

Amanda Gobus

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
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Midlothian, VA 23112

Before explaining the excellent experience and practice I gained in my summer position, I would like to first thank all of those working to make the Equal Justice America fellowship possible. I am honored to be an EJA fellow, and I assumed reception of the fellowship as a serious responsibility to perform to my fullest capacity in my summer position. Being chosen as a fellow meant more than just provision of financial means; it meant I had a duty to the donors, those at EJA who reviewed my initial application, and to the clients I served.

I was fortunate enough to spend my summer as a law clerk at Legal Services of South Central Michigan (LSSCM). Due to the thorough introduction with which LSSCM welcomes the law clerks and also the many kind and helpful attorneys, my transition as a new law clerk was seamless and I immediately felt ready to accept assignments. Because I was there Monday through Friday, I make connections with attorneys that created endless opportunities for me.

I worked primarily on family law cases, and secondarily on landlord-tenant cases. Sadly, most if not all of our clients seeking help with divorce, custody or personal protection orders, have endured a history of abuse. Abuse tears down a person's ability to function at even the simplest level, creating fear and insecurity in the mind of the abused; especially if he or she is low income. The legal system is often the next step after an abused client has sought help from a shelter, and more often than not the clients come to us in very desperate times. One such client I helped came as an immigrant to America and fell in love with a non-immigrant man. This man proved to be abusive and lord her immigrant status over her at any sign of dispute. Once we accepted her case she was so happy that she cried. She expressed how relieved and proud she felt that all these people were working to help her, despite her husband's previous threats that nobody would. This client's story is not unique, and it is extremely important that these people receive legal representation. Especially in situations where one party is financially at an advantage over another, it is empowering for clients to know that their legal representation puts them on an equal platform with the opposing party.

Another realm of client empowerment is in landlord-tenant cases, when tenants can receive as much access to legal advice as their landlords. In the Eviction Diversion Program (EDP) law clerks have the opportunity to represent tenants facing eviction. One client I helped was a veteran with severe anxiety; he was uneasy and nervous being in the courthouse and was getting upset. A problem with his disability payments prevented him from paying his rent in full and the unpaid rent accumulated month after month. The landlord made a verbal agreement with the tenant, in which he would allow him to stay and slowly pay off his debt, but at the last minute the landlord changed his mind and served the tenant with a notice to quit. The tenant owed over two thousand dollars in rent and was facing eviction. I was able to negotiate a settlement in which the landlord honored the previous agreement, allowing the client to stay in his unit and make monthly payments toward the back balance.

Having a background in social work definitely gave me an advantage this summer when it came to communicating with clients. Many clients expressed gratitude for making them feel listened to; not just by hearing their words, but by engaging with them and letting them know that I understood their concerns and questions. While many clients had family support, others had none and found a sense of strength, pride and reassurance in knowing that they had devoted legal help.

This summer's unique hands-on experience may not have been possible had it not been for the fellowship. In fact, my position this summer at LSSCM has turned into an offer to continue in the fall, which I accepted. A sincere thank you for opening so many doors to my future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amanda Gobus', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Amanda Gobus
Michigan State University College of Law
Juris Doctor expected May 2019

Nicole Shannon, Supervising Attorney

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October 2, 2017

Dan Ruben
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RE: Amanda Gobus

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to evaluate Amanda Gobus as an EJA Fellow with the Legal Services of South Central Michigan Lansing Office (LSSCM). As Supervising Attorney, I have the privilege of overseeing our Law Clerk Program. Ms. Gobus was a standout this summer, and I am thrilled that she will be continuing on with us as an hourly paid clerk.

Ms. Gobus is smart, dedicated, and empathetic—all key qualities to succeeding in poverty law. Ms. Gobus was excellent under pressure, as she participated in our Eviction Diversion Program (EDP). At EDP, Ms. Gobus provided direct representation for tenants facing eviction. In that role, she quickly met with clients at the courthouse, explained their rights, reviewed their case to determine what defenses or counterclaims they had, negotiated settlement agreements, and appeared on the record in front of a judge to memorialize the agreements. We could always count on Ms. Gobus to do an excellent job.

Ms. Gobus's language skills were put to great use, speaking to clients in English, French, and Spanish. Ms. Gobus was able to break down complex legal concepts, putting clients at ease.

Additionally, Ms. Gobus is a true self-starter. When presented with projects, Ms. Gobus would deliver not only a great finished project, but great ideas on how to proceed down the line. She did not shy away from difficult tasks or situations, and our permanent staff quickly became comfortable giving her complex and sensitive assignments.

Ruben
August 7, 2017
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Ms. Gobus was exactly who we would expect as an EJA Fellow: Committed to social justice, curious, hardworking, and empathetic. Please contact me with any further questions.

Sincerely,

Nicole Shannon
Supervising Attorney