

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

August 29, 2006

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to thank Equal Justice America for providing me with the funding which afforded me the opportunity to work in a public interest internship this summer. I learned a lot, and I believe I was able to assist clients and my organization as a whole effectively.

For twelve weeks this summer, I worked at the Disability Law Center (DLC), the designated protection and advocacy organization for individuals with mental, physical, and developmental disabilities in the state of Massachusetts. The DLC is organized into four teams: Institutional/Facilities, Health/Benefits, Education, and Community. Each team sets six to twelve priority areas which focus the DLC's resources and help decide what assistance the DLC will be able to provide. I was able to work on projects for each of the teams, spanning multiple priorities.

The most exciting project on which I worked was preparing for and representing a client at an administrative hearing regarding possible discharge from a nursing facility. The client was scheduled to be discharged to a homeless shelter, even though life at a shelter could damage his health severely, including the possibility of him needing leg amputations. I assisted the supervising attorney on all aspects of the case, including writing letters, gathering and interpreting the client's records, forming legal arguments after performing legal research, interviewing the client's doctor for an affidavit which I drafted, speaking with the client throughout the process, and directly examining the client at the hearing itself. Although the DLC has not yet received notice of the final hearing decision, I feel confident that we offered this client the best possible chance to retain a stable environment long enough to promote better healing of his legs.

I spent much of my time this summer performing legal research and writing. I created a comprehensive guide navigating through special education statutory, regulatory, and case law relating to disciplinary exclusions (suspensions and expulsions), using the most recent versions of the IDEA and DOE regulations, which came out only this summer. I compiled a guide to case law relevant in Massachusetts for reasonable accommodations in employment for individuals with disabilities. I worked on multiple smaller assignments for cases or projects, including issues like service animals as an accommodation in public schools, latex allergies in public schools, aversive therapy, prison medication regulations, and the definition of a "school day" in special education law.



During the summer, I also had several chances to use the editing and writing skills I honed during my first year of law school, especially by checking citations. I provided extensive editing for an amicus brief which the law center submitted on an appellate level case about housing for individuals with mental illness, and I drafted the motion to submit the brief. I edited training materials for a workshop on disability benefits when drug or alcohol abuse is involved. I edited and helped write sections of an article on continuing disability reviews which will be published in the Clearinghouse Review.

In addition to work opportunities, the DLC provided weekly speakers for trainings on relevant public interest issues. Some of my favorite presentations were from the director of Boston's Health Care for the Homeless, a family court and probate judge, two human rights officers at state institutions, and an expert on legal ethics issues involved in representing people with disabilities.

Overall, I had a wonderful summer experience. I got to know interesting, dedicated lawyers and support staff who advised me through a variety of projects in different areas of disability law. People sought to make my experience both meaningful to me and useful to the clients they serve. After a busy first year of law school, I found it a real pleasure to discover that a working environment like the DLC exists. At the DLC, even though the lawyers work hard, they have time to help each other and maintain a comfortable work/life balance, all while serving a population with a significant need for legal protection. I look forward to working at a place like the DLC when I practice law.

Thank you again for making this opportunity possible for me. The Equal Justice America fellowship I received made up the majority of my summer income and allowed me to focus my attention on a public service legal job, instead of on making enough money to pay my bills.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dominic Gouker", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dominic Gouker

Boston University School of Law, Class of 2008