

August 29, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I had the amazing experience of completing my Equal Justice America Fellowship at Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services. Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services is an organization that provides legal assistance to low income families and individuals residing in their service area. The organization specializes in housing and benefit legal services, but also works with issues in elder law and mental health rights. During my ten weeks at Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, I had the opportunity to work on at least ten different cases involving housing and mental health rights. While improving my research and writing skills, I was able to serve clients who truly needed legal assistance. A few of the cases I worked on are on-going, but I hope to continue my work on those cases through volunteer work at the organization this academic quarter and see positive outcomes.

The first client I had the opportunity to work with was in the midst of being evicted from his apartment in public housing due to a suicide attempt. This client had a history of mental illness, and after becoming distraught with fear, he attempted suicide by diving off the second floor stairwell of his apartment building. As a result, he cracked his skull open and lost sight in one eye. Our client had suffered through this traumatic event and the housing authority's solution was to evict him for unsafe behavior. I negotiated with the Housing Authority, and we came to an Agreement for Judgment that our client could remain in his apartment if he agreed to abstain from life-threatening activities in common areas of the housing facility. This combined with the mental health counseling he is receiving are allowing him to have a stable living situation while being treated for his mental health needs.

The last case I began working on was for a woman who had suffered through many Americans with Disabilities Act and other violations while admitted to a mental health facility. This client was legally blind and was unable to have her service dog with her during her admittance. She was also not allowed to use assistive technology that helped her read while in the facility. She was told to sign paperwork without being able to read it or having it read to her. Due to her particular diagnosis, the staff at the mental health facility told her they could not treat her, but refused to release her. Holding a patient without a treatment plan is a violation of Massachusetts law. I drafted a complaint to the Department of Mental Health for our client, laying out the violations that occurred at the mental health facility. Hopefully, through this

complaint process, the Department of Mental Health will ensure this facility is not able to violate the rights of patients.

My Fellowship was full of stories of helping people, like the aforementioned clients, who would not have been able to stay in their homes or help future mental health patients had it not been for this organization.

Sincerely,

Janelle Jordan
Northeastern University School of Law
Class of 2016