

September 23, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to extend my sincere thanks to you and Equal Justice America for supporting my summer work with the Unemployment Law Project (ULP). I truly appreciate that your organization thought me worthy of a summer fellowship and I cannot envision a better experience following my 1L year. Apart from developing my legal skill set, my internship with ULP reinforced my desire to practice law in the service of communities and individuals in need. The Unemployment Law Project offers direct legal aid to thousands of people attempting to access unemployment benefits. Although it is possible to represent oneself in unemployment hearings, an individual's likelihood of security or maintaining unemployment benefits increases dramatically with competent representation.

Throughout my internship, I provided direct legal representation to individuals in their administrative hearings for unemployment benefits. I conducted factual and legal research and prepared my clients for what to expect from the Administrative Law Judge and opposing counsel. During the hearings, I engaged in direct and cross examination, and made legal and closing arguments. Additionally, I interviewed prospective clients, participated in ULP's daily case review, and wrote a Petition for Review which is an appeal at the administrative level.

The Unemployment Law Project serves individuals from all over Washington State and our clients reflect the state's diversity. I represented clients that were diverse in regard to race, ethnicity, age, education, income, religion, and familiarity with the legal process. Every client posed unique challenges and it was an honor to coach each of them and prepare a winning strategy for their hearings.

I will always remember a client who had been terminated from what she called her first real job. This client was a single mother who suffered from a traumatic past. She was resolved to help others like herself and became certified as a peer support specialist and found a job working in a group home for the homeless and people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction. Her employer fired her for insubordination, stating that she threw a clipboard and stormed out of a staff meeting after refusing to adhere to changes management had implemented. The allegation was ridiculous and untrue. The passion she exhibited for her work was evident and inspiring, but the way she communicated the events that occurred prior to her termination was confusing and I worried that the judge would not find it credible. It took a lot of work and cuing for us to get on the same page, but we put in the necessary time and effort until we were both confident in each other and she was comfortable with the likely cross examination questions from the employer's counsel. When I told her that she had been granted unemployment benefits she told me "I can tell you'll be a good lawyer. I have a feeling." I am still far from becoming an attorney, let alone a

good one, but I cherished her kind words and will strive to ensure that her premonition comes to pass.

Her story is not special to me solely because of her kind words, the challenges she faced in securing unemployment benefits illustrate the difficulties many Americans face. She filled out her initial Employment Security Department questionnaire from the employer's point of view and was denied benefits. This mistake is common based on the phrasing of the questions and occurs frequently. When I conducted her intake, she focused on immaterial details and supplied so many facts in an effort to tell the whole truth that her story was convoluted and confusing. This too is common. Laypeople do not know or understand the unemployment statutes and do not know which facts to highlight or what details are important for the judge to know. Without representation she did not have a high likelihood of receiving unemployment benefits that she desperately needed to pay rent and take care of her child.

In many ways, ULP is an organization that spends much of its time, energy, and money putting out small fires of injustice. There are more clients in need of unemployment benefits than ULP can represent. This fact makes organizations like Equal Justice America indispensable. Not only does the Summer Fellowship program increase the number of clients who receive representation, it also gives law students the opportunity to develop the legal skill set necessary to support deserving, but underserved, communities throughout their careers. I am honored to have been selected as an Equal Justice America Fellow and given the opportunity to spend my summer working towards a more equitable and just world.

Respectfully,

John Steinnes
University of Washington
Class of 2016