

October 5, 2017

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 Boundary Rd # 204B
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Because of the generous support of the Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship, I was able to spend my summer supporting inmates at North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services (NCPLS). Without the assistance of NCPLS, many of these individuals would be forced to navigate a complicated and sophisticated legal system alone. Through this work, I gained and improved many practical skills, but more importantly, I was immersed in the intersections of race, poverty, and disability in our criminal justice system.

This summer, I spent time in places most people avoid. A fellow intern and I drove nearly three hours to a prison accessible only by back roads in a rural county of the state where livestock chickens outnumber humans 200 to 1. In this far-flung prison, our client spent most of her days in solitary protective custody because her gender identity put her at risk in this men's prison. As we explained the content of the civil lawsuit brief the NCPLS attorneys had drafted, our client shared her frustration not just at her present circumstances but at the injustices she felt she had suffered for years in prison.

NCPLS also represents individuals who have been brought back into custody after violations of their post-release supervision. I got to visit and counsel three of these clients at the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women. One woman in particular stands out. By her own admission and our observations, she was struggling in the facility and desperately needed mental health treatment that she could not get in prison. The parole commissioner who presided over the client's hearing voted for a 90-day confinement, but the two parole commissioners not present at the client's hearing who reviewed only documents and a brief summary of the hearing effectively overruled the other commissioner, making the ultimate decision to fully revoke her release for the maximum of nine months. I researched case law related to due process rights in post-release revocation hearings. The results of this research were used to challenge the full revocation. The client's revocation was revised to a 90-day revocation—only three more days by the time the revised decision was released.

In addition to my in-person interactions with clients in North Carolina's prisons, I was able to support many clients in their post-conviction appeals through research. I was especially lucky to be involved in a case seeking relief for a client who had been unconstitutionally sentenced to life in prison without the possibility as parole as a minor, who many felt may even be innocent. I wrote a memo analyzing a witness affidavit for potential hearsay exceptions in case the affidavit needed to be admitted if the witness did not show up for an evidentiary hearing. This witness was key to potentially exonerating our client.

A few weeks after my internship ended, four of the NCPLS attorneys came to my law school to support and supervise a pro bono project that I was facilitating for a group of UNC's first-year students. The students were tasked with responding to inmate letters that the school received. I was gratified to work with the attorneys as colleagues, guiding other students through legal work that I had done all summer.

The Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship is an incomparable resource for law students like me committed to public interest work serving low-wealth communities and clients. Because of the fellowship, I was able to keep up with bills and afford to commute to my internship location 25 miles from my home. I thank you and the organization for investing in me and in the representation of inmates across North Carolina.

Sincerely,

Megan Bishop

University of North Carolina School of Law '18

NORTH CAROLINA PRISONER LEGAL SERVICES, INC.

Post Office Box 25397
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611
1110 Wake Forest Rd., Raleigh, NC 27604
(919) 856-2200
Facsimile Transmission (919) 856-2223

August 22, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I write concerning the summer internship Megan Bishop completed with my organization. I am the intern coordinator for North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services (NCPLS) and had the pleasure of working with Megan throughout her time with us. She did an excellent job.

NCPLS is primarily focused on criminal post-conviction work. We review the convictions of any state inmate who requests a review. We litigate any legal issue which has a reasonable chance of lowering an inmate's sentence or overturning their conviction. In addition to our criminal work, we handle civil issues related to conditions of confinement within NC prisons facilities.

Megan was an active participant in all of these areas during her time with us. She was constantly involved in legal research and the evaluation of client files and concerns. She drafted several outstanding legal memos on topics such as the possible homicidal and suicidal effects of Paxil, the implications of Sixth Amendment right to counsel on legal mail, and hearsay exceptions in a witness affidavit. She also drafted a closing letter explaining the way North Carolina courts have addressed calculations of drug amounts in mixtures and a consent order correcting a client's sentence.

Megan traveled across the state with other interns and attorneys, both to prisons and court hearings. She prepared clients for several post-release revocation hearings at the local jail and received rave reviews from the faculty for her work as a witness at the National Institute of Trial Attorneys' Anthony Amsterdam Capital Post-Conviction Skills Seminar at Duke University.

Megan was one of the best summer interns we've had at NCPLS, and we are glad for the support she received from your organization. Do not hesitate to contact us for any additional feedback.

Sincerely,

Ben Finholt
Staff Attorney