

August 31, 2009

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I was a law clerk at Advocacy, Inc. in Austin, Texas, an organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil and human rights of people with disabilities. I was able to participate in and observe a wide variety of practice areas. The greatest highlights were helping secure Medicaid benefits for clients for whom they had been wrongfully denied.

I prepared for a Medicaid fair hearing for a young man whose request for a piece of medical equipment had been denied. This involved extensive communication with the client, his mother, physical therapist, and medical equipment provider, along with drafting numerous letters and conducting legal research. After receiving our materials, the Medicaid provider settled just before the hearing, which meant that my client could receive the equipment weeks earlier than he would have had we actually won the hearing. Instead of going to physical therapy once a week and spending only thirty minutes actually doing therapeutic exercises, my client was able to complete more effective therapy at home on his own. He then had more time to focus on college and work. This success was particularly exciting since this was the first time I made an immediate and concrete difference in someone's life. After sharing the good news with him, I was also able to provide him with a referral for help finding financial resources for his college education.

I also drafted a complaint for a federal lawsuit on behalf of a toddler in need of medical equipment. Her case was another straightforward wrongful denial of equipment, but the particular Medicaid provider had a long history of similarly unjustified denials. Medicaid recipients who are wrongfully denied equipment often do not have access to an attorney, and consequently, they often do not prevail at the administrative hearing. Therefore, creating systemic change is crucial to minimize the number of patients whose requests are incorrectly rejected. Regardless of whether or not the provider settles or defends against the lawsuit, I hope that my effort will help reduce the number of people who are wrongfully denied benefits.

During the summer, I also had the opportunity to observe hearings for civil commitments and education placements, as well as meeting clients. Seeing the treatment of our clients was sometimes very eye-opening, and it was difficult to see the obstacles they faced. It was helpful to learn about the variety of areas within disability

law, and seeing our clients' struggles reaffirmed my commitment to helping those who otherwise would not have adequate support and legal representation.

In addition, I looked at more systemic policy issues in Texas. I researched the restraint and seclusion of students with disabilities in Texas public schools and then wrote to districts with particularly high rates, inviting them to begin working with Advocacy on ways to reduce the incidents. Another policy area I looked at was language used by the Texas courts when referring to people with disabilities, and wrote letters to courts on changing such language. While I did not directly work with clients on these issues, working toward such change would ultimately benefit individuals. During the summer, I also assisted the attorneys with legal research for both specific cases and policy issues.

I sincerely appreciate Equal Justice America's generous support of my work this summer. I am particularly grateful to have this support during my first summer, since it was my first opportunity to really experience public interest law. It reaffirmed my passion for working directly with clients. I feel that it is truly an honor when a client trusts me to assist them through a challenging situation, and this summer was my first chance to experience that in the legal world. Again, thank you so much for your assistance, and for making such work possible for law students like myself.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Lee  
Harvard Law School, Class of 2011