

August 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben:

This summer I worked as a law clerk at Mental Health Advocacy Services (MHAS) in Los Angeles, California. My primary responsibilities included providing legal advice to clients with mental disabilities primarily on issues concerning mental health, housing, and special education law, and completing longer-term research and writing projects. Through this work I gained substantive knowledge and lawyering skills.

For my first major assignment, I drafted the majority of a Due Process Complaint to request reasonable accommodations for an 18 year old student at risk of failing out of high school. The student had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. As a result of these conditions, he could not maintain focus long enough to complete his class work or homework assignments. However, according to his parents, his school consistently refused to provide him with an Individualized Education Plan. However, over the course of my research, I discovered that my client's parents had been offered limited accommodations that they refused. Although a language barrier and misunderstanding likely contributed to the family's refusal, we were unable to complete the Due Process Complaint. Instead, we provided the family with information regarding adult education and mentoring programs.

While working on this case, I practiced Spanish language, interviewing, research, and writing skills. I also gained an understanding of how special education law should be applied and an awareness that that many school districts do not comply with the law. I understood the value of this experience when I volunteered at the end of the summer with the Painted Turtle, a camp for children with medical conditions. After my experience at MHAS, I approached engaging with campers with mental health issues differently than I had during the four summers I previously spent working at medical camps.

Based on my experience at MHAS, I understood more fully that a child with a mental health condition has a uniquely functioning brain and therefore deserves, and is legally entitled to services designed to accommodate for her needs. Therefore, when my camper, who is one of eight students in a special education classroom, wanted to roam independently around the carnival instead of mingling with friends, I sat at a table and watched her out of the corner of my eye. Three years ago, I am confident I would have pressured the same girl to join the other campers before she missed out on all the fun. Yet, the camper was excited to independently find snacks, learn magic tricks, and play games. She even seemed excited to talk to me, for a few minutes, when I caught up with

her. As I watched her play, I realized that working at MHAS taught me to think more deeply and critically about an individual's situation to determine how I can most effectively engage with him. This skill significantly improved my ability to interact with future clients.

In addition to assisting clients with concerns related to special education, I helped individuals with mental disabilities solve legal issues related to housing. Specifically, I provided assistance to a woman whose brother, who suffered a brain injury and is a recovering alcoholic, was at risk of being evicted because he allowed guests to use his telephone and washing machine. Through conversations with staff attorneys and legal research, I learned that her brother could be entitled to a reasonable accommodation. I suggested the client request that her brother's housing manager give her brother 60 days to modify his behavior while she sought to increase his mental health treatment. As a result of my involvement in the case, her brother's housing manager was willing to postpone the hearing to decide whether he would be evicted and to consider granting her brother an accommodation.

Outside of the office, I participated in field trips to courthouses and community institutions and organizations. Specifically, I observed court proceedings at the Juvenile, Unlawful Detainer, Dependency, and Mental Health Courts, and visited Skid Row, the Los Angeles Men's Central County Jail, Los Angeles's Central Juvenile Hall, and a number of organizations that provide mental health services to individuals in Los Angeles. Through these experiences, I developed an understanding of the ways in which housing, special education, and mental health law are applied, and an awareness of the challenges facing the clients and practitioners in Los Angeles's mental health community.

Working on the cases discussed above, participating in field trips, writing a memo on Ethics in Medical Legal Partnerships, and helping upwards of fifty clients navigate legal challenges contributed to my substantive knowledge and practical skills. After interning at MHAS I have a greater understanding of mental health, housing, and special education law and juvenile justice issues and am more capable of conducting legal writing, research, and analysis, and client interviews.

I am motivated to continue pursuing a career in public interest law. Through law, I hope to help vulnerable children and their families to access the rights and services they deserve and require to access to their fundamental human rights.

Best,

Leah Glowacki
University of Texas School of Law
2016

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY SERVICES

3255 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 902
Los Angeles, CA 90010
Phone 213-389-2077 Fax 213-389-2595
www.mhas-la.org

A nonprofit organization protecting and advancing the legal rights of people with mental disabilities.

September 4, 2014

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

Re: Fellowship of Leah Glowacki - Summer 2014

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc. (MHAS) was pleased to have Leah Glowacki as a law clerk in our 2014 summer program. MHAS is a nonprofit legal services agency that provides direct legal services to adults and children with mental health disabilities. Our project areas include government benefits, special education, fair housing and access to mental health services.

Leah was a positive and enthusiastic addition to our summer law clerk team. She was a dedicated advocate for clients, showing empathy and compassion, while working diligently to determine legal strategies that would benefit each client. Leah handled advocacy for myriad clients with issues ranging from questions about mental health conservatorship, consumer debt, special education, government benefits and housing.

Leah undertook a challenging special education due process project as one of her major tasks during the summer. This project required her to meet several times with a young adult client who had just turned 18, becoming the holder of his own educational rights, analyze extensive educational records, and research federal and state special education law to determine whether the client had viable due process complaints against his school district. Leah handled this complex set of tasks well, took direction as needed on the project and provided consultation to the client under attorney supervision.

Another challenging project that Leah took on was drafting of a memorandum of the ethical implications of legal practice in the medical-legal partnership context. Leah took on the challenge of researching confusing areas of client confidentiality, issues of clients with diminished capacity and communication with family members and related issues. Her task was to draft a memorandum that will be used as the handout for an upcoming MLCE training during ABA Pro Bono Week that will be sponsored by the Southern California Collective on Medical-Legal Partnership. Again, Leah was diligent in her research, asked good questions, took editing and direction well and drafted a very competent memorandum to meet our needs.

We are grateful to have benefitted from the funding provided for Leah's fellowship this summer. She was an asset to MHAS and served her clients well. She was also a positive influence in the office overall, respectful to all staff and collegial with her co-workers.

Very truly yours,


Pamela Marx
Supervising Attorney