

August 28, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

During my Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship, I worked as a legal intern in the Public Benefits Unit at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS). My internship was a wonderful experience, and I had the opportunity to engage in a significant amount of direct client work and to manage cases from start to finish. I was able to work with clients from the time they first contacted CLS to determine what their legal problems were, identify the next steps, and advise them and advocate for them to help them access benefits to which they were entitled.

Before interning at CLS, I had little experience working with low-income clients, and I was unfamiliar with the welfare system. This summer, I learned a lot about the barriers faced by individuals trying to access this system. Many of the clients who came to CLS had fulfilled all of the requirements to get benefits, yet were still denied those benefits because of inefficiencies within the system. Others wanted to get out of the welfare system but struggled to do so because of the structure of the system itself. I spoke with one client who aspired to be a hair stylist but was struggling to complete the necessary training because of alternate requirements imposed by her welfare-to-work program. During my time at CLS, I also gained a deeper understanding of the intricate connection between the political system and the programs available to low-income communities.

The daily client work I engaged in was the most rewarding aspect of my summer at CLS. One of the most touching experiences for me was when I was able to help a client whose Medicaid plan was no longer covering his prescription for blood pressure medication. I followed up with his provider, and within a few days he was again able to get the prescription he needed. The client, who worked as an ice cream truck operator, was so grateful for my help that he made a special detour from his normal route to stop by CLS' office and drop off ice cream as a thank you!

However, while I found my client work rewarding, working at CLS this summer was also particularly challenging because of several changes to programs run by the Department of Public Welfare. Most strikingly, the Department of Public Welfare eliminated General Assistance (GA), a cash assistance program that served as the sole source of income for nearly 70,000 individuals across Pennsylvania. My supervisor was heavily involved in efforts to prevent the elimination of GA and, later in the summer, to deal with the effects of its termination. As a result, I had the opportunity to engage in a variety of advocacy efforts surrounding the elimination of GA and other welfare changes, including preparing documents for a potential class action lawsuit; advocating to ensure that the individuals receiving GA were given advance notice of its termination so that they could take steps to prepare for the loss of their income; and conducting

legal research that I used to draft a portion of a demand letter. I also conducted interviews with several clients who had been receiving GA, including a 94-year old Jamaican immigrant, to write about their stories and about the impact that the loss of GA would have on their lives. I found these interviews to be the most difficult because for many of these clients, there was nothing I could do to help other than urge them to seek out other resources, such as benefits available through the Social Security Administration. Finally, I worked with my supervisor to arrange two large-scale townhall meetings designed to educate advocates and social service providers about recent welfare changes and the impact those changes would have on recipients of welfare benefits.

As a legal intern at CLS this summer, I immediately became part of the team. I was impressed by how much responsibility I was given, and I appreciated that the attorneys in the Public Benefits Unit immediately brought me into the loop on all of their work. I felt as though I was a valued part of the staff, and I had the opportunity to engage in real, substantive work impacting the lives of clients. By engaging in both individual client work and broader systemic advocacy efforts, I had the opportunity not only to develop valuable skills as a lawyer, but also to make a real difference in the lives of my clients. I am so grateful for the opportunity I had to work at CLS this summer, and for the Equal Justice America Fellowship that helped make my work there possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer L. Feden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer L. Feden

J.D. Candidate 2014, University of Pennsylvania Law School