

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to express my deep appreciation for the additional funding from Equal Justice America to support my 2018 summer internship at the Center for Children’s Advocacy (CCA) in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Thanks in part to EJA, I was able to experience working as a public interest lawyer for children and grow my legal skills.

CCA is the largest children’s legal rights organization in New England. CCA provides legal representation to low-income children and systemic reform throughout Connecticut. As a legal intern, I had the opportunity to work on a variety of different projects with diverse attorneys. I experienced client interaction, legal research, and brief writing and shadowed attorneys in court, meetings, and trainings. The four attorneys in my office specialized in child protection, education, juvenile delinquency, and immigration, and I also worked with an attorney at the Yale New Haven Hospital.

I drafted several motions, including petitions to Probate Court for Special Immigrant Juvenile findings, an appeal for denial of Social Security Disability Benefits, and requests for due process hearings concerning special education services. I also participated in strategy meetings and negotiations related to a potential lawsuit regarding special education services for non-English speaking families. I worked with clients in various contexts, including intake meetings, special education meetings, and home visits.

One case which stood out was an appeal for social security disability benefits. Our four-year-old client suffered from sickle cell disease which caused several complications including frequent pain crises. Sickle cell predominantly affects African American people, and entrenched racism means the listing is restrictive. Prior to enlisting our help, our client’s mother found it taxing to wade through the administrative bureaucracy of the social security administration, and had been denied benefits several times. I reviewed the client’s medical record and drafted a brief supporting her appeal, which the attorney edited and submitted. We also met with the client and her mother to prepare them for the hearing. We will not receive the administrative judge’s decision for several months, but we are optimistic.

The most important thing I learned from working with CCA is how to treat children as clients. An attorney’s role is to speak for their client and to represent their interests. It is vital to communicate with one’s client to find out what they want, and this is no different with children. Although it requires a different communication style, it is even more important to take the time to adequately explain legal problems to children and fully listen to their response. This is a skill which will carry forward throughout my legal career. I am deeply appreciative of EJA’s assistance in gaining the skills I need to be a successful public interest lawyer.

Sincerely,

Lauren Faris
Columbia University School of Law