

September 6, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I received an Equal Justice America Fellowship to work in the Special Education Clinic at Equip for Equality (“EFE”), Illinois’ private protection and advocacy organization. I am thankful that Equal Justice America made this summer internship possible because it was integral to my learning and growth as a future attorney.

The Special Education Clinic both provides representation to parents and children and self-advocacy resources to families who call their helpline. The clinic receives about 800 calls a year on the helpline, and a majority of the callers receive self-advocacy resources from a law student intern, with the assistance of one of four staff attorneys. Because there is a relatively small staff for the volume of calls the clinic gets, the student interns provide much-needed support and enable the clinic to provide assistance to a greater number of families.

This summer I worked on a total of 36 cases and provided services ranging from providing fact sheets to writing complaints for administrative proceedings. Some of the work that I did involved providing information to parents on what their basic educational rights were. Many parents call EFE’s helpline because their child is having difficulty in school and they suspect their child may have a disability, but they don’t know how to get assistance for their student. The first step in getting help is usually writing a letter to the school requesting an evaluation of their student, which many parents can do independently once they receive that information.

We also received calls from parents whose children had disabilities and an individualized education plans (“IEP”) stating the resources they were entitled to receive under federal law, but the school was not following the IEP. In one case, “Sandra” was going to a summer school program but was told that she wouldn’t be receiving the services in her IEP, and her mom called EFE’s helpline. After speaking with her mother, EFE suggested writing a letter to the school and monitoring the situation throughout the summer. As a result of Sandra’s mother’s self-advocacy efforts, Sandra received much needed support in her summer school program.

In another case, I worked on a state complaint for a child who had been found eligible to receive special education services, but was not receiving the stated services. EFE had taken the case for representation because “Stanley’s” mother had tried self-advocacy attempts, but was unsuccessful in getting the right services for her son. The complaint

was filed at the end of my internship and I'm still waiting to see how the issue is resolved. It was a great experience to be a part of the research and writing process of representation in the state administrative process.

One additional benefit to the summer internship at EFE was getting to be part of their case acceptance meetings ("CAM"). When we received helpline calls that we thought would be a good case for representation, interns and attorneys would present cases at CAM and get feedback on legal strategy and also discuss whether or not to take the case. It was a good experience to learn about the factors that the clinic considered in deciding whether or not to represent. As an intern, I also got to participate in the meeting and offer my opinion on the case.

I want to thank Equal Justice America for providing funding for my internship this summer. It enabled me to work at EFE and get additional experience representing children and their parents in educational issues. As a third year law student, I'm currently applying for fellowships to fund a public interest position after I graduate with EFE's Special Education Clinic. I hope to provide these services to low-income students in sections of Chicago where EFE does not currently receive many calls. I plan to provide both outreach and legal advocacy services to ensure that more students with disabilities can receive the free and appropriate public education to which they are entitled to by federal and state law.

Many thanks,

Verity Sandell
Loyola University Chicago School of Law
JD Candidate, 2012



Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities

SELF-ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE ★ LEGAL SERVICES ★ DISABILITY RIGHTS EDUCATION ★ PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY ★ ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS

August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Verity Sandell, a law student at Loyola University, received funding from Equal Justice America and worked as a legal intern with us at Equip for Equality. We appreciate that Equal Justice America provided Verity with funding, as Verity has been an excellent intern.

Verity's legal research and writing skills are particularly strong. Verity drafted an Illinois State Board of Education class complaint on behalf of a class of students with disabilities who are experiencing a delay in placement when Chicago Public Schools agrees to place the students in a new school setting. Verity's first draft of this class complaint was so strong that the attorney supervising her will need to make very few edits. It is rare to see such strong legal writing skills from someone who has not yet graduated from law school. Verity's legal research resulted in her finding arguments that the supervising attorney did not know existed. Her research has strengthened our legal claims and will help us provide the clearest arguments possible in order to secure our clients the placements they need in order to be successful at school.

In addition to Verity's strong research and writing skills, Verity has an excellent rapport with our clients. Verity's experience as a teacher prior to law school prepared her to interact effectively with students with disabilities and their parents. Many of our callers are agitated when they call our Helpline. It can be difficult to focus our callers on the educational issues their children are experiencing. Oftentimes, parents just want someone to listen to them vent. Verity has a tremendous ability to redirect agitated parents and get to the root of the reason that the parent called our Helpline. Parents are comfortable working with Verity, and Verity's legal advice is concrete and in parent-friendly terms. Verity's ability to empathize with our Helpline callers is an asset to our Special Education Clinic. Many of our interns get rattled when a caller is rude or crying on the phone. Verity is able to effectively address the educational issues of even the most difficult caller.

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Verity participated in our weekly case assessment meetings in which we discuss our most difficult cases. She did a great job of developing innovative strategies to address novel legal problems. Her contributions to the conversation were always insightful. Sometimes we discuss a case and determine that we need additional research in order to determine our best legal strategy. Verity often offered to conduct additional research, even though she had her own heavy caseload.

Verity is incredibly conscientious. She always completed her assignments in a timely manner and checked in with her supervising attorney daily to ensure that she was meeting all deadlines and provided the appropriate legal advice.

We are so pleased with Verity's work with us this summer, that we are sponsoring her for a Skadden Fellowship. If Verity secures a Skadden Fellowship, we know she will do great work on behalf of students with disabilities. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to work with Verity this summer and for Equal Justice America's generous funding.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'OP' with a stylized flourish.

Olga Pribyl

Managing Attorney, Special Education Clinic