

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I wanted to say how grateful I am for the opportunity to receive financial assistance from Equal Justice America to pursue my summer internship in the public interest field. As a first generation law student it has meant a lot to me that your organization sees the value in funding law students' work in the public interest field. This summer I had the honor and privilege of working with the amazing folks at the Education Law Center here in Philadelphia. As an intern at ELC I was tasked with helping to manage the statewide help hotline, doing research for ongoing litigation and public policy, and brainstorming innovative ways to push forward the mission of the Education Law Center. It was an invaluable experience and further solidified my commitment to public interest and helping low-income communities.

Managing the hotline was especially rewarding as I had the chance to interview clients, research their issues, and try to help students receive the education they are legally entitled to. I heard calls from all over the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania about children being denied their right to education. Disproportionately we saw Black students, students of color, and differently abled students consistently being denied the services and tools that would allow them to flourish in classrooms and access the education they so desperately need. It was heartbreaking to hear stories of children being turned away from schools, being abruptly expelled with no options, and children as young as 5 years old being suspended in rampantly used exclusionary practices. All of these issues have a tremendous impact on young learners and feed the school to prison pipeline indiscriminately taking chances away from the most vulnerable children who need access to education the most. My work at the ELC reminded me of the crucial role education has played in changing the course of my life and allowing me to pursue law school. Too often children of color are tossed aside and ignored when all they need is access to resources to improve their life

chances. Hearing the stories from clients about their children being abruptly expelled without reasons, or children as young as 5 years old being suspended and excluded from classrooms really solidified for me the importance of advocating for low-income communities who's rights are so often trampled with no recourse.

The opportunity to do research was also incredibly rewarding, as I was able to write about novel legal theories for assuring equal funding for schools across the Commonwealth. Currently ELC has a pending lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for inadequately funding schools across the state. A win in this realm would change everything for current and future students of the Pennsylvania public school system who are currently being deprived of the education they deserve. To be a part of such important legal work really taught me a lot about the intersections between policy and direct services and how the two inform and shape each other.

Again I am incredibly grateful to have been chosen as an EJA summer fellow and will treasure this experience for the rest of my legal career, thank you so much for the opportunity!

Best,

Rafaela Uribe

Temple Law Class of 2019