

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

Mr. Ruben,

Because of the funding from your organization, I had the opportunity to work with the Housing Justice Project in Kent, Washington. The Housing Justice Project is a non-profit organization under the King County Bar Association providing eviction defense to low-income individuals. Most of the work I engaged in was with their drop-in clinic, whereby individuals going through eviction proceedings come to us for limited representation. Because of this, I was able to interact with around 100 individuals, either giving them limited advice through my Rule 9 license, assisting in writing answers to eviction complaints, and even presenting before a commissioner in Superior Court. Though most of our clients were drop-in, my supervising attorney did have a number of clients in ongoing representation. Working with a family of these clients was the most impactful experience I had all summer.

I will call this family the Smiths. The Smiths were a large extended family of very limited means. Living in one rental home were two parents, their three adult children and each of those children's significant others, as well as at least three grandchildren. Mr. Smith and his son were the only breadwinners in the household. Mrs. Smith and the other children were out of work either because of being laid off, child care, or because of physical disability. Earlier this year, the Smiths received a notice on their door indicating that their home had been foreclosed upon. Apparently the Smiths' landlord had fallen behind on mortgage payments and the home was in the process of repossession by the bank. The Smiths did not know what to do; they panicked and stopped paying their rent. That was when they received an eviction notice and when their landlord filed official eviction proceedings with the court.

It was at this point that the Smiths came to the Housing Justice Project for help. By comparing the dates on the eviction proceedings, we discovered that, by the time the claim would actually reach court, the landlord would no longer own the home. That is, the landlord was trying to evict tenants from a residence that he did not possess. We notified the landlord's attorney, but to no avail. We filed multiple responses to the landlord's multiple complaints, but the landlord refused to drop the case. Through all this, the landlord harassed the Smiths, posted notes to their door and continually tried to enter the home even though the home was by then owned by the bank. Finally, after over a month of this, the hearing arrived and I, with my Rule 9 supervising attorney, represented the Smiths in court. We argued that the landlord could not evict somebody from a building he doesn't own. The court agreed, and we were able to garner over \$1,000.00 in attorney's fees.

While all this was going on, I was also able to engage in negotiations with the bank to figure out a move-out date for the Smiths. By then, they realized they would have to leave their home. The bank did not want to engage them in a new lease. They just needed additional time to organize their affairs and find a house large enough for their family. I was able to help them do this. I negotiated a “cash for keys” arrangement, in which the bank pays the tenant a fee in exchange for a move-out earlier than the statutorily guaranteed 60-days after change of possession. In exchange for moving out in 30 days, the bank agreed to pay the Smiths several thousand dollars.

Representing the Smiths was eye opening. I was able to help them get this eviction behind them and gain enough money to find a new home, but I wasn’t able to help them with the stress of going through an eviction. I wasn’t able to help them avoid their landlord’s harassments. I wasn’t able to help them pay their bills during this ordeal. And yet, they thanked me every time they came to our office. Not only for the legal advice, but for being there in their darkest hour. The thing they taught me was how support in the legal world, a world that the Smiths did not understand, translates to support in other parts of life. The mere fact of not having to think about eviction made life a little bit better.

The reason I found this internship so rewarding was because it showed me, on a ground level, how the law can help people. The law is a convoluted and intimidating place for people who don’t understand it. Even more, for low income people especially, it can be harmful. Many of the clients I dealt with were skeptical because they had already interacted with the proverbial “system.” I helped them begin to change that perspective. More importantly, I discovered how the law is able to help those who need it the most.

Thank you sincerely for your support this summer. I truly could not have had this experience without it.

Michael Gerbec
University of Washington School of Law
Expected Graduation 2016



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October 15, 2015

Dan Ruben
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RE: Michael Gerbec's Summer Internship

Dear Dan:

Michael Gerbec was an intern this summer at the Housing Justice Project which is a project of the King County Bar Association. We are a court-based eviction defense clinic located in Kent and Seattle, Washington. We have a small staff of five but hundreds of volunteer attorneys and paralegals who assist tenants each day. I was Michael's primary supervisor this summer.

Michael was a strong intern and we appreciate that the funding you provided enabled him to work with us this summer. He learned the day-to-day operations of the clinic and was enormously helpful in keeping us running smoothly. He conducted intakes with new clients, opened and closed cases and assisted with filing. In addition he worked on several exciting projects and cases this summer, including:

1. Updating written materials in our clinics, specifically our mobile home materials.
2. Representing several tenants facing eviction in court.
 - a. In one instance he appeared in court on behalf of the tenant on four occasions obtaining three dismissals and one reasonable accommodation which allowed her to obtain extra time to secure new housing.
 - b. In another instance he negotiated an unprecedented \$8000 cash-for-keys deal as well as obtained an \$1100 attorney's fees judgement and a dismissal.
 - c. On two occasions he successfully represented tenants in court to stay the execution of a writ of restitution.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to work with Michael. Should you have any questions regarding his internship with us please contact me at (206) 267-7027 or jessical@kcba.org.

Sincerely,

Jessica Todd Long, Staff Attorney
Housing Justice Project