

May 17, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thanks to Equal Justice America, I was able to continue my internship at Essex – Newark Legal Services (“ENLS”) advocating for the low income residents of Essex County.

As a legal intern in the Housing and Income Maintenance Unit (“HIM”), I continued to serve as a primary case-handler providing representation and advice for clients facing issues such as government benefit terminations, denials, and delays, homelessness, relocation, and domestic violence. As securing benefits such as Emergency Assistance/Temporary Rental Assistance is often a pre-requisite in preventing or curing evictions in non – payment of rent cases, I also conducted research, prepared legal documents, and counseled clients in non- payment of rent proceedings.

My experience this semester proved to unlike others for several reasons. First, the client population I encountered greatly expanded from individuals and families facing homelessness to homeless people literally living on the street with nowhere to go or nothing to eat. Further, I also noticed an increase in clients who were both disabled and homeless – for instance, I had one client who was terminated from Emergency Assistance and as a result, “lived” at Penn Station while she suffered from cancer. As if the obstacles our clients faced were not bad enough, ENLS experienced two massive budget cuts, with one occurring at the start of this semester. While these budget cuts not only threatened the long term foundation of legal services but also our short term ability to advocate for clients in need. It was this moment that I realized the urgency of advocacy for my clients and the need to use the law in its full potential to protect clients at all cost.

Accordingly, one of the highlights this semester was being able to teach my client how to effectively represent himself at an administrative fair hearing, when our office did not have the resources to do so. The client, who also had a disability, experienced a delay of benefits without sufficient notice. After weeks of counsel and advice, the client attended his fair hearing pro se and received a favorable decision. I was not only able to explain the applicable law, but once I encouraged the client to look at the regulations (which are publically accessible), he was also able to foster an interpretation that helped him win his case. This was one of the most impactful experiences because it revealed that in some instances, equipping individuals with support, hope, encouragement, and an education of the law, can empower them in the end.

My entire experience at ENLS has inspired me and validated my desires to pursue a public interest career, preferably in direct services. While I've learned a great deal in my year at ENLS, I look forward to continuing my educational experiences in the public interest field. Once again, thank you for affording me one of the best experiences of my legal career.

Sincerely,

Chanell Johnson  
Candidate for J.D., 2013  
Rutgers School of Law – Newark

# **ESSEX-NEWARK LEGAL SERVICES**

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May 17, 2012

Mr. Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America  
Building 11- Suite 204  
13540 E. Boundary Rd.  
Midlothian, Va.

Re: Chanell Johnson

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to you as the direct supervisor for the above grantee, who has worked in this office since May 23, 2011.

Ms. Johnson has been assigned to work as a legal intern in the Income Maintenance (IM) Unit. I am one of the two most senior attorneys in the unit. Ms. Johnson is a very eager, inspired, resourceful and persistent advocate. Since Ms. Johnson began working with us, she has steadily taken on greater responsibilities. Not long after she began, she was interviewing clients who contacted the office regarding an IM problem. Soon after that, she began contacting social services agencies on behalf of clients to advocate for those agencies to resolve the IM problem brought to her attention. Ms. Johnson has also appeared at administrative hearings on behalf of clients, with direct supervision from an IM attorney from this office.

Ms. Johnson has proven to be an invaluable asset to this office. At present, this office is experiencing a significant influx of IM clients. In the past, it has not been uncommon for us to service between 15 and 20 clients with new IM matters on an average intake day. Many of these cases involve requests for administrative hearings, some of them filed on an emergent basis. This work load requires a rigorous attention to the gathering of facts, including the initial interview, contacting of agency caseworkers, interviewing of potential witnesses, and discovery of material in the case record relevant to the issues involved. Ms. Johnson has continually proven to be up to the challenge of assisting our attorneys with case preparation in these sometimes difficult matters.

In addition Ms. Johnson's own life experiences have helped to make her an ideal advocate for low income residents in Essex County, New Jersey (and, I might add, in any area where injustice needs to be addressed by legal representatives for the poor). She is empathetic because she identifies with the situations her clients sometimes find themselves in through no

*Affordable, decent housing is a human right.*

fault of their own; but she is nonetheless dispassionate in evaluating the specific facts of a case in relationship to applicable legal principles.

I do not hesitate to give Ms. Johnson the above evaluation. Her proven reliability and enthusiasm for the job is unfortunately less frequent than would be desired in the present climate of austerity that low income people are subjected to. This makes her contribution all the more significant to the needs of the clients of this office. Please call me at the above number if you have any questions about the content of this letter.

Very truly yours,

Richard W. Foard,  
Staff Attorney