

August 31, 2017

Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to express my most sincere gratitude to Equal Justice America (EJA) for granting me a Summer 2017 Fellowship. Due to the Fellowship's generosity, I was able to spend the summer after my first year of law school working at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). During my placement with NYLAG's Employment Law Unit, I gained invaluable insight into the provision of civil legal services for low income New Yorkers and was able to work with NYLAG's diverse client base. Through my work with NYLAG's attorneys and clients, I developed skills that have prepared me for the upcoming school year and will make me a better attorney.

Over the summer, I assisted NYLAG's employment lawyers in serving clients with issues regarding discrimination, retaliation, unemployment insurance, and family and medical leave. My day-to-day work was varied and interesting; it included both conducting intake interviews for potential clients and assisting attorneys with projects for already-existing clients—such as legal research and drafting demand letters, administrative charges, and mediation statements.

Through the intake process, I learned how to ask the questions needed to determine the validity of potential legal claims. Perhaps more importantly, I learned how to conduct this sort of conversation while also expressing an appropriate level of empathy for the callers. The issues discussed during intake were not easy to talk about, and I appreciated that NYLAG as an institution valued clients to a level where it was understandable (and even expected) that intake calls would consist of more than just collecting the necessary information.

When callers had a promising case, I would invite the individual to NYLAG's office for a follow-up meeting with an attorney. Attending these meetings was one of the most enriching parts of my summer. It truly opened my eyes to see how the law—as a seemingly esoteric

concept—could have a real impact on my fellow New Yorkers. I also enjoyed the challenge that came after these meetings: doing research to figure out which exact laws could provide the best protection for the client and how to go about securing the desired relief.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of my summer internship was representing a client at hearing in front of an administrative law judge (ALJ) regarding the client's denial of unemployment insurance. I first met with the client at NYLAG to discuss the set-up of the hearing and the kind of questions she could expect the ALJ to ask her. On the day of the hearing, I ensured that her story was fully told and asked questions of her employers to point out the inconsistencies in their rationale. While we are still awaiting the ALJ's decision, I am inspired by the client's gratitude for the services I was able to provide. I saw such value in the experience that I plan to help Columbia Law School get involved with the Unemployment Action Center, a non-profit that provides free legal services for New Yorkers at their unemployment hearings and will allow my classmates to have an experience similar to mine.

Going forward, I am excited to use and develop upon the research, writing, and direct client skills I developed while working at NYLAG. I am extremely grateful to EJA for providing me with a summer fellowship so that I was able to pursue this important work on behalf of low income New Yorkers.

Very truly yours,

Mariah Vitali

Columbia Law School, JD expected May 2019



August 17, 2017

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

**Re: Mariah Vitali, Intern at New York Legal Assistance Group
Employment Law Project – Summer 2017**

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing with regards to the service provided by Mariah Vitali during her time as a legal intern in the Employment Law Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). I am a staff attorney and current Skadden Fellow at NYLAG and, along with my colleagues Katherine Bromberg and Elissa Devins, had the pleasure of supervising Mariah over the summer. Mariah was an asset to our team and we are thankful to Equal Justice America (EJA) for its support of Mariah as an EJA fellow.

NYLAG's Employment Law Project provides a broad range of services to low-income New Yorkers seeking recourse in employment-related matters. This includes assisting individuals in pursuing claims of employment discrimination, wage and hour violations, and obtaining unemployment benefits. Our services may constitute anything from brief advice and counsel to representation at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the New York State Division of Human Rights, the New York State Department of Labor, the New York City Commission on Human Rights, or federal court. Because our practice is so varied, our interns must be flexible and adept at identifying the issues presented during an initial client interview. This in turn helps us triage cases in order of priority and assess the best course of action for each client. We encourage our interns to take an active role in the case development process. This necessitates a good grasp of the federal, state, and city statutes pertaining to employment rights so that interns can independently conduct intakes, categorize clients' problems, and report back their understanding of the claims to supervisors with their recommendations regarding the viability of the prospective client's claims.

Mariah regularly took on tasks and responsibilities that were out of her comfort zone in an effort to grow. For example, during her short time as an intern at NYLAG, Mariah had the opportunity to represent a client at an administrative hearing. Non-attorneys are permitted to

serve as representatives in unemployment insurance hearings. With attorney supervision, Mariah prepared opening and closing statements, counseled the client for direct and cross examination, and represented the client at the hearing. Mariah conducted herself professionally and asked incisive cross examination questions. Unemployment insurance hearings typically last anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. However, this hearing ran particularly long because the employer brought several witnesses to testify. The hearing officer ordered that the remainder of the hearing take place in late August, well after the end of Mariah's internship. Without skipping a beat Mariah agreed and readied herself for the second part of the hearing. This is merely one example of Mariah's consistent willingness to go above and beyond during her internship

In addition to conducting intakes and assessing potential cases, Mariah drafted demand letters and administrative complaints, and conducted complex legal research on an array of employment law issues. Mariah was an excellent researcher and writer. Her work product was clear, concise, and thoughtful. Mariah was an important part of our team this summer and we are grateful to EJA for making this internship possible.

Sincerely,



Nina Martinez
Skadden Fellow/Staff Attorney