

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing this letter to tell you about my experience working as an EJA Fellow. The organization I worked with was the Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services. During my fellowship, I assisted 11 clients with legal issues that they had, and I will tell you about a couple of those clients in this letter. The names of the clients listed below have been changed so that their privacy is protected.

My first client, named Sam, was a middle-aged single-mother raising an 11 year-old daughter. Both she and her daughter suffer from extensive mental health issues, and Sam's issues were severe enough to prevent her from working. In Sam's case, the Social Security Administration (SSA) alleged that she failed to report \$75k in income during one month. After some investigative work to develop Sam's financial history, I was able to show SSA that she never had that money. I was also able to show that she was manipulated into letting a dubious character use her account, which is why SSA thought she had the money in the first place. As such, SSA ruled to restore her benefits, and now she will have some money to help care for herself and her daughter. Winning for Sam was one of the most important things I have ever done, and it taught me that systems, despite their flaws, biases, and indifferent cruelty, can be used for the benefit of the least advantaged members of society so long as one knows how to speak their language.

Another client, named Dee, was a young single mother raising two young children. Dee recently moved to the United States from an East African country. She moved to the west originally, but while there she had constant issues with having enough money to care for her children. She decided to move closer to family so that she would have more stable childcare. However, soon after she arrived in Massachusetts, she was kicked out and she and her children had no place to live. I assisted Dee and her children in being placed in a homeless shelter (we were able to have her placed in a shelter the same day she approached the Department of Transitional Assistance with her problem), and at this moment Dee is working very hard to position herself so that she can take care of her family without state assistance. Winning for Dee and her children taught me that people want to help other people. She was able to be placed in a shelter within six hours of arriving at DTA. Before going in, I had heard stories of people being forced to wait for days before being placed in a shelter. However, I was able to express my client's situation well enough that she was placed in a shelter well before the end of the business day.

The officials at DTA could have dragged the process on, but they chose to provide quick and effective relief.

The lesson I learned that will stick with me is that the tools that we use to help low-income clients are not particularly complicated, but do form real barriers for people who need the help of legal aid. The public services that clients received were from various agencies, and in almost every case there was not a uniform means of communication across the various agencies. This means that our clients have to call on average three or four different overextended agencies in order to address all of their benefits issues. Because these agencies are overextended, they have labyrinthine customer service systems that require people to be calling a single agency for several hours at any given time. Our clients do not have that kind of time, and many of them, even if they have the time, lack the ability to successfully navigate those structures. There is very little that we do that our clients, in an ideal world, could not do for themselves. While living in an imperfect world ensures our employment, it also reflects policy decisions that were made that have the effect of further disenfranchising already disenfranchised people. Our clients are faced with impossible decisions every day, and we as a society have determined that the class in which those clients belongs should remain dejected and oppressed by those decisions. By not actively combatting their issues, we facilitate their oppression. However, I must thank you and Equal Justice America for allowing me to contribute to the fight, even if it was only for a limited time. I know that these issues will be a guiding force in my life, no matter what road I take.

Regards,

Aaron Harmaty
Notre Dame Class of 2019



GREATER BOSTON
LEGAL SERVICES
...and justice for all
Cambridge & Somerville Legal Services Office

August 3, 2017

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

RE: Aaron Harmaty – EJA fellow

Dear Dan Ruben:

I am writing this letter as an evaluation of Aaron Harmaty's fellowship at the Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) office of Greater Boston Legal Services. Aaron was a full time legal intern in my office under my direct supervision during the summer of 2017. In this context he performed all aspects of representation for low income residents of Cambridge and Somerville seeking assistance with housing and public benefits matters.

During the course of his representation Aaron performed intake interviews, on-going client contact, legal research (regulatory, statutory and case based), factual investigation, legal drafting, administrative advocacy and negotiations with opposing counsel. He has been a highly effective advocate and a pleasure to work with.

Aaron is very bright and highly dedicated to achieving the goals of his client. He is diligent, can work independently and is good "on his feet." During his time at CASLS Aaron successfully helped a homeless immigrant family that had been previously denied shelter to get this denial overturned and to access shelter, assisted a low income tenant in getting compensation for her water bills that had accrued while a faulty water meter was measuring her water use, and assisted multiple clients in obtaining or retaining critical benefits such as Supplemental Income Security (SSI) benefits and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). He was able to assist a client in getting many thousands of dollars in a claimed overpayment in SSI benefits waived and in getting her on-going benefits reinstated.

Aaron's skills and substantive knowledge base developed nicely during his time at CASLS and he was a tremendous addition to our office. We simply could not have represented the same number of clients in need of representation if Aaron was not here. Aaron really seemed to enjoy his time at CASLS. It was apparent that the difficulties our client's faced moved him deeply and perhaps at times were slightly overwhelming. In addition to his individual representation he enjoyed observing and engaging in policy work and attending trainings on a range of substantive legal issues.

I know that Aaron will go on to a great career in the law and to excel in whatever employment he

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ultimately seeks. I hope that he feels that he learned and experienced a lot during his time here at CASLS.

Sincerely,

Ellen Shachter
Senior Attorney
Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services