

August 29, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am Eliza Schafler, a second-year law student at New York University School of Law and a recipient of the Equal Justice America Summer 2011 Fellowship. In accordance with fellowship requirements, I am writing to summarize my internship experience.

This summer, I worked at the Mental Health Project of the Urban Justice Center, an organization in Manhattan, New York. As a native New Yorker with a specific interest in addressing homelessness, I had been looking for a way to serve members of my own community who were most at risk. I felt that mental health was an important and relevant issue in the context of urban homelessness, and I was excited to increase my knowledge in that area.

In teaching me about the problems that poor, mentally ill people face, my internship at the Mental Health Project was a smashing success. I studied the intersection of mental illness and poverty from many angles: housing (mental illness can put tenants at serious risk of eviction and make it difficult to obtain permanent shelter); public benefits (disability and financial need are hard to prove, and the appointments and documents required for benefits are a tremendous burden); criminal justice (mentally ill prisoners are extremely vulnerable when incarcerated and require special discharge planning that they do not always receive); and veterans' law (veterans are at particular risk of mental illness, yet they are poorly served by the VA).

My internship also gave me the tools to assist the low-income population I seek to help. By the end, I was representing my own client in a Social Security hearing, and I successfully secured disability benefits for him. I learned how to bring a disability-focused class action, wrote memos for lawyers and in support of my client, and even translated important outreach materials into Spanish. I became able to interview prisoners at Riker's Island one-on-one and determine their treatment needs. I was given many trainings on poverty and disability law, and I was closely supervised by a wonderful attorney mentor.

At the Mental Health Project, I was deeply moved by the extreme vulnerability of the clients. Those without mental or financial stability are in dire need of support, yet

they are seriously marginalized and stigmatized by society in a way that other disabled people are not. They might be isolated even from their families and communities, or targeted for abuse.

The difficulty of admitting to a need for mental health treatment can be overwhelming, even for a financially stable person with a strong support network. To be homeless or incarcerated and facing mental illness is a burden too great to bear alone. I believe that working for low-income people with mental illness is advocacy at its most basic and necessary. I hold the attorneys at the Mental Health Project in high regard, and I hope to incorporate mental health law into my own career.

Thank you for supporting my internship experience this summer! I remain excited for my future in public interest law.

Sincerely,

Eliza Schafler
J.D. Class of 2013
New York University School of Law



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August 12, 2011

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
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13540 East Boundary Road
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RE: Eliza Schafler, Equal Justice America Summer 2011 Fellow

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing in support of Eliza Schafler, an Equal Justice America Summer 2011 Fellow. As of August 5, 2011, she has completed a ten-week legal internship at the Mental Health Project of the Urban Justice Center.

The Mental Health Project is a team of twelve attorneys and social workers dedicated to advocating for low-income clients with mental illness. As a summer intern in our office, Eliza has accomplished significant work in support of our mission.

Eliza has produced a substantial body of research and writing. She has researched topics ranging from the Veterans Administration's policies on street vendors and employment to the New York City Work Advantage program; from Community Trusts for people with mental illness to the Section 8 housing transfer process. She has written and presented three research memorandums on the "fugitive felon" policy and jurisdictional restrictions of the Veterans Administration. She has drafted forms and filed a claim in federal court in a Social Security appeal, and she translated an over 30-page pro se guide to administrative fair hearings into Spanish. Most important, Eliza has drafted an affidavit and written a memorandum in support of a client's application for Social Security Disability benefits.

Eliza has also assisted in providing direct legal services for clients. She accompanied an attorney and client to a fair hearing before the Human Resources Administration and obtained medical records for various clients. She accompanied an advocate on weekly visits to Riker's Island jail, where she interviewed inmates receiving mental health treatment on the quality of their discharge planning. She has also conducted interviews with low-income tenants for a lawsuit against a Brooklyn landlord. Eliza will be returning after her internship is over to prepare a client and his case worker to give testimony at a Social Security hearing, and she will represent the client at the hearing in late August.

Finally, Eliza has undergone training and education at the Mental Health Project. She has

completed trainings on public benefits, Social Security, fair hearings, Riker's Island interview preparation, "Advocacy 101," the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Veterans Administration. She has observed proceedings in Brooklyn Housing Court and Mental Health Court, as well as civil commitment hearings. She also attended a conference on veterans' mental health sponsored by the New York State Health Foundation.

It has been a pleasure having Eliza in the office. She writes well and produces high-quality work under tight deadlines. She is diligent and attentive to detail. She gets along well with other staff, and is always ready to pitch in when extra hands are needed. We are very sorry to see her go.

Thank you for providing financial support to Eliza this summer. She has been a wonderful contributor to our work at the Mental Health Project. Please don't hesitate to contact me at (646) 602-5663 if you would like any additional information about Eliza's work for us.

Sincerely,



Eve Stotland, Esq
Director, Mental Health Project