

August 30, 2011

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

First, I would like to thank you and your organization for the grant to work at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) this summer. It was my first true legal internship and I cannot imagine having a better experience. Although I was dedicated to working at a public interest organization this summer, the Equal Justice America grant eased the burden that an otherwise unpaid internship places on a law student. So, thank you again for helping me realize my goal of working in public interest law.

On my first day of work, my supervisor, Nancy, gave me a warm welcome, then immediately launched into instructions for my first project. A client had an administrative hearing for her disability benefits appeal and I needed to read through her 1000+ page record to help prepare for the hearing. This was hour one of my new legal job.

The phrase "hit the ground running" was certainly applicable to my work with GBLS, but I never felt overwhelmed or undue pressure regarding my assignments. Nancy was a wonderful mentor for many reasons, but communication was chief among them. We checked in almost daily about how cases and projects were going, what the next steps were, and questions I had. She had an open-door policy that allowed me to push myself to find answers, but also go to her if I was confused or needed clarification.

Over my ten weeks with GBLS, I handled sixteen different clients. My tasks ranged from simple research questions, to client interviews, to drafting complex memoranda for Social Security disability appeals. I also attended administrative hearings, went to related health and disability workshops, and learned how to communicate effectively with clients both via phone and letter. As I said before, this was my first legal internship, and I had much to learn. Greater Boston Legal Services provided an encouraging and educational environment in which I could ask questions, learn by doing, and follow the examples of my superiors. It was a well-rounded, enjoyable summer internship that confirmed my love of the law and inspired me to continue to work with public interest organizations.

My clients ranged in age, gender, ethnicity, and legal issue. The only common denominator was low economic status. Over the summer, my appreciation for the struggles many of our community member's have in their daily lives only grew. I was constantly encouraged not just by the work GBLS was doing, but by the strength of our clients. So many of the individuals that I worked with inspired me each day. For most, their legal issues regarding health insurance or social security, were just

one of many challenges they were facing. Although I sometimes felt powerless, it was wonderful to help them with the issues they presented. I knew that every effort I made for my clients could help make their lives a little easier, and that compelled me to work even harder.

One particular client comes to mind; he struggled with mental illness and was receiving disability benefits. He was also attempting to work part time. Social Security had miscounted his income and reduced his monthly benefits accordingly. My task was to sort through four years of financial records and pay stubs to determine where the miscounts occurred; and to accompany my client to the Social Security office to try and remedy the errors without having to appeal their prior decision and attend a hearing. Over a few weeks, I discovered that Social Security had improperly counted my client's wages for sick and vacation days as earned income. In counting those wages, his total earned income seemed much greater than it was. I took the proper documentation to the local Social Security office and they agreed to re-calculate the benefits and issue a new ruling. This process took place over a matter of weeks (as opposed to the year-long process of appealing and having a hearing). The result was that my client received the proper amount of benefits, thousands more than he was getting over just a few years.

As I said, this internship was the best first legal job I could imagine because of the clients, the co-workers and, in particular, my supervisor. Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to accept a job with Greater Boston Legal Services as an in-debt law student and not think twice about the financial ramifications. I loved every minute of my work and strove to put that passion and effort into aiding each of my clients.

Sincerely,

Sarah Young
Northeastern University School of Law
2013 Candidate for Juris Doctor