

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

August 31st, 2010

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

Thanks to the help of Equal Justice America, I was able to serve as a law clerk at Legal Services of South Central Michigan (LSSCM) in Ann Arbor. LSSCM is a private non-profit organization that provides free legal services to very low-income individuals and senior citizens in 13 counties in south central Michigan. As a summer law clerk, I assisted the staff attorneys in several cases regarding family law, consumer law, public benefits, housing, and elderly law. I participated on all aspects of the legal clinic work, including intake interviews, research, drafting pleadings, and court appearances. I also provided housing workshops to the Ann Arbor community on a weekly basis. Since English is my second language and I speak Spanish, I had the opportunity to translate documents and interpret for clients who could not speak or understand English.

While conducting intake interviews, I learned how to filter the most important facts as well as how to ask for relevant information. I also learned that it is important to remain calm and objective even when the story of a client was overwhelming. Student attorneys conducted housing workshops every Thursday, which were an excellent opportunity to have direct contact with clients. The main goal was to educate clients about their rights. In order to be able to present them, we had to complete a lot of research. Therefore, I learned about tenant's rights, local housing issues and federal and state programs that

exist to help the lower income community. Part of my assignment was also drafting pleadings, answers, among other legal documents. As a 1L student, my clerkship was the first time I could work hands-on on a real case. Currently, I have a better understanding of how the courts work and of the administrative paperwork that needs to be created before a client can obtain a legal remedy.

Being able to appear in court on behalf of a client was one of the most valuable and unique experiences. My oral advocacy skills improved substantially. Now I feel more comfortable presenting a case and legal arguments in front of a judge. Finally, working closely with a staff attorney also provided an amazing opportunity to learn about the daily challenges of a public interest law career.

I define my experience at LSSCM as exceeding my expectation both in terms of learning as well as in terms of feeling that I was actually making a difference in the community. LSSCM clients do not have financial resources to pay for legal services. Therefore, it would be much harder to avoid injustice and oppression by persons who can pay for an attorney and who have knowledge of how the legal system works. Most of the issues were systemic. For instance, our office had several clients who were being evicted because their voucher recertification was not being completed timely by the local housing commission. After our intervention, the housing commission demonstrated that necessary steps would be taken to resolve the problem. Our office could also keep the clients in their homes while the matter was being resolved. As a student attorney, I had the opportunity to attend to hearings in the housing commission, communicate directly with housing specialists, draft answers and appear in court on behalf of those clients.

Housing issues are one of many different problems addressed by LSSCM. The lower

income community would be even more vulnerable if there was no legal aid agency to protect their rights. Student attorneys provided valuable help to the office this summer, since the population in need often exceeds the limited resources available. After my clerkship was over, my desire to pursue a career in the public interest area became stronger. The most important factor is that I could actually help a person almost every single day and see the result of my work anytime we could help avoid having a client suffer an injustice.

Natalia Vieira Santanna
Wayne State University Law School
Juris Doctor, May 2012

November 16, 2010

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

Re: Natalia Santana

Dear Dan:

We were very, very pleased to have Natalia as an Equal Justice America Fellow from Wayne State University Law School this past summer. Natalia was a fabulous addition to our summer staff, and she will be a dedicated and capable public interest lawyer.

We try very hard to involve students in as much direct client contact and court attendance as possible. Natalia was a quick and eager learner, and was very successful both in interacting with clients and in her court and administrative hearing appearances. She was a very hard worker, and seemed to greatly enjoy her experience here. I believe she gained a significant understanding of poverty and the daily activities of a legal services office.

I would be very happy to have her work here again if she were interested, and would also consider her for an attorney position in the future.

Please feel free to call me if you have any questions. Thank you for supporting our work through EJA fellowships.

Sincerely,

Paul D. Sher
Managing Attorney