

HEATHER S. WALTERS

August 31, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you so much for supporting my work at Public Counsel Law Center through an Equal Justice America summer fellowship. My experience was so amazing that I'm continuing my work through the fall.

I was thrilled to land an externship at Public Counsel as it epitomizes how a law firm should operate, and the fundamental values that should underlie all public service. While at Public Counsel, I worked in the Education Unit, a subdivision of the Children's Rights Project. The Education Unit works on a number of issues, but most of my work was focused on special education and school discipline.

One major component of my summer entailed working with Public Counsel's Kenyon Juvenile Justice Education Advocacy Clinic. The clinic advocates for the educational needs of youth in the juvenile delinquency system. Without such advocacy, many children end up dropping out of school or continue to encounter the juvenile justice system.

Through the clinic, I was able to meet with clients for intake interviews, offered brief services, and provided updates to the court. For children requiring more intensive assistance, I completed the appropriate forms to help them obtain a court-appointed education attorney. In a few instances, Public Counsel took the case in-house and provided individual representation to the child and his or her family. Because I assisted these children from the very start, I was encouraged to continue working on their cases with the Public Counsel attorneys. As a result, I drafted and filed my first due process complaint against a very large school district. I will be able to see this case through to the end since I am continuing my work at Public Counsel this fall.

Overall, it was thrilling to be on the frontlines this summer, fighting for the educational rights of at-risk youth. Though I was already committed to pursuing a public interest career before my summer experience, I'm now certain of the area of law in which I will practice. In fact, I'm hoping to obtain a job as an education attorney with Public Counsel after I take the bar exam in February 2012. All of this was made possible by Equal Justice America – thank you!

Sincerely,

Heather S. Walters
Southwestern Law School, 2011



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THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW OFFICE OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND BEVERLY HILLS BAR ASSOCIATIONS

August 31, 2011

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

RE: Heather Walters, 2011 Summer Law Clerk

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to provide an update on the work completed by Heather Walters while a summer law clerk in the Education Rights Unit in the Children's Rights Project at Public Counsel Law Center.

Public Counsel is the nation's largest public interest law firm specializing in delivering *pro bono* legal services to low-income communities. Founded in 1970, Public Counsel is dedicated to advancing justice by delivering *pro bono* services to indigent and underrepresented children, consumers, homeless individuals, and families throughout Los Angeles County, ensuring that other community-based organizations serving the population have legal support, and mobilizing the *pro bono* resources of the community's attorneys, social workers, and other professionals. The Children's Rights Project is Public Counsel's largest program, which involves more than 700 volunteers assisting over 6,000 children and youth annually.

Heather greatly contributed to the work of the Education Rights Unit in a variety of ways. Under the supervision of staff attorneys and a social worker, Heather conducted holistic intakes with clients and their caregivers to better understand the educational and mental health needs of the youth and to provide them with information and advice to address those needs. Heather used the information obtained during those intakes to assist our staff in making legal and social service recommendations. She then assisted in placing the cases for representation with *pro bono* attorneys by creating case summaries that identified the legal issues in each case.

While Heather had previously had significant volunteer, educational, and personal experience in the areas on which our project focuses, namely the intersection of education and juvenile delinquency, this summer presented Heather with the opportunity to truly combine these experiences. For instance, Heather has worked very closely with me to successfully advocate with the juvenile delinquency court to release a youth from the juvenile hall and to file for an administrative hearing against a school and school district

on behalf of the youth. Our goal is to ensure that this youth receives the education services to which he is entitled with the hope that doing so will prevent his continued movement along the school-to-prison pipeline.

Due to her stellar work, energetic attitude, and passion for serving this population, Public Counsel has agreed to sponsor her for a post-graduate fellowship project in which she would represent delinquency court involved youth in to ensure that they obtain necessary educational services.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ariel Wander
Staff Attorney
Children's Rights Project
Public Counsel Law Center