

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

Mr. Ruben,

Thank you so much for providing me with an Equal Justice America award to support my work this summer at the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative, a clinic at the University of Michigan Law School. My work this summer was tremendously inspiring to me, and I am eager to pursue further opportunities in public interest law – particularly, opportunities that allow me to work on behalf of people without the resources to access the legal system.

This summer, I worked on a variety of civil rights cases, spanning issues from fair housing to pregnancy discrimination. In the pregnancy discrimination case, I worked closely with our client, a young mother of three who was hired for a temp-to-full-time position that included important benefits, including health insurance for her family, and provided her with career advancement opportunities. After signing her employment paperwork, our client gave notice at her job in anticipation of her new role. During the period between her hiring and her start date, she was also diagnosed with pre-gestational diabetes, and informed that she was at risk for preeclampsia, a pregnancy complication that is often life-threatening. Accordingly, her pregnancy required additional monitoring and check-ups with her doctor. She reached out to the temporary staffing agency that hired her to request accommodations for time off to attend prenatal appointments and was promptly terminated from the position. She and her family have faced significant economic hardship as a result of her firing, requiring her to max out credit cards and take out personal loans from family members, which she is still working to pay back. This also caused her enormous emotional hardship and stress – particularly dangerous given her high-risk pregnancy. She subsequently filed a complaint with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights and the EEOC.

My work on this case included the drafting and submission of a Rebuttal Statement to the EEOC, in response to the Position Statement submitted by the temping agency (which in her case, delivered the news of her termination on behalf of their client), and frequent communication with the EEOC Investigator assigned to her case. Our client also signed an arbitration agreement with the temp agency. I spoke with our client at length to advise her of the options available to her, given the arbitration agreement and approaching deadline to arbitrate; she chose to pursue private settlement with the temp agency. I successfully negotiated with opposing counsel to secure a tolling agreement to extend the deadline to begin arbitration by several months, and worked closely with our client to develop an initial settlement offer and calculate her damages, including backpay and front pay.

I also worked on several fair housing cases. In an impact fair housing case involving source of income discrimination, I prepared our plaintiff – a disabled mother who had lost custody of her child because she was unable to procure housing in her daughter's school district in Ann Arbor –

for a deposition, which I subsequently defended. Working with our client to prepare her for this deposition was incredibly rewarding: depositions can be intimidating for clients and preparing her for the questions we anticipated and helping to ease her anxieties about the upcoming deposition proved to be one of the most meaningful experiences of my summer.

Working with these two women, both of whom could not afford private representation, was deeply rewarding. Both clients had suffered as a result of discrimination, and the discrimination they suffered affected not only them, but their entire families. Helping both women to seek justice deepened my commitment to working with similarly situated clients in the future and reaffirmed my commitment to working to change not only the circumstances of my clients, but the systems that caused them to suffer these harms.

Thank you so much for your support, which enabled me – and other EJA Fellows around the country – to pursue work on behalf of people who cannot afford private representation. I am deeply appreciative of the funding that Equal Justice America provided to me, and of EJA's commitment to funding public interest work that serves real people facing real hardships, and to advance the mission of truly *equal* justice in America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jordan Smith', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jordan Smith
University of Michigan Law