

August 28, 2010

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to work with Community Legal Services in Philadelphia this summer. I worked in the Public Benefits Unit, primarily assisting low-income Philadelphia residents with food stamps, cash assistance, medical assistance, and supplemental security income.

Over the summer I had approximately thirty of my own clients. Some of the clients I only worked with over the phone, some I met in person. I assisted some clients with only a few phone calls, others took all summer as their legal challenges became more complicated and extensive the more I researched their problems. After speaking with some clients almost every day I developed a relationship with them that reminded me why I went to law school in the first place. Not just to learn the law, and learn how to create change or argue a point, but *too help people*.

The most rewarding experiences were the “thank you” phone calls and messages from clients. It is so gratifying to hear someone say that they appreciate your services, your diligence, your efforts, and your respectful communication. It is, of course, also motivating. The bar should be set higher. I hope that I always get the “thank you” phone call for my legal services, but I also hope that one day common courtesy and attentive service can become the expectation, not the exception.

One of my favorite clients, M.A., was living on Supplemental Security Income and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance (food stamps) at a total of around \$750/month, a bit more than 80% of the federal poverty level. M.A. was a slight man with physical limitations that did not allow him to work at all. He lived alone and could not read very well. But my goodness, could he keep records. Another client of mine referred M.A. to me when his food stamps had been cut off - even though he had sent in his semi-annual renewal form *via certified mail*. Can you imagine? Someone whose experience with the public benefits system “losing” his documents has taught him that he must keep records of *everything* – to the extent that he now sends forms to the welfare office by certified mail. I used M.A.’s detailed record keeping to prove to the welfare office that my client was not at fault and that they had simply lost, misplaced, or forgotten about his renewal form. Eventually, after involving the District Administrator, M.A.’s food stamps got re-activated and they gave him several months’ back pay that they had missed while he fruitlessly attempted to contact them himself. This “win” led me to mixed feelings. Of course I was thrilled that my client got his small food allowance back, but I was disappointed because my involvement was needed at all. Here was a client who did everything correctly and in a timely manner. Through no fault of his own he stopped getting his food stamps, at critical part of his meager monthly income. And, though he tried for months to contact his local welfare office, he was unable to get any assistance until I got involved. Even then, if M.A. had not been exceptionally diligent I probably would have only gotten the food stamps reinstated, but would not have been able to get him repaid for the months that they did not pay him.

Another set of clients also highlighted the extreme difficulty that welfare recipients face to get benefits. Two women, welfare-to-work recipients, were told that they could enroll in a

year long program to become pharmacy technicians by their case workers. They were promised by multiple representatives from both welfare office and the education program that their costs would be covered. At graduation, instead of a diploma in their envelope, they got a bill. The school told them that they could not get credit for the program (and thus could not apply for jobs) until the remaining tuition balance had been paid. Luckily, these clients had meticulously kept records of who they spoke to and when and had multiple signed documents to support their claims that they had been assured their tuition would be covered. Even with the supporting documentation, it took weeks of phone calls and emails, steadily going up the chain of authority in the welfare department, to have their expenses paid. By this point, both clients had missed job opportunities because the pharmacy tech program would not provide their transcript to potential employers while there was an outstanding tuition balance. Once again, two people with astounding work ethic, organization, and resolve were only barely able to get the support they were promised from the welfare system.

These types of clients made my summer both rewarding and motivating. Rewarding because they were trying to do the right thing, to respect the bureaucracy with all of its hurdles, in order to do what they needed to survive and provide for themselves and their families. Motivating because I find it astounding that they needed such significant legal involvement to obtain what should be a straightforward service. I cannot imagine the number of clients who are unable to read but do not have a friend to help them complete forms, do not know to send things by certified mail or ask for signatures and photocopies every time they communicate with a someone about benefits, and who do not find their way to Community Legal Services. I want to help these people, but even more, I hope that by helping them I am motivating the public benefits system to stop finding excuses to let recipients fall through the cracks.

Having my own clients was incredible. Throughout my last two years of law school I longed to use my new skills help people in immediate need. I wanted my 2L summer to break away from research, writing, and academia to focus on individuals with whom I could form a relationship. Working with Community Legal Services provided me with that experience. It is amazing how rewarding it is to work directly with your clients to help them gain access to the services they need. Working directly with clients has also motivated me upon my return to school. I am more ready than ever to get everything I can out of my last year of law school and then continue with my career in public interest law.

Thank you again for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hallam Roth". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Hallam Roth
University of Virginia School of Law
Class of 2011

August 31, 2010

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

We are writing to provide an evaluation of Hallam Roth's summer fellowship at Community Legal Services in Philadelphia.

Community Legal Services is a civil legal services office providing free legal representation to over 18,000 low-income Philadelphians each year. Hallam worked with us in the public benefits unit. Richard was her direct supervisor for the summer and Michael also participated in her supervision on many of her cases.

During her time at CLS, Hallam provided direct service to 27 clients on a range of issues. For example, she represented two women who, after attending a nursing school recommended and approved by the Department of Public Welfare as part of their mandatory welfare-to-work program, were billed by the school for thousands of dollars of tuition. She successfully convinced the Department to pay the outstanding tuition. She also represented a newly unemployed father who was having trouble obtaining food stamps and other benefits for himself and his young son. She counseled several clients on Medicaid eligibility, explaining complicated eligibility criteria for various medical insurance programs. In addition, Hallam worked on several large-scale public policy matters, including drafting comments opposing a proposed regulation from the Department of Public Welfare that would make it more difficult for TANF recipients to access education and training and move from welfare to work.

Hallam excelled in this position. She worked hard and with great energy and passion and produced very good results for the clients she helped represent. She was empathetic to clients and had excellent interviewing skills that she improved while she worked with us. She was thorough in interviews and pursuing resolutions of cases. She was exceedingly responsive to assigned tasks and worked well with her supervisors and with the other law students that were part of our team. Her written work met all expectations. Overall we were very pleased with her work.

On behalf of CLS and our clients, we thank you for providing her with the opportunity to work with us this summer.

Sincerely,

Richard P. Weishaupt
Senior Attorney
Michael Froehlich
Staff Attorney