

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

August 30, 2012

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I had a wonderful summer experience working at Swords to Plowshares, a veterans rights organization in San Francisco. Over the summer, I worked with homeless and extremely low-income veterans and assisted them with their VA disability compensation and pension benefits and military discharge upgrades.

More specifically, I conducted client intake, drafted two disability rating upgrade briefs, helped two clients resolve their VA pension overpayment issues, and I wrote a Statement in Support of Claim for a client who has Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) due to Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Additionally, I helped a veteran who was wrongly discharged after 17 years of honorable military service. I wrote a brief advocating for his rightful military retirement and the benefits that go along with that. I also researched child support arrearages and their effect on VA benefits, the regulations concerning concurrent Temporary Disability Retirement List (TDRL) benefits and VA benefits, and the policies on ghostwriting in relation to federal agencies.

My favorite and most memorable client was a man who had served three terms of enlistment in the U.S. Navy. He was honorably discharged after his first two terms, but right before he was going to be discharged for the third time, he tested positive for cocaine and they discharged him with an Other Than Honorable discharge. When a service member gets an Other Than Honorable discharge, he is usually not entitled to any VA benefits. However, since this particular veteran had two prior discharges that had been Honorable, he is eligible for VA Health Care. Unfortunately, most VA employees are not aware of this regulation and they often wrongly deny eligible veterans VA Health Care because of their lack of knowledge about this particular regulation. I wrote a letter on behalf of this client and instructed him to take it to the VA Medical Center as proof of his eligibility for health care. He came back a few days later, gave me a big hug, and told me that it had worked! After years of trying to enroll in VA Health care, he was finally able to, and was seen by a doctor that very day!

Every time I met with this client, he brightened my day. After I was able to get him enrolled in VA Health Care, I worked on his claim for service-connected disability benefits. We got very close during this time, and he inspired me with his positive attitude despite his limited means. Even though he lives in a small SRO with his brother and wears the same clothes every time I see him, he is always happy, and never did he once walk out of the office without leaving a trail of sunshine behind him. After our appointments, he would always tell me, "Wow, Ashley. You are going to be a great lawyer!" and I always felt better after that. This was my first legal job, and I initially felt apprehensive and nervous about my ability to do a good job. However, this client and many others encouraged me and made me feel capable of doing a great job and truly

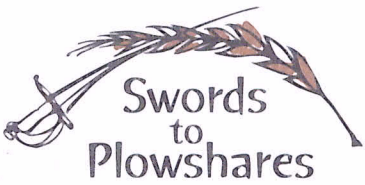
helping. I feel extremely grateful that I was able to work with clients with whom I share an enormous level of mutual respect.

My favorite part of the job was having the opportunity to meet amazing people who have served our country. They go through challenges and hardships that most of us will never be able to imagine, let alone experience personally. One out of four homeless people are veterans and I am so glad that I got to make a difference in some of these amazing people's lives. With the influx of veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, it is absolutely imperative that this population receives immediate attention and assistance. It is our responsibility to make sure that this new generation of veterans does not end up with the same problems that our Vietnam veterans still suffer from to this day.

Thank you again for affording me this opportunity to work at Swords to Plowshares, and it means a lot to me that I was chosen to receive funding this summer. Staying afloat would have been nearly impossible without it, and I am extremely grateful. Thank you for supporting law students who want to work in public interest!

Warmest regards,

Ashley Toles  
Juris Doctor Candidate, 2014  
UC Hastings College of the Law



VETS HELPING VETS SINCE 1974

August 10, 2012

Equal Justice America  
Building II - Suite 204  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

To Whom It May Concern:

I write this letter to report on the work completed by Ashley Toles as part of Swords to Plowshares' summer legal intern program. Ashley was a valuable addition to the legal team.

Ashley worked full-time during her ten week internship. Her projects included the following:

- Multiple client intakes and assessments of both VA and discharge upgrade cases; researched various issues related to same.
- Drafted briefs for increase in service-connected disability ratings for two clients with psychiatric disabilities.
- Wrote a statement in support of a claim for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for a veteran who experienced military sexual trauma (MST) in service.
- Wrote placement memos for cases that were given to pro bono attorneys.
- Helped obtain discharge records from the US Marine Corps headquarters for a client who should have been medically retired after 17 years of honorable service.
- Researched and wrote memo related to "ghost-writing" for pro se veterans in VA benefits claims.
- Active participant in weekly legal staff meetings.

Ashley's excellent advocacy skills led to impressive case wins for clients in need. Some of her wins included:

- Successful resolution of VA pension overpayment issues for two impoverished veterans.
- Procurement of VA healthcare services for a veteran who had been wrongfully denied multiple times in the past.

Please let me know if you have any questions or require further information. I may be reached anytime at (415) 252-4788, or via email at [tpanepinto@stp-sf.org](mailto:tpanepinto@stp-sf.org).

Sincerely,



Teresa Panepinto  
Legal Director