

31 August 2014

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben:

I am a second year law student at Cornell Law School and I had the exciting opportunity to work at the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia (PILCOP) this past summer, with assistance from the Equal Justice America fellowship. In working for underprivileged socioeconomic groups within the greater Philadelphia area, I had a rewarding experience asserting the legal rights of those residents who otherwise would either be unaware of their legal rights or unable to afford legal representation for their problems.

While working for the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia this summer, I received practical litigation experience. I was able to prepare a case, participate in client meetings, negotiate with the City Law Department, and draft motions, complaints, and contracts. In particular, I worked to assert the rights of Philadelphia residents involved in urban agriculture and the basic welfare rights of students in the Philadelphia School District in the context of severe budget cuts and environmental hazards.

My work on behalf of the gardeners who ran Farm 51 gained significant press coverage, both online and in the Philadelphia Inquirer, for embodying the plight of the urban agriculture movement and Philadelphia's current underestimation of the beneficial externalities that stem from such community activities on both empowering neighborhoods and alleviating effects of city decay. In drafting a motion to intervene for Farm 51 in the city's attempted foreclosure of the tax-delinquent property to which Farm 51 was located—as is generally the case for urban agriculture—PILCOP tried to impede the City's lackadaisical and outdated view towards urban agriculture.

I was able to also participate simultaneously in negotiations with the City Law Department to recognize a standard five-year lease for urban gardeners—which I drafted myself based on the needs of Philadelphia residents and the models supplied by other forward-looking cities—as PILCOP and the City Law Department discussed ways to manage the City's potential liability in allowing residents to use the lots with potential dangers caused by mismanagement and lack of upkeep.

I also worked extensively to mitigate the effects of one billion dollars worth of cuts in education caused by Governor Tom Corbett. Combined with an inconsistent school district funding formula in Pennsylvania, such cuts had a disproportionately large effect on Philadelphia schools—which were already significantly underfunded relative to some of the wealthier suburban districts. My work concentrated on Pennsylvania's statutory and constitutional

obligations to the Philadelphia students, both in securing their general health and welfare during school hours and in ensuring the students receive a baseline education. The lack of school personnel—particularly nurses, counselors, and teachers—combined with the health hazards caused by decades of uninhibited industrialization and deficient funding to provide for proper school upkeep places Philadelphia students at a severe disadvantage in trying to secure a proper future. While my work on a potential complaint has yet to be filed, PILCOP will undoubtedly try to protect students' rights to an education and prevent such a disastrous funding deficit from occurring again through legal precedent.

My work with both urban gardeners and Philadelphia students has greatly influenced my views of the legal profession and the inherent responsibilities that come from such empowerment. Most citizens are unable to afford proper representation, and even fewer understand the rights they have. My work this summer was solely dedicated to such individuals, and the work I did had far-reaching effect.

I cannot begin to thank Equal Justice America for helping to make my summer experience possible. Working on behalf of my hometown residents was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had, and I hope to continue my work in areas like education and the environment as I continue my legal career.

Sincerely,

Adam Kassner  
Cornell Law School



**PUBLIC INTEREST LAW  
CENTER OF PHILADELPHIA**

AFFILIATED WITH THE LAWYERS COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER LAW

STAFF

September 12, 2014

**Jennifer R. Clarke**  
*Executive Director*

**Amy Laura Cahn**  
*Staff Attorney*

**Michael Churchill**  
*Of Counsel*

**Benjamin D. Geffen**  
*Staff Attorney*

**Sonja D. Kerr**  
*Director, Disabilities Rights Project*

**Jason Fortenberry**  
*Staff Attorney*

**Edwin D. Wolf**  
*Executive Director*  
1974-1976

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

Dear Dan,

I am writing to share with you about my experiences working with Adam Kassner as an Equal Justice Fellow with the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.

As a component of our environmental justice work, I provide legal and policy support to community gardeners and market farmers in disinvested neighborhoods, many of whom have been putting abandoned parcels back into productive reuse for decades, without legal rights and/or land tenure. The impact of disinvestment and abandonment is greatest in communities of color and low income communities, the very populations that are marginalized from our legal systems. When Adam arrived at the Law Center, he was assigned to me and applied his dedication to this environmental justice work.

Adam was given substantial responsibility to draft legal memoranda, motions, and contracts, while working intimately with the experienced attorneys at the Law Center. He was particularly engaged with our efforts to intervene at sheriff's sale on behalf of an urban farm client, Farm 51. Adam made certain that we were in compliance with the procedural rules and drafted our Motion to Intervene, the filing of which brought significant media attention to the issue. Furthermore, Adam participated in meetings with the City Law Department, the Food Policy Advisory Council (FPAC), and FPAC Soil Safety Working Group thus allowing him to observe the role of policymaking and negotiations to resolve legal issues and remove barriers in furtherance of the rights of community gardeners. In support of this policy work, Adam prepared a series of draft lease and license agreements that we will be sharing with the City Law Department as possible models.

Adam also played a key role in our litigation against the Pennsylvania Acting Secretary of Education to compel her to investigate 825 complaints by parents, caregivers, students, and teachers, documenting curriculum deficiencies and other crisis conditions in the Philadelphia Public Schools. Adam provided legal analysis and contributed to an initial version of our complaint.

Finally, Adam took initiative to do research at the intersection of our environmental justice and education work. He represented the Law Center at the Community Asthma Prevention Program Summit and returned with questions about the legal implications related to school buildings that present an environmental risk to students. As a result, Adam prepared a series of memos for me and other staff attorneys regarding legal rights of students with asthma and respiratory issues and legal strategies to pursue mitigation of environmental risk.

It was a pleasure to work with Adam. On behalf of the Law Center, I thank you for the support of Equal Justice America in allowing Adam to join us for the summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Laura Cahn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Amy Laura Cahn  
Staff Attorney and Director, Garden Justice Legal Initiative