

August 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you so much for supporting my work this past summer at Public Advocates. While there, I was a part of the Metro Equity Team, which focuses on affordable housing, transit justice, and climate justice. I spent the majority of my summer working on climate justice efforts.

My first assignment was to draft a memo analyzing a framework proposed as guidance for forthcoming cap-and-trade funding. Under SB 535 (de León), a minimum of 25 percent of Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund moneys must fund “projects that provide benefits to” disadvantaged communities in California, and at least 10 percent must fund “projects located within” those communities. Public Advocates is a part of the SB 535 Coalition, which played a crucial role in the bill’s adoption. The SB 535 Coalition proposed a four-step approach for determining what provides a benefit to a disadvantaged community. In my memo, which was prepared for presentation to the California Air Resources Board, I analyzed several housing programs using the four-step tool in order to evaluate whether the tool properly determined whether a project constituted a benefit. A rigorous framework for determining what constitutes a benefit to a disadvantaged community is crucial; in the fiscal year 2014-15 alone, there will be over \$14 million in funding for disadvantaged communities, and this amount will likely increase in coming years.

An important part of my experience in analyzing the disadvantaged communities benefit tool was a community meeting. During the meeting, community members shared experiences of state projects gone awry. One example was the weatherization program which will receive cap-and-trade funding. While weather stripping is intended to have energy-saving benefits by increasing insulation, weatherization is also intended to decrease the amount of ambient air pollution that residents are exposed to. One of the community members explained that weather stripping had insulated her home to the point that it felt like a “bubble about to burst.” Consequently, her family left the doors open more often, which left them exposed to more air pollution. I incorporated this observation into my memo to underscore the importance of community involvement in project development and evaluation. The community meeting reminded me of the critical need for on-the-ground experience in helping shape guidelines for funding. In my public interest fellowship search, I emphasized my desire to gather information from the direct legal services context to better inform cap-and-trading funding guidelines.

Most of my summer was spent on legal research and writing memos on topics such as the implied intrastate commerce clause, but I also benefited from seeing various aspects of Public Advocates’ work. Coalition-building, community education and outreach, and policy efforts are all crucial parts of advancing the public interest that I did not have experience with before this summer. I also appreciated seeing the connections between areas such as housing and education.

Thank you again for your support; it has indeed strengthened my commitment to public interest work.

Best,
Evelina Nava
BerkeleyLaw, J.D. 2015