

August 31, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I write to express my appreciation for Equal Justice America's grant to support my work this summer. I am a second-year law student at the Columbia Law School, and I had the privilege to work at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia in the Energy Unit.

My work in the Energy Unit provided opportunities to work directly with clients and to help the unit in its work to make energy and water more affordable for low-income Philadelphians. On the direct service side, my greatest accomplishments were working with my clients to prevent two shut-offs, including one that would have led to an eviction.

One of the clients, a former government employee currently unable to work due primarily to mental illness, narrowly avoided having her water shut off. While living without water is challenging for anyone, it would have been especially destabilizing for her son, who has an Autism Spectrum Disorder. My client had tried several times before to enroll in the low-income program that the Water Department provides, but her application had never been processed correctly. With my supervisor's help, we were able to convince the Water Department to stay termination until we could file another application. When the client, her son, and I went together, with paperwork we had prepared in advance, the Water Department employee was helpful and considerate. The client applied for the program and soon applied for the Philadelphia Water Department's groundbreaking affordability program, TAP. The client, who was an enthusiastic and helpful partner throughout the process, paid our help forward by testifying at a hearing concerning potential cuts to LIHEAP, which she said would be disastrous for special needs families like her own.

I also worked on several research memos to evaluate cases for potential litigation and to support the Energy Unit in preparing comments for rulemaking. I especially enjoyed these projects after taking Administrative Law as my 1L elective and after spending two years working on cases involving the Social Security Administration. I learned a great deal this summer and appreciate Equal Justice America's support.

Sincerely,

Ben Bennett
Columbia Law School Class of 2019