

August 30, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a second-year student at Columbia Law School and I wished to express to you my thanks and appreciation for Equal Justice America's funding this past summer. It allowed me to focus on my work at the New York Legal Assistance Group without worrying about financial concerns.

I spent this summer as an intern with NYLAG's LegalHealth unit. I was attracted to LegalHealth due to its focus on helping low-income New Yorkers' physical health by helping them through various issues that keep them from getting the healthcare they need. I was exposed to and researched topics ranging from bankruptcy to asylum and housing, and was able to have face-to-face contact with clients from all walks of life, with all their own stories. During my time, I was able to interview clients, assist with Medicare applications, and even began the process on a VAWA application and political asylum case.

However, one experience particularly stands out. Twice a week, I accompanied my supervisor to her legal clinics at hospitals in Brooklyn where she conducts intakes and provides counseling. On one such occasion, we had a Chinese-speaking client come in. I was born in China and have conversational fluency in Chinese, so my supervisor had me conduct the intake. I had never done an intake before-- and certainly not in Chinese-- so it was a nerve wracking, but tremendously fulfilling experience. I grew up watching my parents struggle to navigate a completely different system in a completely new country, and it was partially to help immigrants like my family that I came to law school. That day, I was able to provide the client with crucial information and reassurance, and it meant so much to me to be able to do that. For the first time, I really felt like I was doing what I came into this profession to do, and I am very glad that I will now have the experience to hold on to when things get difficult.

Thank you again for Equal Justice America's support this summer. Without the funding I would not have been able to devote my time and energy to assisting some of the people who need it most. I learned and experience many things this summer that will make me a better lawyer, and better person.

Sincerely,

Michelle Gong
Columbia Law School