

August 22, 2013

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

Mr. Ruben:

Thank you and Equal Justice America for sponsoring my summer internship with Philadelphia Legal Assistance. In my position, I helped clients with unemployment compensation legal issues. My main tasks included advising clients on how to interpret agency decisions, on how to appeal a decision against them, on how to self-represent at an administrative hearing, or I would represent the client at the hearing. I was called upon to interpret statutes and case law relating to unemployment compensation. During my summer, I was able to help over fifty clients with unemployment compensation questions, and was able to personally represent many of them in administrative hearings.

It was very rewarding to be able to assist clients, especially considering many times we would be facing experienced attorneys and management from the employer. If the client did not have representation from Philadelphia Legal Assistance, he or she would have been left completely unprepared and outmatched by the employer. Clients were always very appreciative, and in most cases, we were able to get the client the benefits he or she deserved.

It was very hard to decide which client interactions I should write about, as I had many rewarding experiences. One of my first clients was a single woman who had to quit her job because she was facing stress disorders brought on by negative interactions with her manager. Unemployment compensation law in Pennsylvania has a presumption against quitting, and you cannot get benefits unless you quit for good cause and have tried all avenues to preserve your employment. The service center had reviewed her case and denied her benefits. She filed an appeal and I met with her and agreed to take her case.

When I first met the client, she was very frazzled as she had never experienced unemployment compensation and had been employed steadily throughout her life. Now, she was facing bills and did not have the necessary funds to pay them. It was a first for her and she was very scared. On top of it, she was having emotional issues because of the stress from the manager and now the stress of the job loss. She had tons of documentation, but did not know what was important her case.

I sat with the client and went through roughly one hundred documents, finding the ones relevant to helping her prove her case. I listened to her story; she was emotional so it took me a long time to coax out all of the relevant details. I then patiently explained the law to her. At the hearing, I represented her and was able to question her in such a way that she would not get

overwhelmed and still get all of the relevant information to the referee. Through my questioning, she was able to establish that she did have good cause and that she did exhaust all avenues before quitting her position. She was awarded benefits, and thanked me so much for all of my hard work with her.

Another client of mine was fired from his position as a custodian for something that he did not do. He was very upset and felt that his image was crushed at no fault of his own. Further, he had a fiancé and a small child to provide for. After hearing the client's story and reading the employer's documentation, I realized that he was really set up to be the scape goat because they were unable to determine which employee was truly at fault. At the hearing, I was able to question the employer's manager and human resources representative and find holes in their story. In addition, I objected to inadmissible hearsay and was able to keep it out of the record. As the employer was unable to prove that the client had committed willful misconduct (the legal standard required) he was awarded benefits. He was extremely thankful for my helping him at the hearing, and even more so once he was awarded benefits.

Thank you again for helping fund me as I worked this summer at Philadelphia Legal Assistance in the Unemployment Compensation group. I really enjoyed my experience and feel as though I truly helped the needy in Philadelphia.

Best Regards,

Christy Bergstresser  
Drexel University  
Earle Mack School of Law  
Class of 2014



# PHILADELPHIA LEGAL ASSISTANCE

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August 26, 2013

Mr. Dan Reuben  
Equal Justice America  
c/o [Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org](mailto:Katie@equaljusticeamerica.org)

Re: Christy Bergstresser  
Summer internship

Dear Mr. Reuben:

I had the pleasure of supervising Christy in her summer internship this year at Philadelphia Legal Assistance. I first worked with her early this year as she began the second semester at the Earle Mack School of Law at Drexel University. Last fall, a group of students organized a student project to represent low income clients with claims for unemployment compensation in Philadelphia. The students worked at our office representing clients who had sought help in their administrative hearings. Christy joined the project for the second semester and enjoyed the work so much that she applied for an internship to continue her work in the summer.

In Pennsylvania, lay persons are permitted to represent claimants in the administrative hearings scheduled when appeals are filed from an initial denial of benefits. After some training, the students begin interviewing clients to obtain the essential facts of the claim and reviewing administrative files at the office of the referees. After observing several hearings, and working with our paralegal specialist and me, the students begin representing their clients at hearings. These hearings are informal, but follow the basic format of a trial, with direct, cross, introduction of documents and closing statements. Basic evidentiary issues, including the hearsay rule and some of its exceptions also come up, with opportunities to object.

Christy is on the law review at school and very quickly picked up the necessary case law and regulations needed to analyze claims and advise clients. She had a very good relationship with her clients, which meant that they felt comfortable with her and that she was able to obtain the information needed for the case. As in any litigation, surprises occurred at hearings, but she had the mental agility needed to change her tactics as needed. She was also very conscientious, with excellent work habits.

By the time she started her summer internship, she was an experienced veteran. In addition to doing high quality work in her cases, she was also able to act as a mentor to the other summer intern working in this area. Our paralegal and I had to much less supervision this

summer since Christy needed little and the other intern enjoyed working closely with an experienced colleague. They enjoyed working together so much that they went to each other's hearings all summer, even though the other student did not need Christy along after a while, and Christy did not need anyone accompanying her. The two students just enjoyed analyzing the cases together and going over the hearings afterwards.

It is clear to me that most of the success of our internship program in unemployment compensation can be attributed to Christy. I was extremely impressed by her and really enjoyed working with her. Your support of her work here is greatly appreciated.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Hill", written over the typed name.

DAVID L. HILL  
Supervising Attorney

cc: Christy Bergstreser