

BRENT ELIASON

August 31, 2012

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben:

My summer Fellowship was a great experience. I enjoyed helping people in need, and I gained practical legal experience in the process of serving my clients. I completed the intake for at least twenty new clients. I researched, wrote, and submitted written arguments to the Michigan Compensation Appellate Commission, and briefs to Michigan state circuit courts. Most memorable are the times I got to represent my clients at administrative hearings and oral arguments.

I represented two of my clients at administrative hearings and won both cases. Client #1 was a medical technician who lost his job after taking a sick day. He was denied unemployment benefits on the grounds that he was unable to work, but he was able to go back to work the next day. After questioning him at the hearing and submitted medical documentation proving his ability to work, the judge issued a ruling making the client once again eligible for unemployment benefits. Client #2 was a daycare worker who was denied unemployment benefits after her employer claimed that she quit, when in fact she was fired. After questioning the client and her employers, the case could have been decided based only on credibility. However, in addition to questioning I also submitted evidence showing communication between my client and the human resources manager for the company showing that she was in fact fired, and she did not quit.

Taking advantage of Michigan's student attorney law, I also presented an oral argument at the Wayne County Circuit Court for one of my clients. My client did not receive a fair administrative hearing because he was not given notice of the issues to be decided, nor was he informed that he could have an advocate represent him at the hearing. The judge ruled from the bench that the case be remanded for a fair hearing. The case was an important reinforcement of precedent requiring that claimants be given a fair hearing when their eligibility for unemployment benefits is being determined.

The longest part of client intake was listening to their stories. The sequence of events was critical in many of the cases. Having a coherent story was also important in presenting and winning cases. Listening to clients' stories was also helpful to the clients themselves often as a form of catharsis. Several people told me that they had been trying to tell their story for months and that no one would listen to them. Before offering any legal advice or services, they were grateful just to be able to talk to someone about their troubles.

I had a great experience. Thank you for your support, which made my experience possible.

Sincerely,

Brent Eliason
University of Michigan Law School
Class of 2014