

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

August 31, 2010

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you and Equal Justice America for funding my summer internship with the HIV Unit of South Brooklyn Legal Services (SBLs). I had a wonderful summer at SBLs and learned an enormous amount.

The HIV Unit of SBLs is a comprehensive rights practice, which means that I was exposed to a range of legal issues: social security benefits, family law, and, most frequently, housing law. On a daily basis, I was in touch with clients about their living conditions and public assistance payments, and liaised with case workers at the HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA). On occasion I wrote advocacy letters on our clients' behalf to HASA in order to ensure rent grants. In instances where our clients were threatened with imminent eviction, I accompanied my supervising attorney to Housing Court to obtain Orders to Show Cause.

Aside from the daily responsibilities of tracking our clients' housing situations, I had two main projects: one was a social security disability case, and the other was a federal complaint.

The HIV Unit often gets cases of HIV-positive individuals seeking Social Security Disability or Supplemental Security Income benefits due to HIV/AIDS-related conditions. The unit put each intern in charge of one social security hearing. My case was a challenging but engaging one, as the client was a recent immigrant from Puerto Rico and had a patchy medical record. I met with the client several times, and prepared a memo for submission to the Administrative Law Judge in anticipation of a hearing. Although my supervisor was present at the hearing, I delivered the oral argument, spoke directly with the ALJ, and conducted a direct examination of the client. Given the sparseness of the medical record, the ALJ adjourned our case while we gathered more information from his new doctors. Throughout the next month, I had conversations with doctors and psychiatrists about our client's mental and physical conditions, and submitted a supplemental memo with additional records. At the close of the internship the case was still pending.

The other main project was a federal complaint concerning New York City Transit recent cuts to public transportation services and their effect on New York City's disabled population. Our complaint alleges that the service cuts -- specifically those to the buses and Access-a-Ride -- violate obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). I reviewed case law on previous ADA claims and public transportation, and spoke with many leaders in the area who had been involved in similar cases in New York City. I gathered facts about the cuts, attended an ADA compliance meeting at the Metropolitan Transit Authority, interviewed potential plaintiffs, discussed our argument with our lawyers and outside counsel, and, finally, prepared a first draft of the complaint. The complaint was filed shortly after my departure from SBLs.

Both projects were highlights of the summer, both for the subject matter and for the experience of conceiving of and developing a case. However, all the projects I worked on this summer, as well as

the day-to-day responsibilities, were extremely stimulating. The lawyers in the HIV Unit at SBLS are committed and thoughtful lawyers who care about interns and ensure a constructive learning experience for them. My supervising attorney frequently took time out of her day to have long conversations about the legal details as well as the broader implications of our work.

My experience at SBLS was a pivotal one. It strengthened my commitment to serving as a lawyer in the public interest and to practicing in the New York City area. Further, it sparked an exciting interest in litigation and helped me move forward in thinking about what areas of law I want to pursue through public interest litigation.

Again, I greatly appreciate the assistance of EJA for facilitating the experience and supporting my development as a lawyer.

Sincerely,

Clara Presler

University of Michigan Law School  
Class of 2012

# SOUTH BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES

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Dan Ruben  
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Midlothian, VA 23112

September 15, 2010

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I write this letter on behalf of Clara Presler, a 2010 EJA Fellow who worked under my supervision at South Brooklyn Legal Services.

Ms. Presler worked closely with me on my caseload, which includes a combination of Family, Housing, Public Benefits and other general practice cases we undertake on behalf of HIV-positive clients living in Brooklyn. Our interns are responsible for three general areas during their internships: research, writing, and client interaction, including trailing us on all our court appearances. Ms. Presler performed all these tasks this summer, in addition to another task that I will discuss in more detail below. Ms. Presler's performance in each area listed above was outstanding. She is a smart, dedicated, and mature law student with excellent research and writing skills. She researched complex areas of law while she was here, and aided me in drafting two different briefs. She was able to quickly pick up on the intricacies of legal issues, and to ask relevant questions when she needed further guidance. She displayed a level of empathy towards our clients that was in keeping with her maturity level. My clients felt comfortable with her and formed genuinely affectionate relationships with her – she in turn treated them with kindness and respect.

I would particularly like to highlight one case on which Ms. Presler provided this office with invaluable assistance. In June, 2010, the New York City Transit Authority implemented far-reaching cuts to its fixed route and paratransit transportation systems, including buses, subways and Access-A-Ride. After we were approached by local politicians wishing to challenge these cuts, we agreed to take on the case for investigation and, if we found viable causes of action, to bring a federal lawsuit under the ADA against the State and the City agencies. I immediately assigned the case to Ms. Presler for the investigative stage and she worked diligently for a month or more, collating data, researching the effect of the cuts, liaising with local organizations for people with disabilities, and generally framing the extent of the problem. She personally reached out to potential plaintiffs and evaluated the real effect these cuts were having on people in the community. After the enormous task of evaluating the feasibility of a claim was completed, I then assigned her the task of actually drafting the federal complaint. Her work in this area was as commendable as in the investigative stage of the proceeding. She

conducted research on the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and helped us flesh out our claims. She met with a team of lawyers and provided able assistance to each of us. As with all our other clients this summer, our plaintiffs in this case grew to know her and treat her with respect and affection over the course of this project. Unfortunately, Ms. Presler's summer with us ended a mere week or so before the filing of our federal complaint in *Watkins, et al. v. MTA*, and she was unable to witness first-hand the fruit of all her labor. In my nine years as a lawyer in this office, this is the only time I have been assisted by an intern on a federal complaint. It was a genuine pleasure to have Ms. Presler be the first.

Sincerely,

Pavita Krishnaswamy  
Senior Staff Attorney