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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you very much for your support over my law school career. I have had the good fortune to be supported by Equal Justice America twice: during my first summer and my last semester of law school. During both internships, I worked at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), and am delighted to report that my graduation this May is not the end of my involvement with GBLS. I will be joining GBLS with a two-year Equal Justice Works Fellowship beginning this September (board of bar examiners willing, that is). EJA's support has been invaluable to my development as a public interest law student (and lawyer), and has allowed me to advocate for dozens upon dozens of clients with meritorious cases whom GBLS otherwise would have had to turn away.

My work this semester focused on advocating for families whose subsistence-level nutritional and cash assistance had been unlawfully denied, terminated, sanctioned, or decreased. For example, I met a young black woman with two young children who were homeless and came to GBLS because she had literally no income or resources. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) had terminated her cash assistance because it believed that she had not provided the required verifications, when in fact she had provided the verifications *three different times*. I resolved that problem. Additionally, DTA thought it could terminate this young, homeless family because of the young mother was not able to meet the work requirement. I quickly learned that DTA had not properly screened the family for disabilities, and that this young woman had a host of mental health-related disabilities.

This family had been living on couches, in shelters, on the street, and this young mother held a variety of different jobs, none for very long as her disabilities made it impossible for her to work without treatment - treatment she was unable to access due to her housing instability. With GBLS attorneys' supervision, I advocated for the family to have more stable shelter, got the younger child into pre-school, referred the client to health care resources, and proved to DTA that the young mother had disabilities and therefore was exempt for the work requirement. Thus, the family was able to access the education, health care, housing, and subsistence benefits to which it had a legal right.

An incredibly cacophonous morass of laws govern the distribution of cash and nutritional assistance in Massachusetts. These laws are administered by a cash-strapped agency desperately in need of additional staff and resources. Predictably, the laws are unlawfully executed, generally to unlawfully terminate, sanction, or deny the poorest residents in Massachusetts cash and nutritional assistance. The families for whom I and GBLS advocate are extraordinarily poor, often homeless, dealing with disabilities, and are disproportionately non-English speaking and of color. Massachusetts has promised these families some minimal amount of food and cash so that they may have a hope of escaping apparently inevitable poverty, but without an advocate, this is an empty promise.

Consider the family I described above. The mother was trying to raise two young children - make sure they did homework, ate a good dinner, were happy, etc. - living in a shelter, while dealing with disabilities, and without any money. Even in that impossible situation, though, she still managed to get documentation to DTA. However, because DTA is so so resource-and-staff-strapped, it was unable to realize she had disabilities or to process the documentation she provided. No family could hope to prevail and have its legal rights realized without the help of advocate.

I came to law school from the AmeriCorps VISTA program, determined to be a public interest lawyer. Only a month or two into law school, I discovered that though the private legal sector - firms and the like - were beginning to rebound from the recession, legal aid had been decimated. I learned that GBLS, as the largest provider of legal aid in the Boston metro area, had survived, but that it was not hiring new staff attorneys nor could it pay its summer interns. I do not have a trust fund and have not won the lottery (yet!) so I cannot work without an income. Given those economic realities, this critically important work - enforcing the rights of some of Massachusetts's most disenfranchised, impoverished families, creating the space for them to make their resistance real - cannot be accomplished in the current economy without organizations like EJA.

I greatly appreciate the support EJA has provided GBLS, me, and my clients over the past three years. I look forward to seeing all that EJA Fellows will do in the future, and I thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth McIntyre
Boston University School of Law
Class of 2014



May 29, 2014

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

Re: EJA Intern Elizabeth McIntyre

Dear Dan:

Thank you so much for funding Elizabeth McIntyre to work in the GBLS Welfare Law Unit full time as an externship for her final semester at Boston University Law School. She was a wonderful addition to our unit and a huge help to our clients.

Elizabeth asked me to write to you with an evaluation of her work. Here you go:

Most of Elizabeth's work involved direct legal assistance to clients whose cash benefits, food stamps, or child care benefits are being denied, lowered, or stopped. For example, Elizabeth advocated for a homeless client with mental health disabilities to obtain child care for her three-year-old, so she could make appointments with her psychiatrist. Another homeless client's Food Stamps were cut because her medical expenses were not being taken into account. Elizabeth collected evidence of the client's expenses, calculated how much the client should have been receiving under state agency regulations, and presented that argument to the agency to correct the client's benefit amount.

In another case, when the state realized it had accidentally paid the family too much, Elizabeth figured out how much the family should have been paid under the regulations, realized that the state was taking back too much money, and helped straighten out the repayment plan going forward.

Elizabeth also handled three cases of mothers who are unable to work due to disability. She explained the clients' rights and the benefit of disclosing their disabilities to the welfare agency. She successfully interviewed the clients to obtain the information needed to apply for disability exemptions to the work requirement and time limit for cash assistance. As a result, the mothers and their children now are protected from losing cash benefits that otherwise would have been completely terminated for their whole families.

Elizabeth represented a number of families who had been denied or were facing loss of benefits



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because they allegedly had not turned in all of the required documentation. Elizabeth evaluated whether all of the documentation demanded of the clients was actually required under the regulations. She helped the clients obtain and provide the lawfully required documentation and persuaded the agency that further documentation was not legally required and, therefore, to restore the client's benefits.

Elizabeth also helped us with policy initiatives and trainings. GBLS presented a day-long training for Mass. Continuing Legal Education on basic benefits for poor families with dependent children. Elizabeth helped revise a portion of the training and participated in a skit at the training demonstrating examples of common agency errors in families' benefits cases. Elizabeth also helped current and former GBLS clients participate in advocacy to state policy makers.

In the challenging context of a complex maze of agency regulations, procedures, practices, and organizational structure, Elizabeth became very adept at analyzing issues in cases, determining what information to pursue and how, and developing cases strategies. She worked hard and effectively to resolve and attain full relief in all of the cases possible to complete during her internship. The high quality of Elizabeth's work was noted by all advocates in our unit. She dealt sensitively and patiently with the challenges working with many of our clients present, including the need to use interpreters, the need to cease with interpreters who turn out to be inadequately skilled, and barriers to being able to connect with clients over days, let alone the same day. She also worked effectively and patiently with a number of difficult-to-penetrate bureaucracies.

Elizabeth graduates law school with a wealth of practical experience. Her perceptiveness about our clients' complicated lives and the extensive ways in which the welfare system is outrageously unjust was remarkable at the outset for an intern, and for anyone working for the first time in this area. I have no doubt that Elizabeth will excel in whatever area of legal work she undertakes.

Sincerely,

Melanie Malherbe Managing Attorney

Welfare Law Unit