laws in Alameda County and in the state of California. I learned about the common problems that welfare applicants and recipients face and learned the best tactics to help clients overcome these problems. I also learned how to work with low-income communities effectively and how to be an empathetic and sensitive lawyer. Our trainings addressed a variety of topics to prepare us to be social justice lawyers, including how to work with clients with mental health issues and how to advocate for victims of domestic violence. Each of these trainings helped me to be an effective legal advocate this summer and taught me how to take a client-centered approach to lawyering.

During my internship I had my own caseload of seven clients. The majority of my clients were single mothers on welfare, who were the victims of domestic violence. I helped these women overcome decreases and denials in benefits by getting various agency regulations waived. These regulations included the Maximum Family Grant Rule, which excludes children born into families on welfare from receiving cash aid, and the 60 Month Time Limit, which disqualifies adults from receiving welfare after five years.

To get these regulations waived, I often wrote domestic violence declarations for my clients. I had to conduct very intense and personal interviews with my clients to write their histories. This

process was difficult and depressing, but also empowering. I had one woman tell me things she had never told anyone before. She cried through much of the interview. Later that week she called me to tell me how she felt as if a weight had been lifted off of her shoulders and how grateful she was to have the opportunity to tell someone her story. She said that even if she didn't secure full benefits she was happy she went through the process.

I also worked with clients on General Assistance. I met one of my clients one afternoon in the welfare department in Oakland. I was there doing legal outreach for EBCLC. This was one of my favorite projects because it allowed me to interact directly with community members. Once a week I would set up a table in the lobby of the welfare department and pass out literature to welfare recipients about their legal rights, answer their questions and assist them in any way that I could.

This client approached me in the welfare department. He had been denied cash aid three months prior and as a result had been evicted from his apartment. He had no money, no food and was sleeping in his van in front of his mother's house. He told me he felt like giving up. After listening to his story, I made a call to his worker and was able to secure him emergency cash aid that same day. He also became my client and I represented him at an administrative hearing to recover retroactive benefits for the wrongful denial of his aid. Throughout this process I learned how to write a persuasive position statement, do a direct and cross examination and conduct discovery. I also learned how to educate my client throughout the process so he could advocate for himself and teach others. This experience made me feel powerful, and like I could really make a difference.

In the Income Support Unit, we also acted as legislative advocates. I gave a presentation to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors opposing proposed cuts to General Assistance. I also prepared reports and wrote letters urging representatives to preserve public benefits programs and supportive services. These tasks taught me about the importance of being not just an attorney, but also a community organizer.

Each of my experiences at the EBCLC helped me to learn and grow. The summer left me feeling enriched and empowered. I now feel even more secure in my desire to be a public interest lawyer.

Equal Justice America made all of this possible. Without this funding, I would not have had such an amazing, eye-opening experience.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Anna Kirsch
UC Hastings
J.D. Candidate 2011