

September 18, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I spent my summer working for low-income residents in the District of Columbia as part of Legal Aid Society of DC's Public Benefits Unit. For more than 80 years, Legal Aid Society of DC has been committed to "making justice real" for its clients through direct service and advocacy for systematic change.

The Public Benefits Unit helps low-income individuals access benefits and resolve issues related to critical safety net programs. I worked with clients who had problems with their Social Security Insurance and Social Security Disability Insurance benefits. On several occasions, I spent hours on the phone with the Social Security Administration advocating for clients and trying to obtain information for clients about overpayments, termination of benefits, and the status of applications. My internship often involved extensive research as I learned to navigate the complicated rules that govern the Social Security system. My work also included writing a brief for the administrative appeal of a homeless veteran with mental health issues who had been denied SSI benefits.

My experience with one client exemplified the need for legal representation and assistance navigating the complex world of disability benefits. This individual had been receiving disability but his benefits had been unexpectedly terminated after Social Security told him they had overpaid him. Though he had already attempted to resolve the issue on his own and had already excellently articulated his concerns, the problems he faced were so complex and the Social Security system was so overwhelmed with similar requests that the unique services offered by Legal Aid Society were required to resolve the issue. After extensive research, I wrote letters with detailed requests citing specific regulations, met with the client, and spoke directly with Social Security representatives. As a result, this client received back payment for the missed payment and his benefits were reinstated. Attempting to work with Social Security on his own had caused him great stress and frustration. He felt financially insecure and stressed by the situation. Unfortunately, his experience was a common one. Many low-income individuals often face insurmountable obstacles of bureaucracy, overwhelmed local offices, and complicated regulations when they try to navigate the Social Security system on their own.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela Disney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela Disney

Law School: American University, Washington College of Law
Anticipated Year of Graduation: 2015