

October 25, 2011

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

Dear Dan Ruben,

Thanks to the generosity Equal Justice America, I worked this past summer at Public Advocates, a non profit law firm whose mission is to challenge “the systemic causes of poverty and racial discrimination by strengthening community voices in public policy and achieving tangible legal victories advancing education, housing and transit equity.” I worked with the Education Legal Team, under the supervision of attorney John Affeldt. Under Mr. Affeldt’s guidance, I was able to work on an array of projects. I helped to prepare two major cases, both brought on behalf of students living within low income areas for better educational resources. In the case *Sonya Renee, et al v. Arne Duncan* Public Advocates is working to bring better qualified teachers into low-income schools. In the case *Campaign for Quality Education v. California*, Public Advocates is challenging the constitutionality of the current spending system for California schools which disproportionately deprives the neediest students. In addition, I worked on advocacy projects: I provided legal advice on the state’s obligation to educate English Language Learners who have recently entered the country; I researched how different funding schemes helped and/or hurt students from low income neighborhoods; and I interviewed students attending low-income schools to discuss the quality of the teachers in their classrooms.

Some of the most meaningful moments of the summer included meeting the plaintiffs in our cases. It was always a privilege to listen to each plaintiff’s story, learn about the obstacles he or she faced, and hear how he or she perceived the litigation process. I still vividly remember my meeting with the named plaintiff in our case *Sonya Renee, et al v. Arne Duncan*, which is currently pending before the Ninth Circuit. *Renee* challenged the Education Department’s definition and dispersion of intern teachers, who are still in training when they begin teaching. The problem is that untrained, intern teachers disproportionately fill positions in low-income schools, and by extension students at such schools receive an inferior education. The case sets forth disturbing statistics such as how “nearly a quarter of California’s 10,000 interns teach in schools whose students are 98-100% minority; as such, these minority students are five times more likely to have intern teachers than students in schools with the lowest proportion of minority students.” When I met the named Plaintiff and her family I heard firsthand stories about the problems associated with a high concentration of intern teachers. Ms. Renee’s children spoke

of how their intern teachers would often leave mid-way through the year since their lack of preparation overwhelmed them. During one school year, more than five teachers cycled through the son's classroom. As a result of this poor preparation, both the son and the daughter struggled during their subsequent school year.

Ms. Renee's children are far from alone. For me, these stories drove home the fact that the quality of a child's education is too often determined by his or her socioeconomic status. Ms. Renee's case brought by Public Advocates seeks to create more equitable access to qualified teachers.

As a country that prides itself on being the "land of equal opportunity," the U.S. needs to develop an education system where a student's educational prospects are not determined by his or her zipcode. Public Advocates is helping to make this a reality, and for this reason I was thrilled to work for them this past summer. Moreover, my work with Public Advocates helped me build the skills and connections that I plan to use going forward as I develop a career in public interest law. Equal Justice America made the whole experience possible, and for that I am deeply grateful.

Sincerely,

Genevieve Bonadies
Harvard Law School, Class of 2013