

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

8/23/2013

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am grateful to Equal Justice America (EJA) for funding my summer internship at the Legal Action Center (LAC). With EJA's assistance, I was able to spend eleven weeks at LAC this summer. LAC is a non-profit legal services and policy advocacy organization. It is the lone organization in New York State, and the country-at-large, that is dedicated to fighting discrimination against individuals with HIV/AIDS, substance abuse issues and criminal records.

This summer, LAC worked towards its mission by doing research to develop impact litigation strategies, initiating state and federal litigation on behalf of individuals who had been discriminated against because of their criminal records, providing community education and direct counseling to previously incarcerated people about their rights and obligations in the context of employment, providing technical assistance to substance abuse, mental and public health agencies, and engaging in state and national advocacy efforts to promote sound policies for LAC's target populations.

As summer legal intern, I had the unique benefit of working on both legal and policy initiatives at LAC. This allowed me to better understand the important ways in which lawyers who provide direct legal services can inform and enhance policy and legislative initiatives. The insights that LAC attorneys collected through advocating for clients directly informed the policy initiatives and legislative drafting choices made by the organization's policy team. And, the litigation strategies and work scope decisions made by the legal team were directly influenced by current community advocacy initiatives lead by LAC and its counterparts in state and federal re-entry and public health coalitions. Exploring the symbiotic relationship between the organization's divisions taught me critical context and methods as an aspiring community-based lawyer and advocate. Regular communication between divisions, deliberately aligned strategy and a consistently devoted ear to clients on the ground, stood out to me as necessary pillars for effective social justice advocacy.

Specifically, I researched and wrote legal memoranda regarding ADA confidentiality for individuals with disabilities, the rights of people with criminal convictions to receive certain state employment licenses, and the scope of the aiding and abetting provisions of the New York State and City Human Rights Laws. Additionally, I assisted an attorney in researching and drafting a civil complaint and a pre-litigation demand letter on behalf of two clients who had been unfairly discriminated against by employers in violation of New York State

and City Human Rights Law. I also conducted policy research, edited draft legislation and attended policy coalition meetings.

In addition to legal research and writing, I staffed the LAC criminal justice hotline, receiving calls from individuals with criminal records, identifying potential discrimination issues, providing information about basic rights and obligations, and counseling individuals with criminal records in regards to navigating licensing agencies, administrative hearing boards and employment opportunities. Through the hotline, I heard the concerns and stories of nearly 25 LAC clients seeking clarity as to their rights after being involved in the criminal justice system. Many were frustrated to hear that New York State does not allow for the expungement of any criminal records, and only allows sealing of past criminal convictions in very limited circumstances. In those instances, I explained clients' alternatives, informed them of their rights in the context of housing or employment and conducted limited intake to identify potential discrimination claims.

My experiences at LAC were invaluable and I remain indebted to the attorneys and paralegal staff who taught me the nuts and bolts of litigation strategy, provided direct and encouraging critique of my research and writing skills and acted as an incredible example of client-centered, dedicated advocates committed to social and community justice through the development of good law and policy.

Again, I thank EJA for supporting an opportunity for me to work and learn at LAC this summer. I know my experiences will inform my future work in the public interest, and I hope future students are able to benefit from EJA's generosity moving forward in their careers as well.

Sincerely,

Dacia Read
Brooklyn Law School, 2014