

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Dan Ruben,

This past summer, I worked at the University of Michigan Law School's Unemployment Insurance Clinic. I was moved by this experience because I could help clients directly as lead counsel in cases. As a native of Michigan, I was motivated to work hard for the people of my home state.

Our supervising attorneys gave us full responsibility on all cases. We chose case strategy, spoke with clients, and acted as first-chair during hearings. This was a very rewarding experience for an aspiring litigator—but the most important thing was helping people in a time of need.

The unemployment appeals process and difficult separations mean that most clients come to the clinic frustrated. They do not understand what the determinations mean, but they know what it means if they are denied benefits. Many clients needed the unemployment benefits just to get by. I feel grateful to have helped several clients through this process.

One hearing and one client stand out. The client was fired from his job in a warehouse, and the employer alleged misconduct. If the client committed misconduct on the job, then he would not get benefits. This matter went to a telephone hearing in front of an administrative law judge. The employer was on the line with the client's former supervisor and submitted several write-ups as exhibits to try and prove misconduct.

When it was our turn to present evidence, I had the opportunity to conduct the direct examination of the client. I asked him questions and let him tell his side of the story. After the hearing, we received a favorable decision—the client was not disqualified for benefits.

I got to call the client and tell him the news. He was very excited and very grateful. He told me that this meant a lot to him because he was struggling and if the unemployment agency tried to collect restitution, he would struggle to pay his bills. He thanked me and the clinic repeatedly for the work that we did.

The above client is one example of my very rewarding experience this past summer. We like to say that unemployment benefits are for people who are unemployed through no fault of their own. That is what happened to this client. He did his best, but the employer fired him. His victory was the result of a lot of hard work. That phone call and that hearing exemplify why I came to law school: to help people through a difficult situation. I couldn't have asked for a better summer experience.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Tigay
University of Michigan Law School
Class of 2018