

August 12, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you again for the Equal Justice America fellowship that helped me to spend this summer serving with Equip for Equality. I worked in the Special Education Clinic, answering helpline calls from parents of children with special needs. Many of these children are not receiving from their school districts the accommodations required by the law. For example, the IEP of a five year old girl with autism in Chicago promises her toileting assistance from a paraprofessional aide, but this has been withheld. Her teachers have been sending her home soiled two or three times per week. I was able to advise her mother of her legal rights and I wrote up a summary of the case to present to pro bono attorneys. One of them has taken her case and will represent this family at an upcoming IEP meeting.

A mother of a nine year old boy with Celiac disease called to find out what kind of accommodations could be put into her son's 504 plan to avoid exposure to gluten in the classroom. I researched this question and found the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies. I drafted a letter for this parent to the school district requesting a copy of the local school policy to establish its compliance with the ISBE guidelines.

A seventh grade boy, whose father has been incarcerated for the last ten years but who has been a successful student, missed about forty days of school last year due to depression and anxiety over his older brother's departure for military service. The school district has been inflexible and unsympathetic to his condition and decided to retain him another year in seventh grade, despite his passing grades. I researched the ISBE truancy and absenteeism policies and discovered that the district had a responsibility to inquire into the causes of the absence and to offer help and counsel. The matter is still unresolved.

A highlight of the summer was participating in an ISBE mediation between a school district and the mother of a five year old boy who is medically fragile. Last year the school allowed the boy's home health care nurse to accompany him to school, but this

year they wanted to substitute their own nurse. My supervising attorney and I were able to negotiate an agreement that satisfied the mother's concerns.

My experiences this summer have certainly strengthened my desire to practice in the area of special education law, and I am grateful for the Equal Justice America fellowship that helped to provide for my family while I was away.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Shea". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "S".

Michael Shea

University of Illinois College of Law, Class of 2013



Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities

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August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am pleased to write this evaluation of Michael Shea's work during the past summer at Equip for Equality ("EFE"). During his time at EFE, Mike was an important member of our team and made significant contributions to our work. He displayed strong intellect, compassion, strong writing skills and talent for legal analysis. Mike was very enthusiastic and dedicated to the work we provide to parents in our Special Education Clinic, making it a pleasure to mentor him.

As you know, Equip for Equality's Special Education Clinic serves the entire state of Illinois and it provides free legal services for children with special education needs. EFE has four offices, three of which are small satellite offices in downstate Illinois where one or two attorneys work in each office. While at EFE, Mike worked in our Clinic in the Springfield, Illinois office. Mike displayed great self-sufficiency skills, confidence and independence in that setting.

Mike received uniformly positive reviews for his work, effort, and commitment. Mike displayed excellent research and writing skills, and showed talent in oral advocacy. He wrote well researched memos and he also analyzed many cases in a variety of topics. Mike accompanied his supervising attorney to two important settlement conferences and he played significant roles in the negotiations.

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Although Mike had completed only one year of law school prior to his internship with EFE, Mike's rich life experiences prior to law school provided him with many practical advantages over most first year law students. Mike was consistently prompt and effective in his assistance to parents who called the Clinic's Helpline. He was able to engage easily with parents' concerns, identified the issues efficiently and applied the laws to the facts.

With his familiarity with special education issues, Mike was effective in relating the facts, analyzing cases and discussing strategies in EFE case management discussions. When Mike attended a resolution session (similar to a settlement conference) with his supervising attorney for a student with autism, he offered valuable suggestions to the supervising attorney and the parents in a caucus during the five hour meeting. In a different case, a mediation, Mike offered suggestions that resulted in reaching a significant offer of settlement after the conclusion of the meeting.

Mike displayed excellent strong writing and research skills. Mike wrote two memos on the Illinois State Board of Education's policies regarding food allergies and the application of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 on students with food allergies. The memos were well-researched and very well written.

Mike's dedication to the Clinic's work was evident during his summer internship. He was a kind and caring person that parents appreciated during the Helpline calls. His excellent interpersonal skills and his consistently positive attitude made Mike an important member of our team. Equip for Equality was fortunate to have Mike intern with our Clinic and we are very grateful for Equal Justice America's support of his internship.

Sincerely,



Olga Pribyl,

Managing Attorney, Special Education Clinic