

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for the opportunity to work with the Juvenile and Special Education clinic at the University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. I enjoyed the work tremendously and refined a number of legal skills.

During the summer I helped ten families or adult students affirm their educational rights. However, one case in particular stands out. The case involved a young 12 year old student who was denied a free and appropriate education by the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) his entire life. This student speaks with an obvious lisp and requires speech and language services. The student has had behavioral problems since kindergarten and this past year he was repeatedly suspended. He has also been involved in the juvenile system. This year the student failed a number of classes. His mother began requesting evaluations in September 2013. DCPS has 120 days to evaluate a student after initial referral. DCPS had been denying the student any or all special education services, and specifically has refused to provide a speech evaluation for two years. DCPS also failed in their "child find" obligation, which is an affirmative responsibility of local school districts to locate and evaluate student in all areas of suspected disabilities. It was not until the Legal Clinic's involvement that DCPS finally evaluated the student.

During the summer, I made numerous written requests for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) for speech and language and comprehensive psychological evaluations for the student. I was successful in getting an IEE for speech and a comprehensive psychological IEE, to see if there were other educational needs that have not been met. I represented mom at an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting and we went over the evaluations. As a result of the evaluations, the student was found eligible for special educational services, and as a student with a learning disability in reading writing and math. The IEEs also raised a number of other possible diagnoses that must be investigated. The student is currently receiving 10 hours a week special education service and four hours of behavioral support service.

DCPS did not agree with the findings of the speech and language evaluation, and this issue must be settled in a due process hearing. As a result, I have filed a due process complaint for the student because of the delay of service, the failure to meet the child find obligation and the failure to evaluate after the mother's multiple requests. After the Clinic filed the due process complaint, we entered into negotiations to try and settle the issue. DCPS offered 100 hours of compensatory service. Mom does not believe this is enough to meet the student needs and therefore, at mom's request, we will continue to pursue the due process complaint. The hearing is scheduled for October.

This student, with the right supports, can succeed academically. Helping the family get the needed special education services this summer has been very rewarding. The fellowship also gave me an unbelievable opportunity to continue with the clinic in my chosen field. Thank you for this opportunity.

Nermin Abdelwahab
nerminaw@gmail.com
Juris Doctorate Candidate, 2016
University of the District of Columbia
David A. Clarke School of Law