

August 22, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I wanted to thank you and your team for your hard work and support this summer. It was an honor to be selected as an Equal Justice America fellow and to serve people with disabilities this summer at Equip for Equality. The Equal Justice America fellowship allowed me to take this unpaid opportunity at Equip and focus on my work, not on groceries or rent. While my heart was in the work that Equip does, the fellowship allowed me to keep my mind on it as well.

I spent ten weeks at Equip for Equality, a private non-profit organization that serves as the governor-designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in Illinois. I was part of the civil rights team and worked on issues ranging from a Department of Labor Overtime rules that impact people with disabilities to assisting at Americans with Disabilities Act training seminars. I was also fortunate to have a great deal of interaction with clients either through intake interviews, outreach events, or visits with clients.

What I will cherish most about this internship was my interactions with Equip's clients and the attorneys that serve them. I was moved by our client's stories about the barriers they faced and the tenacity that they overcame them with. I remember the first time I heard that individuals who use wheelchairs were at one time forced to go through kitchens or side doors and had to schedule dinner ahead of time to make sure they could get into the restaurant. That same person, who once had to call ahead to make sure her wheelchair could be accommodated, was one of leaders of a movement that got the ADA passed in 1990. After I heard her story and the stories of all of our clients, I found new meaning in Margaret Mead's admonition to never doubt what a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can do.

As I reflect on my past ten weeks, I hope that I helped Equip's clients as much as they helped me. I remember being on intake calls with people who were having a terrible day or horrendous problems with co-workers or supervisors harassing them at work. I also remember the feeling of calling that same person back with information about their rights, the laws that protect them, and the steps that they can take to advocate for themselves. I know what an impact it made when people would thank Equip for providing that information and being a partner in the struggle for a more just world. One particularly memorable moment was at an outreach event when people were calling our attorneys and interns superheroes (I received the honor of being Batman). It was truly a wonderful experience to serve our clients and I cannot thank them and Equip enough for all that I have learned.

Sincerely,

James Naughton  
Loyola University Chicago School of Law