

August 27, 2014

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, Virginia 23112
dan@equaljusticeamerica.org

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you very much for helping make my summer with Inner City Law Center's Homeless Veterans Project possible. After enduring 1L, I found myself in need of a reminder why I came to law school in the first place. ICLC, and the community they serve, provided them in spades.

I cannot recommend ICLC highly enough. Their attorneys are passionate, dedicated advocates for clients who have nowhere else to turn to. One particular client, "Mary," was a survivor of not one, but two instances of military sexual trauma (MST) during her enlistment in the Army. She originally filed her disability claim for PTSD resulting from MST in 2003, and despite meeting all of the requirements for service connection, she was denied several times. The attorneys at ICLC got the case earlier this year. About a month into my clerkship, an attempted mediation with the VA went nowhere. The team gathered in a conference room to discuss our options and future strategy. I presented my research on how we could get the Court of Appeals for Veteran's Claims (CAVC) to overturn denials from the Board of Veterans Affairs (which is more complicated than it should be, because of procedural rules) and Melissa Tyner, the senior attorney on the project, tasked me with writing the lead brief before the CAVC. My work went before the court at the end of July, and we expect to hear the results in early September. If Mary wins, she will be awarded disability benefits retroactive to her original application date in 2003. To a homeless and disabled veteran, that six-figure sum is potentially life changing, and could permanently end her homelessness.

Drastic results like the above were rare, but the summer was full of meaningful moments. My favorite days were when we staffed our outreach clinics – one at the West L.A. VA Medical Center, and one at a homeless shelter for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. I cherished the opportunity to be there for these veterans, to be present for their stories and to be teamed up with tireless legal advocates who cared deeply for them.

The hardest day was when I met with "Mario" for the third time. We had originally met at the OEF/OIF homeless shelter, and he came into the office to give a stressor statement. These stressor statements are critical elements of disability claims, and Mario was suffering from PTSD. I took notes as he told his story.

"Everyday I ask myself: 'why am I awake today? Why am I here? Why didn't I die on that mountain in Afghanistan?' It seems like I'm always struggling. These have been going on since 2010.

Even when I'm with people, strangers, or my family, I'm lonely... I couldn't stop drinking, drinking and driving, just doing stupid things. I couldn't stop my destructive behavior. I think I was looking for someone to kill me.

Throughout the day, every day, I feel so down. I never have any energy. I do everything right. I eat healthy and exercise. I get eight hours of sleep. It doesn't matter. I'm still depressed. When I do all things correctly and I'm still depressed, when it's just there, I don't know what else I can do. There are days I can't get out of my depression, and there are days it'll stay there the whole day. I get dizzy, and have difficulty breathing. I can feel how my heart rate drops, and I start to feel really weak."

Mario received an increase in his disability rating and can now afford to move out of the homeless shelter.

I did not come to law school to learn about the Rule Against Perpetuities or Kroger Evasion. I came because I wanted to help people. And through my work this summer, and my time spent with public interest attorneys from across Los Angeles, I got the booster shot I needed.

Thank you again, Mr. Ruben and Equal Justice America. I assure you, when I say that I am here because of you, it is not hyperbole.

Best regards,

Tristan Orozco
Class of 2016
Loyola Law School – Los Angeles



August 27, 2014

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

Melissa Tyner
(213) 891-3223
mtyner@innercitylaw.org

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing with my evaluation of Tristan Orozco's EJA sponsored summer clerkship with Inner City Law Center in the Homeless Veterans Project.

Tristan worked at our organization full time for eight weeks. During that time he advocated on behalf of homeless veterans and other vulnerable populations through a combination of direct services and community outreach. Tristan has a wide range of experience and demonstrated commitment to serving low-income communities, including veterans, making him an asset to ICLC.

Tristan demonstrated many strengths over the duration of his clerkship, including: selecting meritorious cases; collaborating and strategizing with team members within the organization; interacting with clients who come from different backgrounds and cultures and have experienced substantial trauma, and confidently managing his own cases.

Tristan's work required extensive research, writing, and editing of legal documents of all kinds on a variety of legal issues including, public records requests and responses, communications to clients, requests to agencies, and applications for government benefits. Tristan's writing showed strength well beyond his years in legal practice. His work directly contributed to ending homelessness for many veterans in our community.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions about Tristan's excellent work with our organization. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Melissa Tyner,
Senior Staff Attorney

Mr. XXXX, SSN: XXX-XX-XXXX

October 31, 2012

Page 2