

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I wanted to thank you for the support of Equal Justice America while I was pursuing my summer internship at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago (LAF). I was honored to receive a 2015 summer fellowship from Equal Justice America. Your assistance made it possible for me to work at LAF.

I had an incredible experience working in the Public Benefits Practice Group. Not only did I learn a significant amount about benefits and administrative law, but I witnessed firsthand the tremendous need for direct civil legal services for those living in poverty. Navigating the complex web of rules, regulations, and procedures that surround public assistance programs is extremely challenging. For claimants who are contesting the termination of their benefits, alleged overpayments, or undergoing complicated redetermination hearings, appearing before an agency *pro se* is often a frustrating and daunting experience. Since many of these individuals and families rely on these benefits to supplement their monthly income or for medical assistance, the stakes are very high. Our clients are impoverished and often disabled, and they have nowhere else to turn in these situations. The work being done by LAF's Public Benefits Group is thus of the utmost importance – without LAF's assistance, many claimants would not be able to present their cases effectively before an agency and receive the crucial benefits that they are guaranteed under law.

I learned a great deal about how to manage the litigation process and to advocate effectively while working at LAF. I was involved in every step of the litigation process. I observed or conducted the initial intake interview of the client, addressed his or her questions about the case, and reviewed and developed any evidence that was missing from the record. I frequently outlined our legal theory of the case after conducting research on the applicable law and legal standards, drafted our hearing brief, and attempted to reach a settlement with the agency before a hearing. It is one thing to learn about the litigation process in the abstract in a civil procedure class, but it is an entirely different experience to actively manage a case. It was an exciting and rewarding experience to learn how to litigate through such incredibly important cases for our clients.

Moreover, my supervising attorney, Amy Marinacci, was a great mentor over the summer. She entrusted me with carrying out very substantive tasks and managing several cases while she was out of the office. It was a pleasure observing her advocate for our clients at hearings before administrative law judges. Despite her busy schedule, she taught me about administrative law, issues faced by the low income community in receiving benefits, and effective lawyering and

advocacy. All of the other attorneys at LAF were equally generous with their time, and I appreciated the opportunity to work with them on their cases.

I also wanted to share a case that I worked on from start to finish through the summer. I helped conduct the intake of a client who had her cash benefits terminated by the Illinois Department of Human Services. As a single mother who had just finished school and looking for a job, she was relying on these benefits to provide for her family. Due to circumstances out of her control, she was unable to comply with a reporting requirement. This resulted in the agency sanctioning her by terminating all of her benefits. This was despite the fact that she was complying with every other requirement while attending vocational school. Through my investigation of her case, I learned that the agency applied this drastic sanction because they alleged that there were prior unrelated sanctions in her case from almost ten years ago. Over the following weeks, we learned that the agency could not prove that they had undergone the proper notice and sanctioning procedures for these alleged prior sanctions. Because of this, we argued that the agency could not legally sustain the current sanction level.

We were able to resolve this client's issue at a pre-hearing conference, where the agency agreed to apply a lesser sanction which resulted in the full reinstatement of the client's much needed cash benefits. Given the procedural nature of our argument and the fact that our client was repeatedly told by the agency to waive her right to an appeal, it was fortunate that she did file an appeal and speak with us about her case. She is now fully receiving her benefits. Cases such as this one truly demonstrate the important work being done by LAF and the importance of securing adequate representation in civil cases

Again, I had a wonderful experience working at LAF, and I am grateful for the support of Equal Justice America. I better appreciate the significant need for legal services for the indigent community and the professional responsibility that lawyers have in giving back to the community. I hope to be engaged with pro bono work such as this over the course of my career.

Best,

Shiva Jayaraman
The University of Chicago Law School, '17