

June 15, 2010

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for granting me a 2010 Equal Justice America Legal Service Fellowship. My enthusiasm for supporting the provision of legal services and representation for the poor has only been strengthened by my internship with the HIV Law Project.

The HIV Law project offers direct legal services to people living with HIV or AIDS in Manhattan and the Bronx. It provides advice and representation to clients in their day-to-day legal problems, including HIV-related confidentiality issues, housing issues, denial of financial and medical benefits, immigration law, creditor/debtor law, employment law and other family law matters. The objective is to meet the immediate legal needs of individual clients living with HIV, eliminate injustices and barriers to services and benefits, and generally improve the quality of life of people living with HIV/AIDS.

As an intern at the HIV Law Project, I researched and wrote a paper describing problems with coerced antiretroviral treatment of pregnant women and their children. The paper focuses on how such coerced treatment violates women's right to refuse medical treatment under both American and international human rights law. The purpose of the paper is to shed light on the issue, as well as emphasize that HIV positive women affected by coercive treatment policies generally make informed and rational decisions, and these decisions ought to be respected by courts and healthcare providers.

I also contributed to a project advising the New York Department of Health about the subpar and sometimes non-existent healthcare resources available to HIV positive immigrants in New York's penal and civil facilities. This was an interesting contrast to the first project given that we focused on increasing resources for HIV positive peoples rather than advocating for a more hands-off approach, like we are with coercive treatment of HIV positive pregnant women. In addition, I helped with the process of lobbying New York City council members to reject proposed budget cuts that would decrease the number of social workers and case managers available to people living with HIV and AIDS in the City. Again, this offered a stark contrast to the first project. On the one hand, I advocated for increased access to appropriate and *desired* healthcare resources, and on the other hand, I advocated for less interference because the relevant population feels they neither wanted nor needed it. All of my work at the HIV Law Project has aimed to communicate what is in the best interests of the clients as individuals and to

respect the rational decisions people make based on available and reliable information.

This fellowship permitted me to continue working to bring legal services to a largely marginalized population and remain enthusiastic about doing so. Thank you for supporting my work with the HIV Law Project. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to get in touch.

Sincerely,

Rachel E. Lappin  
Brooklyn Law School