

August 31, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a second-year student at Columbia Law School writing to express my sincere gratitude for Equal Justice America's additional funding for my 2017 summer internship with the New York Legal Assistance Group's LegalHealth Unit. Over the summer, I learned an immense amount about public interest legal work and grew in my legal writing and research skills.

LegalHealth provides direct civil legal services to low-income individuals with serious health problems. LegalHealth attorneys have established legal clinics in hospitals and medical facilities throughout New York City, and they visit these clinics once or twice a week to meet with low-income patients whose physicians or social workers have referred them to the clinic.

As a summer intern, I shadowed an attorney at clinic every week, and one week, I covered the clinic on my own. It was a fantastic learning experience, as I was able to understand how the issue-spotting skills I gained in law school could be put to use in the real world. I interviewed about five patients who had a variety of legal issues, including a woman whose boss was harassing her because he knew that she did not have immigration status in the U.S., an elderly couple that needed additional Medicare funding for home health care, and a cancer patient who sought advice on disability benefits as he was preparing to quit his job. Even though as a summer intern I was unable to provide legal advice, I collected the relevant information and communicated to the patients that an attorney would be in touch soon regarding their case. Still, the patients were so grateful to even have someone to confide in and listen to their troubles.

One of my most significant experiences was meeting with a client who had her Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments cancelled after she received a settlement from a previous litigation matter where a piece of tile fell on her head. The Social Security Administration had mistaken the settlement as an increase in her resource and income levels that made her no longer eligible for SSI payments. While the settlement did make her ineligible for a few months, she would soon need her benefits reinstated after she spent that amount down. I wrote an advocacy letter on her behalf explaining how the Social Security Administration had erroneously classified her income as a raise in her resources by the wrong amount, and how she would need her SSI payments reinstated after the settlement amount had been spent. I collected receipts of her spending and tabulated the amounts spent for evidence, and in the process, I met with her several times to gather more receipts and ask questions where it was unclear how much she had spent. At the end of the summer, she came back into the clinic with a new legal issue, but her SSI payments had been reinstated. It was a rewarding experience to know that because of the letter I wrote explaining the situation, she was able to get her needed benefits once again.

I had a lot of client interaction during my summer internship, and I enjoyed every moment. I was able to help a widow file for a work permit renewal, and I interviewed a cancer patient who

was hoping to gain asylum in the U.S. following persecution in Jordan. I was also able to serve as a witness to several wills and power of attorney forms, and the clients were always so thankful that we were able to come to their home or hospital room and provide these important services at the place that was most convenient for them. I realized that even small gestures, such as conducting a home visit or going with the client to a hearing or an administrative office to do a singular task, make a huge difference.

Throughout my internship, it was rewarding to see how the medical-legal partnerships created through LegalHealth can help those who need it the most, when they are most vulnerable. I am very appreciative for the additional funding through Equal Justice America.

Sincerely,

Erica Wu
Columbia Law School
Class of 2019