

Dear Dan,

Thank you and Equal Justice America for the opportunity to work for people I believe needed my help the most. Working at Public Counsel Law Center in Los Angeles was a challenging yet worthwhile experience that has taught me more than I bargained for. I saw multiple realms of Los Angeles that I did not know existed and will never soon forget.

Public Counsel did everything possible for the interns to learn about the various fields of public interest. I went on several tours throughout Los Angeles, ranging from a general historical tour to going and seeing how the individuals and families on Skid Row lived on a daily basis. These families were not necessarily born into poverty, but due to unfortunate circumstances, ended up there. After our tour, the interns were shown a documentary on some of the people living on Skid Row and understand that their struggles extend beyond what we had ever imagined.

The majority of my summer was spent working within the Children's Rights Project, where I worked on individual cases to secure benefits and services for children with severe developmental and physical disabilities. Most of these children had been in the foster care system since they were very young and had never seen a stable family environment. The children in the system with disabilities were seen as undesirable for many of the families looking to adopt a child due to the huge responsibility associated with the disabilities. When they finally were adopted, the expense of taking care of a child with a disability was vastly disproportionate with that of a healthy child.

One family that I had an opportunity to visit had four adoptive children. The husband had recently left his wife because he could not handle the pressures associated with caring for four children with severe disabilities. This mother was willing to let her husband walk away before she would allow any of these children to go back into the system. Her five-year-old son had multiple disabilities, including severe seizures, which many times caused him to be hospitalized. The mother spent many sleepless nights in the hospital not knowing whether her adoptive son would survive the night. As she told us about the children's new medical problems, the tears in her eyes were so overwhelming that I could not hold back my own. This mother made me realize that the only thing that one should hope for is having a healthy child because as much as it is unfair to the parent to have to go through this agony night after night, it is even less fair for the child to have to suffer this gravely. As a result of the increased seizures and her son being hospitalized, this mother needed additional hours of in-home nursing care for her other children. At a home meeting, the agency that allots the nursing hours was fighting us tooth and nail for an increase in hours, but my supervisor and I were able to state the regulations and criteria necessary that would allow for this change. As reluctant as they were, it was impossible for the agency representative to argue against the regulation.

Another family whose case I worked on consistently throughout the summer had adopted their disabled son at the age of one. Although he had been diagnosed as disabled and had met the criteria to receive certain benefits, the family was never informed of the benefits or the additional services they were entitled to receive. This family even requested re-evaluations and for additional funding because they were unable to afford this severely disabled child on their salaries. They were constantly denied and never notified the reasons for the denial. My supervisor is representing this family and suing the state agencies for the retroactive benefits that

were wrongfully denied to this child for the past fourteen years. I had to analyze every possible legal issue that could potentially be argued during trial because it is always better to be over prepared than under. I analyzed jurisdiction issues, inactive status definitions, WIC Codes and many other potential issues. As challenging as some of the research was, the work remained interesting and knowing the people I was doing the work for made it all completely worthwhile.

My experience this summer has humbling and cannot convey my gratitude enough for the opportunity to do something so meaningful.

Thank you again,

Neetu Bawa
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