

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I had a really enjoyable summer internship experience in the Homeless Advocacy Group at MetroWest Legal Services. My supervising attorney made a real effort in making sure that my internship at the organization would be informative and memorable. Throughout the summer, I worked on a variety of cases that spanned from Social Security Disability Appeals to unemployment hearings. I also learned about shelter regulations in Massachusetts that very often do not make much sense. For example, there is a 12-month rule in which a homeless person can't be sheltered through the system if he or she left the shelter within the past few months. The problem with rules like this is that it places many homeless families in difficult situations. For example, one of my clients was a couple whose child was taken away from them because of drug use. Since the presence of a child is required for the shelter, my clients were put back on the streets. When they arrived at the office, they were drug-free and looking forward to being reunified with their baby son. The 12-month rule was one of the obstacles that stood in their way. Of course, the reason for their departure wasn't that they chose to leave the shelter, but were forced. The couple is still working hard to reuniting their family.

As part of my summer internship, I was also presented with the opportunity to represent a client in an unemployment hearing. It was a rather intense assignment since I was given only three days to prepare for the hearing. Luckily, all of the information, such as the employee's handbook, was already retrieved by the attorney and paralegal that was previously working on the case. I ran through my direct and cross-examination questions with my client the day before the hearing and before I knew it, I was sitting right outside the door of where the hearing was to take place. After five very long minutes, I found out that the employer, who initiated the appeal, did not show up. Fortunately for my client, it was a default win, but I was a little upset that I was not able to demonstrate all that I worked on in the past few days.

My work with other clients ensured that I would not remain disappointed with the lost chance of representing a client. By interviewing and compiling medical information from another country, my supervising attorney and I were able to secure SSDI benefits for an aging client of ours. It was uplifting to see how happy our client and his sister was when the hearing was concluded and that there were good signs that we had succeeded in arguing his case. There continued to be many more successful cases that I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work in. In addition to working with clients at the office, my supervising attorney also took me to a veteran's hospital where we interviewed clients who could not leave the hospital because of substance abuse issues. As a result of my summer internship, I had a first-hand experience of how truly effective legal services organizations are to communities of people who cannot afford legal help that they need.

I appreciate Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity to work in a public service organization this past summer and hope that this program continues so that law students can see what their legal training can do for the poor.

Best,
Barbie Hsu
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