



August 4, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for my selection as a recipient of the Equal Justice America Fellowship for the summer of 2014. I had the unique experience to intern at University Legal Services (ULS) in Washington, D.C. ULS is the federally-mandated Protection and Advocacy program for individuals with disabilities in the District of Columbia. My involvement was specifically in the Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness program (PAIMI). PAIMI protects and advocates for the rights of individuals with mental illness through individual representation, institutional reform litigation, class actions cases, investigations of abuse and neglect, policy, and community outreach. The PAIMI program provided a plethora of opportunities to work with clients and mental health consumers. My main responsibilities included legal research and writing regarding mental health policies, aiding lawyers in individual and class action representation, and participating in many of the outreach and regulatory activities.

During the outreach activities, I frequently visited adult, adolescent, and children inpatient psychiatric units in the District of Columbia. During these visits ULS would monitor the hospital policies and treatment, but more importantly, educate the patients regarding their rights while receiving mental health care in the District. In addition, the lawyers and I would meet with current patients that wished to discuss violations of rights or the arrangement of outpatient services upon discharge. Conversations with the juveniles included “likes and wishes.” We asked the kids’ perspectives on what they liked about being able to receive inpatient care, and wishes for changes in treatment. This exercise allowed us to evaluate both the hospital policies and provide feedback for improvements. It was enlightening and unique to bond with the patients, and advocate for needed accommodations.

Working directly with patients and clients, I provided legal support for protecting the individual’s rights during treatment and aided representation in claims of abuse and neglect. I was involved in two restraint and seclusion investigations of one juvenile psychiatric unit that resulted in broken limbs. While investigating the incidents, ULS worked with the hospital and the Department of Behavioral Health to reform seclusion and restraint policies and the implementation of these procedures at the hospital. The training should result in fewer injuries during seclusions and restraints, increasing the safety of the patients. As an organization, we

were able to remedy the situations, provide help to the families and individuals with the claims, and advocate for corrective action plans to minimize future injuries.

Besides regulating the actual units, I personally aided District residents in receiving proper mental health services. I assisted in a claim to prove legal competence of an individual to terminate the need for a representative payee for social security funds. By proving her legal capacity to manage her own funds, the client can now directly receive her checks to pay her bills and make purchases independently. In addition, I worked with an elderly man, whose sole mode of transportation was a wheelchair, to ensure he was placed on the list for housing provided by the Department of Behavioral Health. His current home, with stairs, was inaccessible without physical help from others. Once the client is in a wheelchair accessible home, he will be able to come and go when he pleases. Many of the claims include providing accommodations in the least restrictive setting possible. It is important that individuals are able to live as independently as possible, despite mental or physical disabilities.

Working at ULS has enabled me to become more closely involved with the mental health system, especially in the District of Columbia. Providing protection to individuals with mental illness, especially in claims of abuse and neglect, is essential for the regulation of psychiatric and mental health facilities. During my outreach activities I met with patients, staff, and hospital directors to ensure proper treatment of these individuals. The knowledge and experience I gained during the internship has deeply impacted my own perspective of mental health and further encouraged my path towards mental health advocacy. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to participate in this program.

Sincerely,

Danica Gonzalves

The George Washington Law School
J.D., 2016



August 12, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for the opportunity to host Danica Gonzalves this summer as a University Legal Services, Inc., Protection and Advocacy Program (ULS) legal intern.

Since 1996, ULS, a private, non-profit legal service agency, has been the federally mandated protection and advocacy (P&A) program for individuals with disabilities in the District of Columbia. Congress vested the P&As with authority and responsibility to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities. In addition, ULS provides legal advocacy to protect the civil rights of District residents with disabilities.

ULS staff directly serves hundreds of individual clients annually, with thousands more benefiting from the results of investigations, institutional reform litigation, outreach, education and group advocacy efforts. ULS staff addresses client issues relating to, among other things, abuse and neglect, community integration, accessible housing, financial exploitation, access to health care services, discharge planning, special education, and the improper use of seclusion, restraint and medication.


Danica was an excellent intern. She worked directly under my supervision, conducting research, updating publications, and providing direct advocacy to individuals with psychiatric disabilities. She was employed from the dates of June 9, 2014 through August 6, 2014. She was dependable, enthusiastic, persistent, and intellectually curious. In sum, she was an important asset to the office that buttressed our capacity to serve our clients this summer.

A few examples of her work stand out. Danica updated a "Consumer Rights Manual," which provides critical information regarding rights and access to services for adults receiving mental health services in the District of Columbia. She updated the material to ensure it continues to be relevant and accurate. She also wrote an in-depth memorandum discussing eligibility for mental health services in the District, a complex issue involving application of new definitions of mental illness pursuant to the publication of the updated Diagnostics and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to District of Columbia law. Last, Danica assisted in every aspect of a case to help a social security recipient remove a representative payee and

control her own money. Danica helped with the initial intake, and then proceeded to research the standards for removing a representative payee. She then worked with the client to prepare explain to educate her as to the standard and prepare her for the interview at Social Security. She prepared legal arguments and summaries to rely on in preparation of the meeting, and then accompanied myself and the client to meeting. When the Social Security employee began to misstate the standard, Danica was able to redirect the conversation by retrieving the relevant legal authorities on the spot. As a result, the client was able to regain control of her money.

Thank you, again, for providing Danica this opportunity. Her presence, which was made possible due to Equal Justice America, directly improved the lives of District residents with psychiatric disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Lav', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Lav
Managing Attorney