

August 29, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I was fortunate enough to work at the New York Legal Assistance Group in New York City. As an intern in NYLAG's Special Education Unit, I had the opportunity to advocate for low-income New York families of children with special education needs.

The New York City special education system is exceedingly complicated. Parents who are well-educated English speakers in good financial situations struggle to navigate it. For parents who are low-income, non-native English speakers, with little to no formal education, it can be close to impossible. NYLAG's Special Education Unit provides a tremendous resource to these parents—supplying free legal representation to parents of children with special needs who could otherwise not afford it. The Unit ensures that the New York City Department of Education provides all children with disabilities with the education guaranteed to them by federal and state laws, and not just to those children whose parents are able to afford it.

The best part of my summer was the sheer amount of client interaction. Over the course of my internship, I had the opportunity to meet with parents, observe a student in his school, and attend Committee on Special Education meetings. I met with some incredibly devoted parents, who felt frustrated and defeated by the special education system. Because all of NYLAG's clients are low-income, a child's special education needs are more often than not only one of the many problems facing these families; our clients dealt with poverty, foreclosures, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, and more. I was consistently struck by the strength and capacity of the parents, who served as unrelenting activists for their children, even in the face of grave injustice.

I feel so lucky to have been able to work with the capable and compassionate attorney advocates at NYLAG. They proved to be great supervisors, resources, and mentors to me. I was enthused by their dedication to children with special needs. They entrusted me with a lot of responsibility—editing a brief on behalf of a client to be submitted to federal district court, participating in Committee on Special Education meetings, and writing an impartial hearing request on behalf of a client. I learned something new everyday.

Thank you so much for making my work this summer possible through an Equal Justice America fellowship. My summer was incredibly meaningful and unforgettable.

Best,

Emily Freeman
Harvard Law School, Class of 2014

July 24, 2012

Dan Ruben
Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Re: Emily Freeman

Dear Mr. Ruben:

As a lawyer in the Special Education Unit (“SEU”) at the New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”), I am writing on behalf of Emily Freeman, a summer intern at NYLAG. Emily started at NYLAG on May 29, 2012 and will end her internship on August 3, 2012. In the SEU, we help low income families with disabled children in need of special education services.

Emily decided to work in the SEU after her first year at Harvard Law School because of her strong and long-standing interest in special education. She came to this internship with a great deal of experience in actually working with disabled children, and a firm grasp of educational law.

Emily is extremely bright and conscientious, as well as compassionate. Over the summer, she had a wide range of responsibilities, including writing a memorandum about a rather obscure element in education law, cite checking a brief for the Southern District of New York, attending meetings with the Committee on Special Education, and helping one of my colleagues prepare for an Impartial Hearing. The quality of Emily’s work is first rate.

In particular, Emily accompanied me to two meetings with the Department of Education (“DOE”) regarding an almost 12 year old boy who was doing poorly in school, despite being of normal intelligence. The DOE wanted to keep him in a general education class, with no services, which Emily and I thought would mean that he would probably fail again during the 2011-2012 school year. During the second meeting with the DOE, there was agreement between the DOE and the mother that her son would go into an “inclusion” class, which would mean that he would be in a class of 30 children (18 with no disability and 12 who have some recognized disability) with two teachers, rather than a class of 30 with just one teacher. We hoped that the extra teacher in the room would provide our client with the additional help he needed.

At the first meeting with the DOE, the principal and psychologist suggested that they wanted to question the child at the second meeting about the reasons for his poor school performance. Emily and I both had questions about the wisdom of doing so, but the DOE was adamant that they had included other children in meetings with beneficial results. As Emily and I had feared, the 12 year old, when brought into a room with many adults, most of whom he had never seen, and questioned about his short-comings, was mortified. I was very impressed with Emily's ability to read the situation, and know beforehand that the DOE's idea to confront the child would not turn out well.

Emily's presence during this summer was an enormous help to me and my colleagues. She will be a wonderful lawyer whatever her area of expertise.

If further information would be helpful, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Laura Davis