

October 7, 2024

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
3007 East Boundary Terrace  
Suite 201  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer I had the privilege of interning at Legal Aid at Work (LAAW) in San Francisco, CA as part of the Work & Family Program. With the support of Equal Justice America, I was able to work directly with low-income workers and help advocate for greater workplace rights. My internship with LAAW reinforced my commitment to pursuing a career in workers' rights and civil rights and informed the type of social justice lawyer I want to be in the future.

The Work & Family Program is dedicated to empowering workers who are parents, pregnant, or family caregivers to access time off work, paid leave, and workplace accommodations to care for themselves and their family without risking their jobs and income. This was my first time working in this area of the law and I was surprised to learn about the complexity of California and federal family leave laws and how they interact with other employment and civil rights laws. While California has robust protections for working families, there is a gap between the rights on paper and a worker's ability to access those rights. For example, while California offers a partial wage replacement program for workers on leave, many employees feel like they cannot access these programs. Low-income workers may not be able to afford earn less than their full wage for several weeks while on leave or go without pay while their benefits application is processed by the government. These issues were especially exacerbated for clients with other marginalized identities, such as gender, race, and immigration status. My conversations with clients this summer highlighted the ways that workplace justice and family caregiving are intricately tied with issues of economic, racial, and gender justice.

Most of my time this summer was dedicated to speaking with clients on the Work & Family helpline. Clients would call the helpline with questions related to a range of workplace issues, including what rights they have to Pregnancy Leave or Paid Family Leave, how to apply for State Disability Insurance, how to request a workplace accommodation, and what to do if an employer discriminates or retaliates against them for trying to exercise their rights. After speaking with clients, I would research their questions, discuss with a supervising attorney what advice we should provide, and call back the client to inform them of their rights and possible next steps they could consider. I would have to think about how to break down dense legal concepts into a form that would be useful to clients. By the end of the summer, I felt like I was able to build positive relationships with clients and grow my communications skills.

I also saw firsthand the difference that individualized legal advice had on clients going through a family or work crisis. Even during calls where I felt like I did not have great news or clear answers, clients would remark how important it was to have someone listen to them and share

information. This emphasized the importance of directly empowering individuals through knowledge and resources to allow them to reclaim dignity, respect, and autonomy after experiencing injustice. LAAW's holistic model of advocacy, which includes direct legal services, targeted litigation, policy advocacy, and community outreach, is something I hope to incorporate throughout my own practice as a future lawyer.

My internship with LAAW this summer reaffirmed my goal to pursue a career fighting for workplace justice. I am very grateful for Equal Justice America's support this summer, without which I would not have been able to pursue this opportunity. We need more law students working to increase access to legal services for low-income clients, and I am glad to know that Equal Justice America is committed to supporting the careers of young social justice lawyers.

Sincerely,

Miranda Finestone