

Sept. 29, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to use the Equal Justice America fellowship to advocate for impoverished long-term care residents in Washington, D.C. through the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program there.

The purpose of my internship was to contribute to advocacy for Washington, D.C. long-term care residents by learning from and assisting the attorney for the Legal Counsel for the Elderly District of Columbia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. I had the opportunity to advocate for resident rights in many ways. I participated in researching comments on proposed local legislation regarding the definition of "Medical Necessity" for purposes of the District's Medicaid plan, and I researched and wrote a memo advising attorneys within AARP's Legal Counsel for the Elderly on barring notices in nursing homes and how they infringe on nursing home residents' rights. Most memorably, I interviewed and assisted nursing home residents in need of Legal Counsel for the Elderly services.

Residents can be isolated from the rest of the community, sometimes even from their own support networks. They are often physically or mentally unable to advocate for themselves, and can be in a unique position of dependence on caregivers, administrators, and service delivery systems. I am proud to have researched and helped to provide advice through the very successful mechanism of the Ombudsman Program to ensure that such a vulnerable group is protected.

I also had the opportunity to see fine cooperation in action. With input from contacts at other organizations like ULS, the ACLU and Public Citizen, the quality of the work I have been able to provide so far this summer is much improved, we have been able to decrease overlap in areas of research, and better identify areas that require further inquiry. These relationships fight a silo effect, and different perspectives can spur creativity, further increasing the quality of advocacy we provide to District nursing home residents now and in the future.

At the Ombudsman Program, the volunteers and staff see just how precarious the lives of nursing home residents can really be; being dependent on caregivers often requires that they have a true dependence on the Ombudsman Program too. With the elderly, the margin of error is slim. A rights violation like being dumped in a shelter or left with untreated wounds can mean the difference between life and death. Residents learn that they can depend on the Ombudsman Program to advocate zealously for them. I am proud that residents called on us to advocate for them, and I am also proud of the ripple effect that work can have. We take every opportunity to

educate nursing home administrators and caregivers regarding their responsibilities, working for systemic change from within. My experiences have left me with a new appreciation for the importance of the wording of a statute or a legal opinion; this has been a chance to meet the real people whose lives and wellbeing are affected by what was just an academic exercise in my first year of law school. I have had the chance to see the way a law, applied, can change lives. Thank you for your organization's support of that experience.

Sincerely,

Bethany L. Brown  
Washington College of Law American University  
JD Expected 2011