

August 9, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you so much for supporting my work this summer at the Pennsylvania Health Law Project (PHLP). I have learned an immense amount about Medicaid and how its administration affects low-income Pennsylvanians. Working with PHLP has allowed me to hone my skills in the areas of direct client work and statutory interpretation, while strengthening my commitment to pursuing a career in public interest health law.

At PHLP, I performed substantive work including direct client counseling, health policy research, and drafting fact sheets for Medicaid consumers. I was happily surprised to find that I would be doing actual legal work that would positively affect the lives of Pennsylvanians in need.

Every week I was assigned one shift answering calls to PHLP's Helpline. Medicaid consumers call the Helpline for help with benefits issues including Medicaid denials and terminations, accessing services, and Medicaid enrollment. With the help of a PHLP staff member, I would return consumer's calls and help them with their Medicaid issues. Determining eligibility for the various Medicaid programs offered by the state is very complicated, and I would often determine which programs a caller was eligible for and help them with the application process. Additionally, I called County Assistance Offices on behalf of clients who had their Medicaid terminated, often without notice, or who were unable to access specific services. Mid-summer, many County Assistance Offices implemented new computer systems that were accidentally terminating Medicaid coverage. These new computer systems also made it impossible for caseworkers to turn coverage back on. On one case, I worked closely with an ombudsman to restart coverage for a client with severe medical problems. Another case involved getting coverage of a client's chemotherapy medication by working with the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) and the client's chemotherapy provider. Working with clients made it clear to me how convoluted the Medicaid system is and how difficult it can be for consumers (and advocates) to understand. Most callers to the Helpline were sick and uninsured, and I appreciated the opportunity to help these callers in need get the health care they deserved.

Another large part of my PHLP fellowship was evaluating the legality of proposed changes to Medicaid procedures and regulations, as well as interpreting existing legislation. This involved the reading of federal and state Medicaid statutes as well as recently enacted bills and proposed changes outlined in operations memorandums and the budget. I drafted a memo evaluating the temporal limitation on reduced regulatory requirements for the Department of Public Welfare during fiscal year 2011—2012. I also evaluated the effect of a Social Security Administration disability evaluation on subsequent applications to Pennsylvania Medicaid programs. These assignments and others like it forced me to hone the statutory interpretation skills I learned through a Legislation class I took in the Spring of my 1L year.

One particularly insightful experience involved traveling to Harrisburg, where I sat in on a meeting of the Medicaid Assistance Advisory Committee (MAAC). The MAAC is composed of consumers, advocates, providers, managed care organizations (MCOs), medical centers, and members of the Department of Public Welfare. Sitting in on the MAAC meeting provided a view into how medical coverage affects every single component of the health care system. The consumers present at the meeting were well informed, both through personal experience and interaction with people in their communities. It was great to see that the opinions and suggestions of the consumers were not ignored by the providers and MCO representatives present.

My summer at PHLP was an extremely valuable experience. I have learned so much about Medicaid, the legislative process, and working with clients. Working with PHLP has confirmed my commitment to a career in health law serving low-income populations. I want to express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for the support it gives to students doing meaningful work at public interest organizations.

Sincerely,
Justine Haimi
University of Pennsylvania Law School, Class of 2014