

August 31, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Rubin:

This summer I had the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America Fellow at Equip for Equality in Chicago, IL. Equip for Equality (“EFE”) is the private, non-profit protection and advocacy organization for individuals with disabilities in Illinois. EFE is organized into three teams that provide legal services to individuals with disabilities: the Abuse Investigation Unit, Special Education Team, and the Civil Rights Team. I had the pleasure of serving and learning on the Civil Rights Team about fair housing issues for individuals with disabilities.

The Civil Rights Team conducted an intake for a number of individuals with disabilities who requested information about, or assistance with, asserting their right to fair housing. One person who contacted EFE sought help to obtain a modification to her apartment from her federally subsidized housing provider. This person had limited mobility and used a cane because she had arthritis. Her disability made it difficult for her to use the unmodified shower and toilet in her apartment. In an effort to accommodate her disability, she requested that her housing provider install a raised toilet seat on her toilet and a grab-bar in her shower. However, after a year and a half, her housing provider had installed neither fixture, so she contacted EFE. For this individual I researched the federal law and drafted a demand letter that EFE sent on behalf of the tenant to the housing provider. Not long afterward EFE was contacted by the attorney for the housing provider in order to arrange for the housing provider to implement the modifications to our client’s unit.

One other client that I assisted was able to use a letter that I drafted to end a practice of discrimination perpetuated against him by his townhome association. The client used a wheelchair and had lived in his townhome for over ten years, but because of a step from his backdoor to his back patio he had never been able to access his back patio or backyard. He wanted to build a small deck over his patio so that he could roll from inside of his house directly outside onto his patio and into his backyard. However, building the deck required permission from his townhome association which was denied on several occasions. Eventually, out of frustration, he contacted EFE to see what his rights were. We researched and prepared a letter to inform the client that fair housing and Illinois condominium laws applied to his townhome associations and required the association to permit him to make a reasonable modification at his own expense, upon certain other conditions being met. He used the letter, and, on his own, explained his rights to the townhome association, which subsequently relented and has granted his request.

These are just two of the success stories that came about while I had the pleasure of serving at EFE this summer. On behalf of myself, EFE, and those with whom I worked, thank you for this opportunity. Please feel free to contact me for any further information about my summer as an EJA fellow at EFE.

Respectfully yours,

Jonathan J. Sheffield, Jr.