

August 9, 2012

Mr. Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
Building II – Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for providing me with this fellowship. I am a rising 2L at Cornell Law School, and I greatly enjoyed my summer working for Community Justice Project. Community Justice Project is a non-profit, public interest law firm, the mission of which is to protect and expand the civil rights of low-income families and low-wage workers.

I spent much of my time this summer helping to prepare a motion for summary judgment for a FLSA case. In this class action case, the class members, many of whom are undocumented individuals, spent months and years painting homes for the defendant, the purported employer. The class members are suing the purported employer for failing to pay overtime and for failing to pay workers during their last week of employment. I conducted legal research as well as helped to prepare undisputed facts from depositions and court transcripts.

The case has proved difficult because many eligible class members will not come forward as witnesses or to provide evidence. I was able to meet the named plaintiff as well as a potential witness. Both individuals explained that eligible class members are afraid that the purported employer will retaliate by making sure that they can no longer obtain work in the area or by reporting them to INS.

In addition to the FLSA case, I helped another lawyer at the firm who focuses upon advocacy work for recipients of public benefits. I helped conduct a state-wide research project to determine the availability of GED programs for TANF recipients.

As part of this project, we visited a community college in Hazelton, PA, a city with a large immigrant population and a history of antagonism towards those individuals. While there, we met with several teachers to discuss why they are now receiving very few referrals to their GED classes. We also met with two TANF recipients to discuss their experience in the college's ESL program. The conversation transitioned into a discussion about their struggles being single fathers on TANF.

One father had been laid-off from his job, widowed, and was trying to raise his young daughter by himself. He was unable to find employment because he does not speak English. His unemployment compensation had run out, and he was facing eviction in a matter of days. His TANF cash allowance was not enough to pay rent anywhere, and the waiting list for Section 8 housing is virtually endless. He planned to leave his daughter with friends and live on the street.

The paralegal with us begged him not to do this because he would lose custody of his daughter. However, the only advice that she could give him was to explain his story to people and hope that someone would be moved enough by his story to help him.

In addition to the GED project and the FLSA case, I also helped with various smaller projects. I helped a client apply for government assistance to avoid foreclosure. I assisted EMA clients and conducted research about nationwide standards on EMA eligibility. Additionally, we visited a local women's rehabilitation program to address a reoccurring problem that the women had been experiencing with the local County Assistance Office. We also discussed with them the potential, and now confirmed, elimination of the General Assistance Cash program, a program upon which most of them rely.

I appreciated this fellowship for many reasons. It showed me the staggering need for legal services, and from a very practical standpoint, it showed me what a career in legal services looks like. But probably more importantly, as a result of my time with Community Justice Project I have a dramatically altered awareness of the multitude of people around me who have not been given the opportunities and privileges that I have been given – and I have a renewed sense of obligation to use the opportunities that I have been given to help those groups of people. For that, I cannot thank you enough.

Sincerely,

Adrienne Steiner
Cornell Law School, 2014



COMMUNITY JUSTICE PROJECT

August 20, 2012

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Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America

Re: Letter of recommendation for Adrienne Steiner

Dear Mr. Ruben:

We are very pleased to write this letter of recommendation for Adrienne Steiner. Adrienne worked as an intern at the Community Justice Project (CJP) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in the summer of 2012.

CJP is a statewide legal aid program, specializing in civil impact litigation and other advocacy on behalf of low-income families and individuals in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. One of our primary areas of work is advocacy to help families on welfare access postsecondary education, as well as GED and ESL programs, so they can qualify for jobs at family sustaining wages. We also do extensive work with undocumented immigrants, helping them obtain health care for emergency medical conditions and protecting their rights as workers to be paid minimum wage and overtime. Adrienne did work for us in each of these areas. I supervised her work on education and health care, while a co-worker of mine here at CJP, Larry Norton, worked with Adrienne on employment law cases.

Adrienne is a very bright, thoughtful, and conscientious worker, who was always very careful to ask background questions to get the larger legal and advocacy picture with regard to assignments we gave her. We had Adrienne working on various projects related to access to education for welfare (TANF) mothers. For example, she helped us conduct a statewide survey of PA Department of Education funded GED and English-as-a-Second Language providers as part of an advocacy strategy aimed at pushing the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) to better identify TANF parents in need of such services and streamline the rules regarding referral of parents to these programs. Parents on TANF, who lack English proficiency or a high school degree are largely precluded from entering training programs that can provide them with the skills and credentials needed to obtain work at a family sustaining wage. Adrienne not only conducted much of the survey, but helped design it and analyze the information obtained.

Adrienne also assisted us with legal research related to advocacy CJP is doing with the state Department of Public Welfare on eligibility of undocumented immigrants for Emergency Medical Assistance (EMA) under the federal Medicaid program. CJP and other legal services programs have seen a tightening of DPW's interpretation of the federal EMA standard and resultant increase in denials of applications for Medicaid coverage for emergency medical conditions, particularly those requiring on-going treatment, such as diabetes and seizure disorders. CJP has argued that this tightening

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of eligibility for EMA by DPW violates the maintenance of effort requirements of the Affordable Care Act. Unfortunately, though, the case law on EMA eligibility from various jurisdictions, including a case just decided in Pennsylvania this summer, is almost uniformly bad from the perspective of immigrant applicants. Adrienne did a considerable amount of research and analysis of these cases, helping us develop a legal theory to deal with these cases in our advocacy with DPW. Adrienne played an important role in shaping a legal memo we sent to DPW on the impact of the Pennsylvania case on DPW's policy regarding EMA for persons with emergency medical conditions requiring on-going treatment. Her insights on this memo were invaluable.

We also asked Adrienne to assist with research on the alarming decline in the TANF caseload in Pennsylvania. We are very concerned about the failure of the TANF program to respond to the recession and high unemployment. The purpose of the research was to attempt to quantify the reduction in the TANF caseload and to determine whether this is happening as a result of TANF families leaving for employment or for other reasons. Adrienne assisted with the analysis that will help us show that the decline is largely not due to TANF parents leaving for employment, but for reasons that likely have more to do with the state becoming more aggressive with sanction policies and imposing other measures that make it harder to families to qualify for and remain on TANF.

Adrienne was a pleasure to work with -- always on time, prompt, yet thorough in completing assignments, and empathetic to the plight of our welfare mother and "illegal immigrant" clientele, who are often unfairly maligned in the press and court of public opinion. Her inquisitiveness about the larger advocacy implications of work we assigned to her and about the operations and impact of government programs she came into contact with in her work was both refreshing and very rare in our experience.

We could not have been more pleased with Adrienne's work and are grateful to EJA for having helped make it possible for her to be with us this summer. Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information.

Sincerely



Peter Zurflieh
Staff attorney
Community Justice Project

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