

October 19, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer, I worked in the Energy Unit of Community Legal Services in Philadelphia with the assistance of an Equal Justice America grant. Shouldering my own caseload, I had to both respond to the crises many of my clients faced and manage their expectations. My clients' needs were often as serious as they were cumulative: several had been without access to running water for close to a year, others needed utility service to stabilize their medical conditions, and some were at risk of losing their children. Through diligence and patience, I was able to triage needs, address concerns, and advise clients on realistic utility solutions. The experience was simultaneously thrilling and humbling, and I plan to use it to provide effective legal counsel as I move forward into my career as a public interest attorney.

My work in the Energy Unit also forced me to be both tenacious and resourceful to resolve my client's cases. For example, one of my clients' water was shut-off for seven months due to a mistake made by the water department. In the absence of viable legal options, I appealed to a deputy commissioner of the department. After several weeks of persistent advocacy, I was able to initiate an investigation and get the client's water restored.

A common element in my cases was to help clients navigate the complicated programs and dispute mechanisms involved in challenging a utility service termination. One example was a sick, elderly client who faced shut-off because, unbeknownst to her, the meter had malfunctioned, resulting in a two thousand dollar bill she could not afford to pay. In response, I explained the administrative dispute process to the client, hand delivered her dispute request to ensure it was timely, and met with a representative of the utility to review her account. In our meeting, the representative recognized an error had been made and agreed to adjust her bill, saving the client from potential bankruptcy.

My experience as an advocate with CLS has equipped me with the ability to handle multiple cases with families who are facing difficult choices, help them navigate a complex administrative process, and advocate forcefully for access to quality and timely services. Thank you very much for the assistance that made this opportunity a reality.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. McGrath". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sean" and last name "McGrath" clearly legible.

Sean McGrath
University of Pennsylvania Law School
Class of 2016



COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
OF PHILADELPHIA

October 20, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I had the pleasure of supervising Sean McGrath as an intern in the Energy Unit at Community Legal Services during the 2015 summer.

CLS' Energy Unit is comprised of a staff of four attorneys and one paralegal. The Energy Unit seeks to assist low income Philadelphia families in maintaining affordable utility service in a variety of ways. We represent individual utility customers in service disputes with utilities, utility collection matters and other matters affecting utility service. We represent low income customers' interests in rate cases and other proceedings at the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission and represent the interests of all residential customers in Philadelphia municipal water and gas utility proceedings. Finally, we engage in community education, strategic litigation, policy advocacy, and legislative advocacy with the goal of increasing our clients' access to utility service on affordable terms and conditions.

With such a small staff, and our clients' overwhelming need for assistance, summer and school-year legal interns provide us increased ability to assess and intervene to maintain and restore life-essential utility service for low-income families. They also provide us an opportunity to dedicate resources to new and further advocacy/education initiatives. Sean effectively and enthusiastically undertook individual cases, allowing us to assist more families, and a new advocacy/education initiative, which provides us further tools to assist low income utility customers.

I was consistently impressed with Sean's attention to detail and diligence in meeting client needs. I was similarly impressed with how quickly he assessed client options and sought out feedback and direction to advance his cases. With his earliest Energy Unit cases, Sean realized that one of the biggest challenges our clients face is navigating utility bureaucracy to obtain all the necessary information to exercise their rights to restore or maintain essential service. In truth, such a feat is hard even for practicing attorneys.

Sean plunged into this work, reaching out directly to utility representatives, and establishing himself as a strong advocate with the knowledge and tenacity to persuade his adversaries.

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October 20, 2015

Page 2

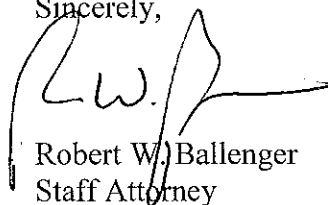
Beyond solving these immediate needs to assist clients in remaining safely in their homes, however, Sean recognized that a system that requires the level of intervention he needed to provide is a system in need of change.

His larger advocacy project involved drafting practice materials for representation in utility due process hearings, a forum through which system change may begin to be made. We are currently exploring how to train students at local law schools and other legal services organizations to use these materials to represent low-income water customers. Accordingly, Sean's work may form the basis for additional resources and representation for low income customers.

Sean was a great team player, and a meaningful collaborator. He is fun and engaging to work with, and has a sincere commitment to obtaining results for his clients.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RWB', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert W. Ballenger
Staff Attorney