

August 31, 2010

Re: Summer Internship Report

Dear Mr. Ruben:

As the school year begins again, I am pleased to have the opportunity to reflect on the work that I did this summer at East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC). I am extremely grateful for the financial support of Equal Justice America, which facilitated this fulfilling experience.

I spent ten weeks working EBCLC's Income Support practice group, where I provided information and advocacy to low-income residents of Alameda County in their applications and appeals for various forms of public aid (food stamps, General Assistance [GA], and CalWORKS).

At the start of the summer, the Income Support Unit participated in a community organizing effort aimed at reversing Alameda County's reduction of cash aid to GA recipients. I spent the first few weeks of my internship conducting outreach at Alameda County's various Social Services offices, speaking with GA recipients, answering questions, and recruiting people to come to the upcoming Board of Supervisors budget hearings. During this time, I also assisted EBCLC staff attorneys at the Alameda County Social Services hearing office, offering on-the-spot representation and/or advocacy for those recipients whose public benefits had been wrongly terminated or reduced. One of the high points of my summer was looking out at the line of people waiting to speak at the budget hearings and recognizing faces that I had encountered in the previous weeks. Seeing firsthand the effects of our community outreach efforts was extraordinarily powerful.

My experience with one-on-one client representation was equally inspiring. I had many interactions with clients. One individual who stands out in my mind is a homeless man with poor health whose GA benefits had been wrongly terminated due to a medical misdiagnosis. My supervising attorney and I eventually got his benefits reinstated. On one of my last days at work, the client called to tell me that he had moved into a trailer, the first place he could call "home" in over six months and that it was our advocacy that had helped him get there.

As you may recall, this was my second summer at EBCLC. I returned to the organization because I knew from experience that I would thrive in its environment of committed attorneys, advocates, and community members working together for social justice. The experience did not disappoint me; in fact, it made me all the more excited for my upcoming graduation (June 2011) so that I can embark on my chosen calling.

Once again, thank you for the support that Equal Justice America provides for students pursuing public interest work.

Best Wishes,

Gina Gemello



September 10, 2010

Katie Toman
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Gina Gemello

I am writing to confirm that Gina Gemello, a student at the University of California Hastings School of Law, interned in the East Bay Community Law Center's Income Support Unit this past summer. I was one of Gina's supervising attorneys during her ten-week internship with EBCLC. After the ten weeks, I can say that Gina is wholeheartedly committed to public interest work and has strong qualities that make her a great public advocate.

EBCLC is a non-profit clinical program established in 1988 by students at Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California, Berkeley to provide needed services to low-income residents in the East Bay. EBCLC provides high quality legal services for free in a variety of areas while helping law students develop social justice lawyering skills. At EBCLC we believe in using a holistic approach to lawyering and provide students with in-depth trainings on how to collaborate with and advocate for clients struggling with poverty, homelessness and mental illness.

Specifically the Income Support Unit provide legal and legislative advocacy for families facing problems with CalWORKs, General Assistance, and Food Stamps. The problems include, but are not limited to, work requirement sanctions, application of the Maximum Family Grant Rule (which denies cash aid to children born into families on welfare), domestic violence, mental and physical health, and language access for non-English speaking recipients. Students in our program interview and assess clients' problems, gather relevant documents, data and facts, research the applicable law, prepare for hearings, assist clients throughout the appeals process and negotiate with the Social Services Agency. Our students also perform outreach at the welfare office to inform clients of their rights. As part of the policy component, students perform research, write policy briefs, speak before the Board of Supervisors and other elected officials, and partake in community organizing as needed.

During her internship Gina had her own caseload of about seven clients across a wide spectrum of race and experience. Most, but not all of Gina's clients were people whose grants were being reduced from about \$296 down to zero putting them at risk of being homeless. Gina conducted intake interviews, drafted intake memos, performed discovery on cases, negotiated settlements with the Social Services Agency, and drafted declarations for her clients as needed.



In one instance, Gina helped a client living in a friend's garage with zero income get General Assistance that was previously incorrectly denied to him. This led the client to better housing. The client adored Gina and sang praises both about her intelligence and her compassion when I spoke to him. In another instance, Gina convinced a client who clearly had mental health problem (but, who did not think he had any) to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Although the client told us that he did not enjoy being around people and prefer the company of dogs, he warmed up to Gina and told her very useful and intimate things.

Gina was always sensitive and empathetic and took the time to listen to and educate her clients about their legal rights as welfare recipients and applicants. In one instance, I had a very difficult time with a client who was upset that we reached a solution on her case based on her stated goal of implementing a settlement that she previously agreed to. As it turned out, the client falsely thought she could sue the Social Agency for punitive damages and failed to inform us of this. The client refused to listen to my explanation, but because Gina was very patient and allowed the client to vent, the client then calmed down and listened to Gina's explanation about the results in her case.

Gina approached each of her projects with enthusiasm and was thoughtful in her work. In addition, Gina spoke against the cuts to the GA program before the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and 150 people in attendance last summer. She had researched, drafted, and practiced her speech and delivered it with conviction and professionalism. She was also generous enough to stay up the night before to make hummus and cucumber sandwiches for GA recipients so that they could have nutritious food at the meeting.

In short, it was a pleasure to have Gina here at EBCLC this summer. She was every enthusiastic about her work and her commitment to people in need came through loud and clear.

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at (510) 548-4040, ext. 371.

Sincerely,

Luan Huynh
Supervising Attorney