

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 Boundary Rd # 204B
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I spent my summer working in the Public Benefits Unit at Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA). At PLA, I spent most of my time representing over a dozen clients in their claims for unemployment compensation benefits. After an initial determination of benefits issued by the State parties can appeal a decision, which results in a hearing in front of a referee where parties have the right to present testimony and cross-examine the other party. One does not have to be an attorney to represent clients in these hearings, so as a 1L I was able to serve as the non-legal advocate for claimants seeking benefits.

Each of the cases I worked on gave me the opportunity to see the full life cycle of litigation in a condensed period. I handled the initial interview, where I listened to the client's story, identified legal issues, and started to prepare my clients for examination and cross-examination. In preparation for hearings, I devised a theory of the case, conducted legal research, did independent factual research, subpoenaed records, and drafted questions for witnesses. Finally, I acted as the client's representative in the hearing, conducting examination and cross-examination in adherence with the rules of evidence, and presented my client's case to the referee.

The quick timeline of these cases was often challenging, I worked with multiple clients at various stages of their claim for benefits all at once. On the busiest of days, I would have a hearing in the morning, a meeting with a new client in the afternoon, and would need to prepare for a hearing later in the week. But this challenge was manageable, the more I interacted with clients and the more I became familiar with the law, the easier it was to jump between competing projects and still provide quality representation.

The biggest challenge for me came from the very nature of legal aid work, providing support to low-income clients, many of whom are suffering from trauma. One of my priorities for my 1L summer was to have a job where I could improve the skills that I will use as a lawyer while also serving the community in Philadelphia, the city that I hope to call home after graduation. At PLA, I had the privilege of getting to know over a dozen Philadelphians who, through no fault of their own, had fallen on hard times. These wonderful people didn't just come to PLA with a claim for unemployment. For many of them there were causes, deeply rooted in poverty, that impacted their employment and every other facet of life. I worked with a man who was worried he was going to lose his home because a medical condition had impacted his ability to work. I met a woman who in the span of a year was diagnosed with HIV, lost her job, and teetered on the brink of homelessness. As an advocate, I learned how to identify these problems and provide my clients the legal services that they deserved.

As many internships do, my work at PLA taught me new areas of law, and helped improve my legal research and writing. But what was most valuable was the hands-on experience I gained representing clients. The experience of managing the emotional toll of anti-poverty work helped me grow as an advocate who cares about providing high-quality service for

clients. Part of that is knowing the impact that your work has on you personally, whether it be the effects of a burdensome workload or a traumatizing client story, and adjusting to make sure the client experience doesn't suffer. Representing clients also taught me how to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds than me, an essential skill that all lawyers should have.

One of the most challenging cases that I worked on was a claim for benefits from a person who had quit their job because of ongoing harassment in the workplace. I met this client twice before the hearing in front of a referee, and saw the emotional toll that working in a toxic environment had taken on them. At the hearing, the referee attacked the client's story, accused them of exaggerating the story, and shifted the burden of handling this toxic situation from the employer to the employee. Unsurprisingly, we received a decision in the mail within a week finding the client's testimony to not be credible, and finding them ineligible for benefits. Talking to my client about whether to appeal this decision was one of the hardest conversations I had this summer. I had to provide emotional support for a client whose veracity was challenged by a person in power and try to separate my own frustrations with what I viewed as an unfair legal opinion from the referee to analyze the potential success of an appeal. Ultimately, the client and I decided that I would write a brief in support of an appeal after my time at PLA was over. After a month of waiting, the Board of Review granted my client benefits and specifically refuted the referee's finding on credibility. My client not only gained the financial support that she was legally entitled to, but she regained a sense of personal dignity that had been unfairly taken from her.

I know that for years to come I will remember the people I worked with and their stories, and I will learn from the wins and the losses to become a better advocate. Thank you for your support of my internship this summer, the experience would not have been possible without the generosity of your organization and its supporters.

Sincerely,

Bradie Williams
University of Pennsylvania Law School
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2019



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Dear Dan Ruben,

I am pleased to inform you of Bradie Williams' outstanding work as a summer intern for Philadelphia Legal Assistance. Mr. Williams worked as an intern in our Public Benefits Unit during the summer of 2017. Throughout the course of his work, he assisted the Unit attorneys in the performance of legal research, writing, and investigation, in addition to handling his own substantial client caseload. Philadelphia Legal Assistance ("PLA") is the federally funded civil legal aid provider for Philadelphia's indigent community, providing high volume, high quality legal services including community education, advice, referral, *pro se* assistance, representation at administrative hearings and at all levels of state and federal courts in areas of basic human needs: family safety, health, income maintenance and home preservation. Mr. Williams' diligent and thoughtful work helped his clients retain stability during times of major life crisis.

As the staff attorney in charge of all unemployment compensation cases, I assigned Mr. Williams a wide variety of cases and challenging legal tasks. I can confidently say he handled each one with a level of maturity and sophistication well beyond his years. During his summer at PLA, Mr. Williams' primary responsibility was to represent low-wage workers in unemployment compensation cases. These cases typically involved two stages: 1) administrative hearings; and 2) written appeals to an agency review board. In advance of the administrative hearings, Mr. Williams had to investigate cases, synthesize facts, craft legal strategy, and prepare his clients for court. His work involved distinguishing the relevant, and often dispositive, facts of a client's separation from his job from what was often a watershed of employment experiences. In the hearings, Mr. Williams sharpened his oral advocacy skills, learning how to direct clients and cross-examine numerous employer witnesses, often with little notice of who would be testifying on behalf of the employer. As part of his training, Ms. Cullen learned the basics of the Rules of Evidence and then used them in hearings to present, and protect, his clients' cases in an effective manner. Throughout the summer Mr. Williams displayed a special kindness and sincerity that helped him earn the trust of his clients and the respect and admiration of his colleagues.

Mr. Williams drafted and filed several appeals to the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review during his summer internship. These briefs required the development of a persuasive narrative paired with a keen analytical approach that could catch the attention of an overloaded agency review board. Mr. Williams' legal work product was very well-written and organized. Throughout

the summer he improved his ability to clearly and concisely construct an argument, both in conversation with supervisors and in appeal briefs. As a result of one of his excellent briefs, the agency review board overturned the hearing officer and granted benefits to Mr. Williams' client. In addition to researching and writing his own briefs, Mr. Williams was also assigned several research memos to assist with my state appellate litigation. Mr. Williams demonstrated a quick understanding of the legal questions presented and provided in-depth, and at times innovative, research memos. During this research, Mr. Williams respectfully engaged in legal strategy conversations with supervisors. Mr. Williams completed his work in a timely and effective manner. Throughout his involvement with these matters and others, Mr. Williams was self-motivated, demonstrated strong communications skills, and showed an impressive developing legal acumen.

Thank you for your providing financial assistance to Mr. Williams that allowed him to pursue this opportunity with PLA. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me at (215) 981-3889.

Respectfully,

/s/ Julia Simon-Mishel

Julia Simon-Mishel
Staff Attorney