

Gabriella Agranat-Getz

August 26, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

While I came to law school dedicated to pursuing public interest law, I had never actually worked full time in the legal services arena; I could only assume that I wanted to pursue direct legal services. After my summer internship with the New York Legal Aid Society, I am certain that it is the right field for me. Without the help and support from Equal Justice America, I, along with many other students, would not have had the opportunity to work in legal services, and as a result, fewer people in need would be serviced. I am grateful for this opportunity both because it was an enormous learning experience for me and because I was able to provide essential legal assistance to those in need.

Within one short summer, I was able to work on many projects involving Disability Law, Education Law and Immigration Law. I gained enormous practical experience by working with clients in different settings, and I conducted research and writing memoranda on Education Law, on the Ethical (and unethical) Practices in Immigration Law as well as writing an SSI advocacy brief; the range of assignments provided me with different types of writing experience.

For Disability Law, my cases included children's and adult's SSI appeals cases, and many of the clients suffered from severe mental health impairments. After meeting with clients to learn about their conditions and their treating sources, I would spend a lot of time collecting evidence from doctors, schools or other sources. I learned that an improved Medical-Legal partnership could really strengthen the services and results for indigent clients, and I would love to work towards building up that partnership in the future. I also wrote SSI advocacy briefs and attended numerous hearings, including representing my own client at her hearing. It was my first opportunity to really share with a judge my client's struggles and illustrate her story thoughtfully. The experience made me very eager to continue to advocate for underprivileged clients.

I am particularly interested in working on challenges that children face. By working in the Immigration, Disability and Education law units I was able to see how different aspects of a client's case or situation draw on the different areas of law, especially for the

low-income clients we serviced. During my first week working at the Legal Aid Society, I quickly learned that in order to service many clients, and to service them well, everyone worked quickly, but also thoughtfully and thoroughly. That meant, among other things, being attuned to a client's entire situation. A client may come in seeking representation for an SSI appeals case, but a housing or education challenge may arise as well. Sometimes, a client would need to be referred to another unit within Legal Aid for services, but other times, the same attorney(s) could provide the assistance. I was struck by one family's story, and my ability to connect her to the requisite services.

My supervisor and I were meeting NC at her son's school for a mediation. NC was hoping to settle with the Department of Education (DOE) and find an appropriate classroom placement without having to go through an Impartial Hearing. Her son, JRC, suffered from learning disabilities as well as mental impairments that resulted in, among other things, a fear of attending school. Neither the school nor the Department of Education had really worked to secure an appropriate placement for JRC, though legally he is entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) provided by the DOE.

When NC arrived at her son's mediation, she was tired. At home she raises six children all on her own, four of whom have severe disabilities and special needs. After the long and arduous Mediation, we were able to agree on possible options for JRC without going to an Impartial Hearing. NC was visibly relieved, even though we had only completed one step. After the mediation, I accompanied her to assess a possible special education classroom and school placement for JRC. If the placement was appropriate, JRC could attend.

On the way, while we were traveling through the busy New York City summer streets and summer heat, NC began to discuss her story. She was not caring for her children on her own by choice, but rather because the father of her children, GC, had been deported about six years prior. A petit larceny offense and an expired VISA resulted in GC's deportation. For NC that meant losing her financial and substantive support for her children. I listened and thought that there may be immigration relief available to her. Of course, I would have to meet with my supervisor and meet with NC again to learn more about her case. We did just that.

We discovered that due to a ten-year bar on GC's immigration entry status, there were few options for the family at the moment. Furthermore, even for the possible forms of relief, the Legal Aid Society could not fully take on GC's post-deportation case at the time. However, I was able to write a thorough 'Letter of Advice' explaining all the possible avenues for relief (family based petitions and waivers) available to the family in the coming years. Though at first I was disappointed and thought that such a letter was minimal, I soon realized its value. First, NC and GC now know exactly what their legal options are. Even if they have few options and even if we could not represent them, our guidance was crucial.

Second, since they now know what relief GC is and is not entitled to, if they are approached by a practitioner who asserts that GC is entitled to different relief, they know not to pay for a frivolous service. Unfortunately, many individuals are convinced to hire

immigration representation even when they do not have sufficient relief. Lastly, the family knows that in a few years they can begin the process of bringing GC back to the U.S. In the meantime, if NC's children have appropriate placements at school, each day is a better and stronger day for the family and each child has a better opportunity for the future. Being able to service individuals and families in many areas of the law was invaluable.

Thank you very much for this amazing opportunity.

Very Truly Yours,

Gabriella Agranat-Getz
Boston College Law School, 2013



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August 29, 2011

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Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write regarding Gabriella Agranat-Getz, who interned for me this summer. Gabriella worked for me three days per week in the Lower Manhattan Neighborhood Office and for Jojo Annobil in our Immigration Unit two days per week.

Gabriella handled a wide variety of matters for me and did so admirably well. Most of her work focused on preparing several Social Security hearings. In one of these hearings, she successfully represented a claimant who was seeking disability benefits. Gabriella's thorough research of the issues and her sensitive interactions with our mentally ill client pre- and during the hearing were professional and effective.

The other area in which Gabriella assisted me was special education advocacy. Gabriella researched case law on disabled childrens' rights to after-school services and wrote a well-reasoned, well-written memorandum of law. She also assisted in obtaining and analyzing medical and school records and attended several mediation sessions at which we pushed for needed special education services. Thanks to her past experience working with children in an after-school enrichment program, Gabriella contributed excellent ideas and suggestions in a number of these cases.

Gabriella was an incredible asset to my practice this summer. I look forward to hearing about her legal career as it develops.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam H. J.", written in a cursive style.

Senior Staff Attorney
Lower Manhattan Neighborhood Office