

August 16, 2008

Dear Dan Ruben:

It has been both a pleasure and a learning experience working at the Philadelphia Unemployment Compensation Project (PUP) this summer. I have been given the opportunity to learn on my feet and further gain experience working with the general public and their various needs. My job position entailed doing intake interviews where I, and my co-worker (also a Penn Law student), would take down the relevant information pertaining to an individual's case. At this point I will ask the client what stage of the appeal process they are currently in. It is necessary that the client has already filed for unemployment compensation with the PA unemployment compensation center and has either been denied, or approved and the employer is now appealing the eligibility determination. Also, I am only able to help individuals who are either appealing an original determination or a referee determination and cannot represent individuals who are appealing to the Court of Common Pleas since I am a non-legal representative. After conducting an intake interview with the client, I would write an appeal if the client has not already done so, or if they have I will begin researching the applicable law for their case in preparation for a hearing. I have only represented claimants at referee hearings thus far.

During the time I have worked for PUP, I have represented clients at referee hearings on fifteen separate occasions. Each time I have had a hearing I have been able to learn something new about the field I was working in. There is one hearing that stands out for me the most. The case does not stand out because it was the hardest, or because my client won the appeal which they did, but because I learned something about never being so sure what is going to happen in a hearing before it actually takes place. The client that I represented had been terminated for excessive absences and had been warned several times that if they continued to be absent it would result in a termination which is what ended up happening. The client came into PUP and explained her side of the story. She was upfront and honest with me, explaining that the employer had given her many write-ups and warnings regarding her absences which she had signed. I remember instructing her on the law and letting her know that it was very possible that the referee would

deny her unemployment compensation seeing that she had broken company policy without justified excuse and had done so enough times that one might see it as intentional. At the hearing the employer's representative came in looking rather confident. I silently prepared for the worst but it never came. The employer failed to bring in copies of the write-ups, the warnings of possible termination etc. He even forgot to bring the policy book my client had signed acknowledging her understanding of the employer's policies especially the absenteeism policy. The employer failed to meet his burden of proof and my client won.

This case does not stand out because it was the case that I had to think on my feet the quickest, or had to research the most, or even had to be the most creative with. It did teach me to plan for the hearing but make several back up plans in case things don't turn out the way I planned them to. This case was an example of where I learned the most. This lesson was only expounded upon during my last hearing. Last week I had a hearing with a client who I had worked with for over two weeks. The client had given me her story which I knew by heart and had prepared the appeal theory based upon. This time I even had a back up plan, and not only one but a few (one plan for if the employer showed up, one if they didn't etc.). My back up plans all failed as soon as my client started telling the referee a story I had never heard, let alone hadn't prepared for. I quickly asked the referee if I may speak to my client for a moment which was denied. The referee felt that my client did not need any help telling her story. I was forced to sit there in horror as all my back up plans and back up to the back up plans all failed. If there is one thing I will take away from this job it is the understanding that planning will only help if things go the way you had hoped plus or minus a few things, if not, you must do the best you can.

Overall, my other cases went smoothly and I was able to secure compensation for them minus another one other case where the client also told the referee another story that I had not heard nor prepared for. Many of the clients I had were mentally ill or illiterate which made my time helping them more difficult but in the end made my experience far more rewarding. There was one client who could not express himself. After trying different ways of getting his story out of him, I figured out that drawing pictures was the best way. The client drew his story and I would draw out my questions as I spoke.

Working at PUP has been by far the most rewarding experience out of all my public interest experience since my clients have been the most appreciative of my help. My work here has been intellectually stimulating and I looked forward each day to coming into the office to help whoever may walk in or whatever clients I had scheduled for the day. Without funding from EJA I would of never been able to afford living this summer nor would I have been able to take such a wonderful internship. Thank you for your kindness and for providing me with an opportunity of a life time.

Thank you,

Samantha Munro

Penn Law Class of 2010