

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

September 13, 2014

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I worked in the Homelessness Prevention Law Project at Public Counsel. My clerkship consisted of a variety of different roles: I trained summer associates to partake in our CARES clinic, which provides direct, on-site services to public benefits recipients at different Department of Public and Social Services Offices. I also supervised and partook in these clinics.

In addition to the direct services work, I researched and wrote a memo on LA County's General Relief (GR) policy to determine when and why benefits are terminated for out of county usage. According to LA County policy, benefits will terminate when it is determined that a client no longer lives in LA County. One of the ways the county determines residency is by looking at where clients use their benefits. If a client uses his entire GR check from one month outside of LA County, the DPSS office will initiate termination proceedings. The practical effects of this are complicated, as sometimes GR recipients live in LA County but work or have relatives who live outside of county. As a result, they transact out of county frequently, and can suffer improper termination.

My research and direct services work merged when I met a client named JoAnn. She had been waiting at a DPSS Office for eight hours before I spoke to her at around 3:30 pm one Friday afternoon. JoAnn's GR benefits terminated while she was taking care of a sick relative in a town just over the LA County line. JoAnn had received a notice of cancellation, which asked JoAnn to write in a declaration attesting that she still resided in LA County, and requested that she attend a hearing. JoAnn submitted the declarations in full, but told the DPSS office that she was unable to attend the hearings due to lack of transportation. Because she didn't attend the hearing, her benefits were terminated. When JoAnn reapplied for GR, her payments were garnished as a penalty.

Over the course of the afternoon, I advocated on JoAnn's behalf to get her back-payments for the period in which her GR had been cut off, and worked with our advocate liaison at the DPSS office to ensure that her benefits wouldn't be garnished. I used my knowledge of the regulations, and my familiarity with the policy's shortcomings, to explain that JoAnn had done everything reasonable to prove that she still resided in LA (e.g., she continued to receive mail from her LA address, and she signed a declaration confirming her continued residence). I argued that her failure to make the hearing shouldn't have been dispositive, especially since she tried to reschedule. The DPSS Office agreed that her residency in LA was clear, and that the termination was inappropriate. I was elated to be able to use what I'd learned about this questionable policy to benefit one of my GR clients.

I also had the opportunity to represent clients in Homeless Court, which is a once in a lifetime opportunity for individuals who have completed a rehabilitation program to get all of their warrants and tickets dismissed. In homeless court, I met with fathers who were reconnecting with their children and grandchildren after years of alienation, and young mothers who were working on finishing their degrees. It was a privilege to be there at such an important juncture; with tickets and warrants forgiven, these individuals would be able to more easily secure driver licenses, jobs, and permanent residences.

My summer at Public Counsel was beyond what I could have expected. It was both humbling and empowering to see how I could use my legal education to make small but real differences in people's lives. I am excited to do more work like this in the future. Thank you so much for the EJA grant, it was an honor to receive it and I am extremely grateful for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Lynch
University of California, Los Angeles School of Law

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LUCY PETROW
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September 18, 2014

Re: Caitlin Lynch

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept my strongest recommendation for Caitlin Lynch, a skilled legal advocate and all around nice person! Ms. Lynch is capable of high quality research and writing and spots issues expertly. Ms. Lynch also has an excellent attitude. During her time at Public Counsel Ms. Lynch worked closely with five other summer clerks and collaborated with several staff attorneys, all of whom adored her. She was always on time, professional and prompt with client follow-up. Our clients, many of whom have difficulty opening up, trusted and confided in Ms. Lynch and, in return, she was able to achieve positive outcomes for many individuals over the course of her clerkship.

I interviewed, hired and supervised Ms. Lynch for her 2014 summer clerkship with Public Counsel's Homelessness Prevention Law Project (HPLP) and it was my pleasure to observe her professional growth and development over the course of her clerkship. Ms. Lynch's flexibility, optimism, friendly disposition and deep commitment to social justice were very much appreciated by both me personally and her colleagues.

Ms. Lynch has demonstrated that she is both qualified and prepared for the workload and responsibility required of an EJA fellow. Ms. Lynch's clerkship with HPLP was physically, intellectually and emotionally demanding and, on day one, she hit the ground running and never stopped. Ms. Lynch was one of six stellar students carefully selected to participate in Connecting Angelenos to Resources and Essential Services (CARES), a signature Public Counsel program. Founded in 1987, this unique and innovative service model provides on-site benefits advocacy in county Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) offices, where impoverished, hungry and homeless individuals, families and unaccompanied youth are most likely to need help. CARES advocates – pro bono attorneys, law students and other volunteers trained by Ms. Lynch and her fellow clerks – help low-income individuals obtain crucial benefits such as cash-aid, food stamps and emergency housing vouchers. On many days Ms. Lynch co-led a three hour CARES training then drove straight to a county DPSS office in

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South Los Angeles or on Skid Row to supervise CARES advocates as they worked directly with clients to overcome obstacles such as a lack of understanding of available programs, confusion about the application process and the wrongful denial, delay or cancellation of benefits.

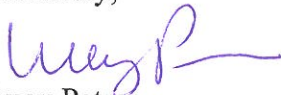
Ms. Lynch excelled as a manager and leader of advocate groups who were prepared and confident under her direction. CARES advocates and clients alike raved about Ms. Lynch on their surveys, frequently describing her as “awesome.”

Ms. Lynch also advocated for clients through a legal clinic at My Friend’s Place (MFP), a well-known Hollywood drop-in center for at-risk and homeless youth between 18 and 24 years old. Because MFP has a low barrier to receive services, Ms. Lynch was able to meet and connect personally with homeless and at-risk youth as they struggled to obtain stable housing, resolve ticket matters, apply for government benefits, secure employment, manage their mental health issues, complete high school, pursue their artistic and musical talents and learn to trust a reliable support system, sometimes for the first time after traumatic histories that often include domestic violence, abandonment and the foster care system.

Finally, of the almost 40 summer clerks, Ms. Lynch was one of three clerks selected to receive Public Counsel’s prestigious Grunfeld/Regan scholarship. Ms. Lynch has exemplified hard work, dedication and consideration and I, on behalf of Public Counsel, am thrilled to endorse, support and recommend her. Ms. Lynch has shown that she is most worthy of an opportunity to leverage her passion and experience into an Equal Justice America Fellowship.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions either via email, at lpetrow@publiccounsel.org, or, by phone, at 213-385-2977, ext. 161.

Sincerely,



Lucy Petrow
Staff Attorney
Homelessness Prevention Law Project