



COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
OF PHILADELPHIA

August 5, 2013

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

Re: Equal Justice Fellowship Wrap-up

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My Equal Justice Fellowship with Community Legal Services of Philadelphia has been an incredibly educational and life-giving experience. At Community Legal Services, I work primarily in the area of Public Housing. This unit allows me ample client interaction. Twice a week, I interview clients with a wide array of public housing issues during intakes over the phone and in person. The other three days of the week, I worked under the supervision of a fantastic staff attorney, Rasheedah Phillips, to assist these clients in the best way possible.

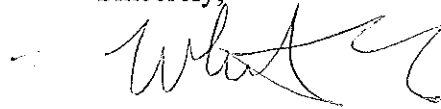
Some clients come to the office with very poor living conditions and serious maintenance issues that required pushing back against the housing authority to respond. Others involved private landlords that benefit from subsidies through the housing authority, taking advantage of their tenants in various ways personally and financially. And others are on the brink of homelessness and facing eviction. I worked to help prevent evictions and homelessness which included attending administrative hearings and municipal court. And although the vast majority of my work was direct legal service, I also had the opportunity to engage in research and policy discussions surrounding new procedures enacted by the Philadelphia Housing Authority. My primary focus in these matters also reflected a serious problem among many of my clients – Domestic Violence. I helped research ways to make transfers quicker and promote the safety of public housing tenants who are the victims of domestic violence.

I had a client come to my office because her ex-husband abused her over many years. After winding up in the hospital as a result of the abuse, the client sought a restraining order. However, over the past year, the restraining order has been violated from her abuser several times. The abuser, knowing where she lived, broke into her house on several occasions and continued to abuse her. She was in desperate need of a transfer and was facing the problem of being charged for damages to the door after repeated break-ins by her abuser. I helped facilitate an emergency transfer for her and linked her with a women's abuse shelter where she could stay

as the transfer was processed. I also explained that, under VAWA, she is not responsible for the physical damages her abuser made to her property.

This is just one of the many clients that I had the opportunity to interact with. I enjoyed the moments when I was able to assist in stopping an eviction or transferring a client in poor conditions or even just insure that a house be properly inspected and maintained. However, I also learned the importance of advocacy when there is nothing you can do legally. Even when legal options are exhausted, you can be an advocate for your client by listening and doing your best to understand their struggles. That is where the real value came from my work with CLS. I am very grateful that EJA provided me with funding that allowed me to have this opportunity. I was always convinced I would enter a public interest career post graduation, but this has continued to enrich my experience and solidify my decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Whitney Young", written in a cursive style.

Whitney Young
Villanova Law School
Class of 2014



August 23, 2013

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

RE: Summer 2013 EJA Fellow Whitney Young, Hosted by Community Legal Services

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Rasheedah Phillips and I am an attorney in the Housing unit at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS). I had the pleasure of supervising legal intern Whitney Young during her 2013 summer internship here at CLS, where she interned in the Public Housing unit.

The Public Housing unit at CLS assists low-income tenants living in public and subsidized housing, including PHA public housing, Section 8 voucher, Section 8 project-based, HUD, private public housing, and Tax Credit housing in the City of Philadelphia. Our assistance includes representation in evictions, termination from the Section 8 program, disability accommodations, admissions advice, repair problems, domestic violence and sexual assault-related housing issues, and other Issues involving public and subsidized housing.

During the internship, after an initial week-long training (and periodic trainings throughout the summer), Whitney jumped right into work on a multitude of tasks. She was given a small caseload of pre-existing clients that she had to maintain throughout the summer, all of which presented different legal issues that she had to tackle. Whitney also assisted in interviewing new clients on intake days, assessing income eligibility, and doing comprehensive issue-spotting.

Throughout the summer, Whitney maintained an active caseload of about 20 clients, where she was tasked with providing advice, doing research on particular issues, and helping clients to prepare for court. Whitney dealt with issues ranging from disability accommodations to neighbor disputes to major repair issues. Over the course of the summer, Whitney gained skills in issue spotting, which had a positive and noticeable impact upon her casework. Much of her skills, however, were located in her ability to connect with clients and gain rapport.

Many of our clients are also domestic violence survivors in need of emergency transfers into safe housing. Whitney took on several of these clients, conducting intake interviews, providing resources and referrals to domestic violence agencies, and helping them to complete

emergency transfer forms. Dealing with survivors requires compassion and the ability to be proactive and move quickly in order to help keep clients safe. Whitney was able to handle these clients with the sensitivity and diligence necessary to move them into safer circumstances.

Aside from direct client work, Whitney was able to get involved in some policy advocacy. This summer, the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA) revised two comprehensive policy manuals, which our unit was tasked with providing comments on. Whitney attended several of the advocacy meetings for the revisions, and interacted with tenant advocacy groups and PHA staff to discuss policy changes. The Housing unit also meets regularly with PHA to advocate for inclusion of a domestic violence transfer policy. Whitney attended these meetings, and also updated self-help materials to include new provisions of the reauthorized Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). These materials are vital to our domestic violence and sexual assault survivor clients with housing issues related to domestic violence.

I have only highlighted a percentage of Whitney's contribution. She was truly a benefit to the Public Housing unit this summer, and I believe that she will be an asset to the public interest community in the near future.

If you have any additional questions, or would like additional details regarding Whitney's work at CLS, please feel free to contact me at (215) 981-3774, or via email at rphillips@clsphila.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rasheedah Phillips", written in a cursive style.

Rasheedah Phillips
Staff Attorney