

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I was an intern on the Disability Rights project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (WLC). WLC is a civil rights organization that fights discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, and also works on prison and education matters. The work the committee does on behalf of people who have faced illegal discrimination is so valuable, and I was very committed to both advocating for our clients and growing as a litigator. I gained experience with civil rights litigation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, as well as some experience with the Fair Housing Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the DC Human Rights Act, and other state laws. In addition to the Disability Rights Project, I worked with attorneys in the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Project and Education Project.

Much of the work done in the Disability Rights project focuses on impact litigation or representing associations, such as the Equal Rights Center or the American Council of the Blind. I also worked on employment discrimination matters as part of the EEO project, which tended to have more of an individual client focus.

As many of our matters are part of ongoing litigation, I cannot go into too much detail regarding the clients I was able to help. However, one of my roles was doing client intake, where I heard people tell us about what was likely some of the worst things that had happened to them. It was incredibly humbling to be trusted with somebody's fear and pain, and incredibly rewarding to be able to help them seek justice and gain some of their security back.

One of my earliest intakes was from a woman who had been fired from her job. She had a seizure disorder, and needed, and was originally granted, accommodations for when she needed to take a day off from work to recover, or work from home to avoid seizure triggers. However, when a new supervisor took over, she was belittled for her disability and the accommodations she requested. She was called names in front of colleagues, and was not given her necessary accommodations. Eventually, she was terminated. She was, obviously, so upset when she was telling me the story over the phone, and very frustrated with the fact she hadn't been able to find any help. Because her employer was so small, it was not covered by the ADA. I was initially worried that we would not be able to help her. However, I found that the county she had been employed in had a far more generous discrimination law. I was able to refer the client to a specific contact in that county's office of human rights who would assist her in filing an administrative complaint. While we did not assist her further than that (at least for the time being), I felt like I played a small part in helping her seek justice. The system can be difficult to navigate, particularly for the

majority of people who are not knowledgeable about administrative complaints, the application of various laws, and how to find representation. It was very satisfying to be able to direct her to someone who could help her.

Another rewarding experience was a community outreach event I participated in. We went to a local high school and gave a presentation on sexual harassment in colleges and the workplace. The students asked such insightful questions, and our end of presentation survey showed that they had learned what constitutes sexual harassment, and what their legal rights are. It was so rewarding to me to know that those boys and girls will be well prepared to begin college or employment with a solid understanding of what to do if they feel they are being harassed because of their gender.

I feel that I really grew as a lawyer during my summer at WLC. I worked with so many passionate, committed, and extremely talented attorneys. The other interns I worked with were equally intelligent and dedicated. It was an incredibly rewarding experience, and I am grateful to EJA for providing a grant for my fellowship.

Thank you,

Mary Deweese
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