

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

August 18, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you very much for awarding me with an Equal Justice America Fellowship this summer. My EJA Fellowship supported my work in the Elder, Health and Disability Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services.

When I finished my first year of law school, one of my main goals for a summer internship was to gain hands-on experience working directly with clients. My experience at GBLS far exceeded my expectation and hope for that. I was given my own clients, and within my first couple of days was working independently on their cases. I was also given an array of different types of cases, including social security retirement and disability appeals, MassHealth appeals, and appeals regarding other public benefits.

My first client was appealing the termination of his disability benefits, and I represented him at a Reconsideration hearing in front of a Disability Determination Services Hearing Officer. The client had initially been awarded disability after being hit by an automobile, and later had his benefits terminated due to apparent physical improvement. However, the client had suffered from various mental health issues and severe depression for years before and after his accident, which were not taken into account during his initial application for benefits. I was able to help this client explain and express that to the hearing officer through testimony and medical records, and the officer agreed to have him evaluated by a psychiatrist in order to further evaluate his disability claim.

One of the highlights of my time at GBLS was representing an elderly client in front of an Administrative Law Judge, appealing her denial of disability benefits. I conducted legal research regarding disability standards, and wrote a memorandum of law in support of my client which we submitted to the Judge ahead of the hearing. We had only received this client's case a couple weeks before the hearing, so it required a lot of work within a small window of time. Additionally, the client was out of the country up until the day before her hearing. I was able to meet with her the day before the hearing, and schedule last-minute appointments with her physician in order to get the documentation of her disability that I needed. After hours of prepping, I was able to elicit compelling testimony from my client at the hearing, and the judge and vocational expert agreed that she was unable to do her past work, and is unable to transfer skills to any other work. Though we have not yet received an official decision from the Judge, we believe the hearing was successful and that my client will be awarded the benefits she needs.

That hearing was an example of my most cherished experience during my summer at GBLS: advocating for those who are unable to advocate for themselves, and telling their story in a way that they may not necessarily be able to tell on their own.

My experiences this summer have furthered my interest in working to serve poor communities as an attorney. I am very grateful for my time at GBLS, and especially to Equal Justice America for making it possible.

Sincerely,

Freda Spencer
Northeastern University School of Law 2019