

August 14, 2008

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would first like to thank you very much for making my summer internship at The Children's Law Center of Massachusetts possible by awarding me the Equal Justice America Fellowship. My summer work was exciting, inspiring, and overall an excellent learning experience.

I spent the greater part of my summer working with a seasoned child welfare attorney. This attorney advocates for children in care and protection, child in need of services (CHINS), and delinquency cases. I researched and wrote memoranda on various topics in these areas of law and observed the courtroom proceedings at each stage in these cases. I really appreciated that my supervising attorney sought my opinion on the cases we worked on and actually used my ideas. For example, I wrote the proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law for one of his care and protection trials. He was very open to my ideas and arguments and ended up submitting most of what I wrote to the judge.

While working with this attorney, I spent a lot of time observing, participating in, and even translating into Spanish for client interviews. This was one of my favorite parts of the summer and I will never forget any of the children that I met. Because the issues in care and protection cases are so fact-specific and sensitive, I do not feel comfortable discussing the details of the cases that I worked on. However, examples of my most memorable client meetings include playing Hoola-Hoop with my supervising attorney and two four-year-olds, using dolls to find out where a young child would like to live (with her parents or with a foster parent), translating for a teenager who had recently immigrated to the United States and teaching him how to play Sudoku, talking to a young pregnant girl about finishing school and taking care of her newborn, and meeting with a child the day after he was removed from his parents' home by the Department of Social Services (or DSS, now the Department of Children and Families).

My supervising attorney went beyond just the legal advocacy he needed to do for his clients. He made considerable efforts to advocate for his clients' educational and emotional needs by attending school meetings and working closely with social workers. I particularly enjoyed participating in the school meetings because of my experience as a teacher. I was able to give my supervising attorney insight into the school's perspective and the inner workings of special education departments. One instance of this non-legal advocacy that I helped with this summer was working with a child's family to put together a Charter School application so the child could

move to a better school. I was really impressed by this attorney's desire and ability to be a friend and mentor to his clients, as well as advocating for their interest in court.

I also did a good deal of detailed research on delinquency law and procedure for another attorney in the office who was preparing a number of appeals. The research I did was challenging and exciting because this attorney was trying to formulate very original arguments and also question areas of the delinquency law. One of the most interesting cases that I did research for was a delinquency case in which the state was moving to extend the youth's commitment to the Department of Youth Services until the age of twenty-one. A youth's commitment can be extended if there is probable cause to believe that they would present a danger to society. The attorney whom I was doing the research for was challenging the law on constitutional grounds because it is vague about what standard should be used at the probable cause hearing to determine dangerousness. I researched case law to determine how courts have defined different burdens of proof and then compared those definitions with the language in the statute. This work was very rewarding because, instead of just finding information, I was making original analogies to put together an argument that has not been made before.

Another of my major responsibilities this summer was to manage my own intake calls. All the calls that came into the office were divided between the interns, however I took all of the Spanish calls. This was one of the most enriching parts of the summer because I had forty clients for whom I was the liaison at the Children's Law Center. I interviewed them, spoke with the attorneys, and then gave the callers information, suggestions, and/or referrals. Most of the cases that came in were parents calling because their child had a disability and they didn't think the school was providing the student with an appropriate education. For a number of these calls, the education attorney was interested in finding out more about the client's case and so I was responsible for conducting an investigation of their school and medical records. Highlights included speaking with a young man who has autism about his desire to pursue a career in graphic design, helping a woman to finalize an adoption through DSS, and speaking to a number of very articulate and well-researched young women who were interested in emancipation from their parents. The entire intake process enabled me to learn the intricacies of federal and state education laws, refine my client interviewing skills (in both English and Spanish), and learn how to conduct an investigation.

Overall, this was a very fulfilling summer because of the breadth and depth of my experience. I worked on all the different kinds of children's law and developed researching, writing, and client interviewing skills. Again, thank you for making this possible.

Sincerely yours,

Harriet Hoder
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Class of 2010