

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer I was a legal intern at the New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”), a legal non-profit organization that provides free legal services to low-income New Yorkers across the various boroughs and Long Island. My experience was certainly a rewarding one. In large part, I supported the Special Education unit, whose mission was to ensure that the Department of Education was held to their legal obligation to provide each student with a free and public education in New York. As I found out, most of our clients were each uniquely disabled and were unable to learn in the state school system to which they were placed. Over the course of the summer, I helped represent a total of four clients. In my capacity as a legal intern, my main responsibility was to do legal research and draft impartial hearing requests (complaints that we filed against the Department of Education). In conducting these requests, I would often have to do client intake, speaking to the child’s guardian to understand how the child’s needs weren’t being met. In addition, the legal research I did concerned the ambiguity and nuanced rules of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Because this law is rather new, there are many questions to be answered.

The most impactful part of my internship at NYLAG was working with my first client, whom I will refer to as John. John is an autistic child who lives in an impoverished area of the Bronx with his mother and grandmother. His mother works three jobs to support him and is only 26 years old. She does not have any time to help him with his school, which he has immense trouble keeping up with. Currently in 5th grade, John is still learning at a 1st grade level. However, the Department of Education is claiming that he has made minor gains. In reality, the (low) standards the school system has in place, is the main reason why he keeps advancing from grade-to-grade.

Although I have never met Nicholas, I was fortunate enough to meet his mother. I conducted her first intake meeting, attended every single administrative hearing with her, and spoke to her countless times over the phone. This all began in my first week, and I was both excited and surprised to have received so much responsibility right away. Although my supervisor lawyered the case, I like to think my client-contact with her contributed to this case.

Looking back, I think that working on this case redeemed some of my pre-conceived notions about how the legal system worked. Upon working on this case, I was told by my supervisor that not only do we often lose to the Department of Education, but also the process is generally drawn out to where it tremendously inconveniences our client. In this particular

instance, we were able to file the case and get a positive judgment within four weeks. I've found that to a certain extent, law school has left me jaded to a certain extent as to how the law operates, however this gave me a little more hope for our system. It was tremendous to see a young boy, one who born with the odds against him, prevail against the Government and have the opportunity to learn in a classroom that he could actually make progress in. For me, this was such a gratifying experience and I would do it all over again. I want to thank you for giving me this fellowship to lessen the burden of working for this non-profit. It was truly a great first step in my legal career.

Sincerely,

Alex Seidenberg  
George Washington University