

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13450 East Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 25, 2013

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America Fellow this summer. I was incredibly lucky to spend my summer interning at the East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) working as part of the health practice. It was a fantastic experience. I was hoping that my summer internship would allow me to learn about different areas of law, experience working in a medical-legal partnership, and develop my skills as an advocate for those in need of legal services. EBCLC provided me with the opportunity to do all of those things while surrounded by an incredibly smart, hardworking, and dedicated group of attorneys and other staff, as well as a great team of legal interns from across the country.

In addition to completing intake interviews, I worked with fifteen EBCLC clients throughout the summer. My very first assignment at EBCLC involved working with a middle school student and his mom on his special education services. There were several concerns related to his school environment and the educational services he was receiving. The student and his mother were concerned about the situation but were unsure about the next steps and their options.

My supervisor and I attended an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting with the student's mother. It was extremely valuable for her to have legal representation at this meeting. IEP meetings can be very intimidating because there are so many involved parties, often including teachers, school administrators, therapists and/or counselors, and a representative from the school district. Many parents are intimidated when surrounded by so many school officials and thus hesitant to express concerns or ask questions. By having legal representation at the meeting, this student's mother felt comfortable expressing her concerns to the team and was a strong advocate for herself and her son. I was then able to articulate some concrete steps we wanted the school and district to take to improve the situation. By the end of the meeting, we had set up a plan and timeline for improving the student's situation at school, which I continued to follow up on throughout the summer.

My experience working with this family and others demonstrated how necessary a legal advocate is in certain educational situations. Many parents are unaware of the laws in place regarding special education students and may be hesitant to question school administrators, especially if they face language barriers, do not fully understand their student's disability, or are otherwise intimidated by the process. Accordingly, a legal

advocate can be essential in ensuring that a student receives the educational services that he is entitled to by law.

In addition to special education issues, I was also lucky enough to work on immigration and public benefits cases. EBCLC has eight different practice areas, so I was able to learn about many other areas of the law that impact the low-income community by speaking with fellow interns and attorneys throughout the summer.

The supervising attorneys in the health practice were exceptional and made sure that I had great learning experiences throughout the summer. EBCLC does an incredible job of achieving their dual focused mission--serving the legal needs of the low-income community and training future attorneys to be skilled in addressing the legal needs of this community—and I am privileged to have been part of this mission during my ten weeks at EBCLC.

I very much appreciate that Equal Justice America was able to support my summer internship at EBCLC, and I am excited to begin my second year of law school with an even deeper commitment to pursuing a legal career working on behalf of those unable to afford an attorney.

Sincerely,

Rachel Nadas
American University Washington College of Law, Class of 2015