

August 13, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Completing an Equal Justice America Fellowship with Equip for Equality (“EFE”) provided me with a wide range of experiences. I gained experience in research, writing, and client counseling. I worked on class actions and individual litigation, in both federal and state court. This fellowship has confirmed my desire to pursue a career in the public interest sector, and in disability rights law in particular.

The majority of my fellowship was spent completing research and writing assignments. The largest project I completed this summer was writing a brief on Alcohol, Drugs, and Conduct Rules under the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”). EFE used the brief as part of an educational series presented for individuals with disabilities and disability rights attorneys. The research that I conducted gave me a greater understanding of the way that the ADA both helps and hinders individuals with addiction. As a result, I have become interested in working with individuals with addiction-related disabilities in order to ensure that the few rights that they have are protected.

I also completed a number of smaller research projects. For example, I wrote an overview of federal and state law governing the accessibility of common areas in condominiums. Additionally, I wrote a memo for use by pro se individuals regarding filing and responding to a motion for summary judgment in the Central District of Illinois. Furthermore, I drafted a number of discovery-related documents, including interrogatories, requests for production, notices of deposition, re-notices of deposition, and subpoenas.

I learned how much I enjoy research when I know there is a person who will benefit from my efforts. This summer, I had a client with mental illness whose doctor had recommended that she keep an emotional support canine in her apartment. I had the chance to write a memo about whether emotional support animals are allowed as a reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing Act (“FHA”). I found Department of Justice guidance indicating that service animals are more broadly defined under the FHA as opposed to the ADA. I also was able to find decisions holding that under the FHA a service animal does not have to be “specially trained.” This was great news for our client and strengthened the demand letter that was sent to her landlord. Seeing first-hand how effective legal research can positively impact my client cemented my desire to pursue a career as a disability rights attorney.

In addition to research and writing, I had the opportunity to have a large amount of client interaction. I completed intake with ten individuals and followed-up with each of them about the disposition of their matter. I also had substantial client interaction on two of the cases that I was

assigned to. On a few occasions I was able to experience communicating with a client who is deaf using an interpreter. I also had a particularly challenging client with mental illness, and over the course of many conversations I learned strategies to communicate with her effectively. Additionally, I represented EFE in the annual Disability Pride Parade in Chicago.

I was pleased to find that EFE puts a lot of time and attention into training its interns. During the first week of my externship I received two-hour trainings each day on topics including the Americans with Disabilities Act, guardianship, beneficiaries of social security, and the Olmstead decision that mandates states provide the least restrictive setting for individuals with developmental disabilities. These trainings laid the foundation for the work that I was able to complete during the weeks that followed.

I strongly recommend a fellowship with EFE to any student who is passionate about disability rights. I am really pleased with the breadth of work that I was able to do this summer. I got to observe a consent decree approved in a years-long class action lawsuit, assist with discovery in individual litigation, and interact with clients by conducting numerous intakes. I also appreciate that I was able to complete several in-depth projects in addition to shorter assignments. The training that I received during my fellowship was an important step in becoming a zealous advocate and has renewed my commitment to pursuing a career in disability rights law.

Sincerely,

Hannah Weinberger-Divack  
University of Illinois College of Law  
Juris Doctor Candidate, 2013