

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

August 24, 2018

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to thank Equal Justice America (EJA) for supporting my summer internship and providing me with the opportunity to pursue public interest work. I began my summer with Partnership for Children's Rights (PFCR), which then merged with Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) two weeks into my internship. My supervisors made the transition very seamless. At MFJ's Warren Sinsheimer Children's Rights Project, I continued the work that I began at PFCR of providing free legal services to low-income parents of students with disabilities in New York City.

At MFJ I mainly assisted attorneys in providing direct legal services to parents to help them obtain appropriate special education and related services for their children. My main responsibilities included completing intake calls, conducting client interviews, reviewing student's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and evaluations, and drafting impartial hearing requests. I was also able to observe an impartial hearing and attend an IEP meeting for which I helped develop a strategy for the proper school placement and services to be requested.

I particularly enjoyed completing intake calls and then participating in the process of determining whether or how MFJ could provide legal representation or advice to the parent. Special education law, like many areas of legal practice, includes a significant amount of jargon, an "alphabet soup" of acronyms, and complex procedures that can easily be misunderstood. During intake calls, I had to navigate the stories that parents shared with me to identify the relevant legal issues and also ask the appropriate questions to put together the full picture of their child's educational needs. Over the course of my internship, I completed eleven intakes. Each parent's experience was unique and allowed me to learn about the nuances of special education law while also developing my skills of building rapport with clients. During team meetings, I then reported on my intakes and shared my analysis of how MFJ could help the client. I appreciated my supervisors' willingness to listen to my ideas and engage in thoughtful conversation about how to proceed on each case.

In addition to the direct legal services work, my supervisor also provided me with a research and writing assignment that allowed me to dive deeper into federal and state special education laws and regulations, while also improving my legal writing skills. Based on my research, I wrote a legal memorandum that concluded that students with substance abuse issues are not eligible to receive special education or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act unless they have another qualifying disability.

I greatly appreciate the support of the EJA Fellowship in allowing me to gain experience with special education law. I enjoyed my time with MFJ working on behalf of disabled students and look forward to continuing to pursue a career in special education law.

Sincerely,

Anthoula Vasiliou
Fordham University School of Law