

Emily Letcher  
Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

As part of the Supplemental Security Income unit, I advocated for disabled clients who had been wrongfully denied benefits. I experienced all aspects of an SSI case, including the initial client intake, the hearing, and the appeal process. I interviewed clients and asked questions, such as where they had received medical treatment, in order to acquire their medical records and prove disability. After contacting their treatment providers and receiving the clients' medical records, I ensured that we had received all of the records that we would need to prove disability. I researched and wrote a brief to an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) explaining that our client was entitled to benefits because of his functional limitations, even though his specific limitations were not those included in the Disability Listings. This client was a 22 month-old boy who suffered from bilateral clubfeet and flat head syndrome, which caused him to be developmentally delayed in his expressive language ability.

In addition, I drafted a memo to the Social Security Administration (SSA) asking that the SSA agree to remand a case where the ALJ had made the same legal error for which federal court had previously remanded the case. The client suffers from bipolar disorder, depression, and other mental health issues. Her claim had been filed several years prior and she had experienced two ALJ hearings and a federal claim. She remains without benefits. Showing the SSA that the ALJ had made the same error allowed us to get her a hearing without filing another claim in federal court.

In addition to my role in the SSI unit, I also assisted attorneys in the Aging and Disabilities unit. I assisted in data collection and synthesis for the report "Careless: How

the Pennsylvania Department of Health has Risked the Lives of Elderly and Disabled Nursing Homes Residents,” a report written by attorney Sam Brooks. The report explains that the PA Department of Health has consistently failed to properly investigate and classify nursing home complaints. The report has received local and national attention and has caused the governor’s office to create a task force to address the Department of Health’s failings. I also assisted attorney Pam Walz in acquiring an attendant care waiver for a client. The attendant care waiver allowed the client’s sister to be paid for the care that she was already providing him, and prevented the client from entering a nursing home.

My experience at CLS allowed me to be exposed to a variety of legal issues and work with clients from different backgrounds. I had a truly wonderful experience.

Emily Letcher  
George Washington University



August 31, 2015

Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 E Boundary Rd  
Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Emily Letcher

Dear Mr. Ruben:

It is with great pleasure that I write to provide you with a brief summary of Ms. Letcher's just completed summer with us at Community Legal Services, Inc. in our North Philadelphia office.

Emily was extremely enthusiastic, dedicated and hard-working. She showed empathy towards our clients, skill and determination. In addition to the high quality of her work, Emily interacted often with clients. She treated them with respect and dignity. We were delighted to work with her over the course of the summer as she begins her legal career.

Emily worked on a variety of projects this summer. One major project involved writing a brief to a Social Security Administration Administrative Law Judge for a severely disabled young child. As a member of the Supplemental Security Income unit, she advocated for disabled clients who had been wrongfully denied benefits. In this particular case, she researched and wrote a brief to the ALJ demonstrating our young client's eligibility for disability benefits because of his functional limitations. This client was a 22 month-old boy who suffered from bilateral clubfeet and flat head syndrome, which caused him to be developmentally delayed in his expressive language ability. Emily learned the complex regulatory scheme quickly, even though she had no experience with SSI issues. She wrote a high quality appeals brief that needed little editing. As of today, we are still awaiting a decision on this matter.

Emily also worked extensively on many other SSI disability cases from the initial client intake, through the evidentiary hearing, and including the appeal process in federal court. She interviewed clients, requested and obtained crucial medical records and played a significant role in obtaining a remand from federal court in a long standing case that has been to federal court on three separate occasions. Throughout all of her time here, Emily's work was very high quality.

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She was resourceful, asked the right questions and displayed just the right amount of independence. She interacted exceptionally well with our clients and all of our staff. She was a joy to have as a colleague in the office.

Emily also assisted my colleague in the Aging and Disabilities unit, most notably on a report CLS issued on the failures of the Pennsylvania Department of Health to properly protect nursing home residents. Emily came to CLS just as we were analyzing data. She worked on data analysis and her work together with that of other students allowed us to issue this report in a timely manner. As a result of the report, the issue has gotten both statewide and national attention. The Pennsylvania Department of Health has announced the creation of a nursing home task force and asked for an audit of nursing home inspection procedures.

Emily showed a deep understanding of the issues and hardships that confront low-income Philadelphians. She showed a compassion that is rare in a law student. My hope is that her experience here this summer will lead her to a career in public interest work. We would be fortunate to have her join our ranks. I would also like to thank Equal Justice America for funding Emily's fellowship. Without this critical funding, many of the students we work with would not be able to pursue this compelling work. Please feel free to contact me directly if you need additional information.

Sincerely,



John S. Whitelaw  
Staff Attorney