

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

September 28, 2011

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Equal Justice America for its support of my internship this past summer with Community Legal Services (CLS) of Philadelphia. Thanks to the summer fellowship, I was able to pursue a position with a legal organization that is having a significant impact on the lives of low-income Philadelphians, and explore an area of practice that is of great interest to me.

As an intern in the Aging and Disability Unit at CLS, I gained substantive knowledge about elder and disability law in addition to administrative and healthcare law. Given the high volume of clients that came into the offices, I also developed significant practical experience in direct client service. Over my ten-week position, I managed a caseload of more than thirty clients, an experience which was challenging as a test of organizational skills, as well as exciting for the variety of clients I was able to assist and problems I helped solve.

The majority of the cases I handled concerned denials of benefits by the Social Security Administration (SSA). I received these case assignments in various stages of the appeals process, which allowed me to become intimately familiar with the procedures within the Social Security regulations. Among the clients I served, two in particular stand out in my mind as embodying the reason direct legal services is so directly impactful on people's lives. The first client was a single mother with four children, who, in addition to receiving social security benefits, had recently become eligible for welfare. I assisted her with an appeal of a denial of a Low-Income Heating and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) grant she should have received for the previous winter. Due to some technical errors with SSA and filing deadlines with LIHEAP, our client owed a significant amount of money to the gas company and had some of her utilities turned off. Unfortunately, this client had a difficult time explaining to the LIHEAP agent the information that LIHEAP required, and the agent was at times uncommunicative and unhelpful about the nature of the denial of the grant. Due to some creative advocacy and persuasiveness on my part, as well as plenty of patience, I was able to get the agent to agree to accept the appeal and move the case forward, as well as assist the client with the appropriate steps she needed to take with other social services agencies to ensure she received the entitlements she was owed. I am confident that the administrative obstacles I overcame on her behalf would have been nearly insurmountable for my client due to the bureaucracy of the agencies with which she had to deal. Most importantly, she is on the path to getting her heat turned back on before the colder months approach.

A second client that stands out in my mind is one whom I never actually met. The client was a child of Puerto Rican descent who was entitled to Social Security Survivor's benefits. His mother had come into the CLS Philadelphia office and had started the process for obtaining the benefits months prior to my arrival. My supervisor had already obtained the necessary documentation from

the Puerto Rico government to prove the client was the deceased father's son. However, by the time I got the case the mother and son had disappeared. Through some very persistent sleuthing on my part, I was able to trace the family from a move to Reading, Pennsylvania and finally back to Puerto Rico. Using an interpreter, I was able to communicate with the mother over the phone a few weeks later, and explain to her the process for refiling for the benefits in Puerto Rico. The child was entitled to years of back pay of benefits, which will undoubtedly help him and his mother until he reaches the age of eighteen.

Two additional highlights of my fellowship experience include writing a brief in support of a client's appeal of denial of social security benefits, which was submitted in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, as well as successfully representing a client at an administrative law hearing for his appeal of the denial of Supplemental Security Income benefits. Thanks to the enthusiastic support of my supervising attorney, John Whitelaw, both of these were excellent experiences: I concluded my summer with a polished piece of writing, as well as a victory on behalf of a client. I consider both the brief and the advocacy to be significant accomplishments, which will allow me to distinguish myself from my peers as I look for new opportunities next summer.

I cannot say enough positive things about the professional caliber and personal dedication of the attorneys at CLS. These individuals, and especially my two supervisors John Whitelaw and Brenda Marrero, became great mentors for me and exemplified the best side of public interest lawyering. Their commitment to the meeting the legal needs of marginalized persons in Philadelphia was an inspiration and a model as I begin to build my own legal career.

Thank you again, Mr. Ruben and Equal Justice America supporters, for the opportunity to engage in this important work and to build ties with a network of like-minded attorneys.

Sincerely Yours,

Julia Melle
J.D. Candidate 2013
Temple University Beasley School of Law

August 1, 2011

VIA EMAIL ATTACHMENT

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

RE: Julia Melle
Summer Intern at CLS
Evaluation Letter

Dear Mr. Ruben:

It is with pleasure and enthusiasm that I submit to you this letter of evaluation for Julia Melle, who has been interning with Community Legal Services, Inc in the Aging and Disabilities Unit this summer. I have been supervising her work along with our unit co-director John Whitelaw, Esq. Julia has done a tremendous job this summer in all aspects of her duties.

Julia has handled cases involving SSI child disability, nursing home quality of care issues, employment related disability denial, and SSI termination and appeal cases. One case out of many worthy of mentioning is a case involving an individual whose SSI benefits were terminated due to excess resources. I gave Julia this case when she first started, and her work on this case has been tremendous. This case is quite complicated and tedious. Julia had to initially organize the mountain of paperwork that the client brought in, years of bank statements that had to be put in order so that we could begin assessing this case and looking to next steps in our advocacy. Julia handled this with great attention to detail. She was able to make sense of years of bank statements so we could then meet with the client and properly advise her of what we could do to reinstate SSI benefits. Julia also took the lead at the client meeting we had, communicating with the client remarkably well and making the client understand her legal rights. Julia has also drafted correspondence in this matter, and has done legal research on Social Security regulations and policy. Her skills in that area as well have been excellent.

Julia has also accompanied me on many nursing home visits and home visits, an aspect of our work that can be very challenging because we visit folks in their most vulnerable state. I was very impressed with the way Julia handled herself on these visits. She has an immediate connection with clients, she makes clients feel very comfortable, and she listens to them very

well and makes clients feel that their legal issues matter. I also found Julia to be at ease in situations where clients are very upset and emotional in describing their legal hurdles. Not once did Julia show a level of unease, in fact she helped the clients talk through their emotions and showed clients empathy and compassion. To me, that is the true mark of an advocate. Not only does Julia's demeanor make clients feel that they are being treated with dignity and respect, her analytical skills and research skills in those cases also proved she can handle the legal aspects of a case in order to tactfully advocate for the client.

Julia was handed the task of covering Intake for our unit. She was not the least bit unnerved. Julia became familiar with our client database system quite fast, and she is comfortable using it. Julia would request assistance when appropriate, and showed she could also work independently with clients. I was very happy with her performance during her coverage of our Intake day and this solidified for me how well she deals with clients and how well she analyzes the legal issues presented. Lastly, I found Julia's background as a teacher most helpful in her work on an SSI child disability case. Julia and I met with the client's mother, and Julia's knowledge of school systems and special education proved very valuable at this meeting, as she was able to advise the client's mother of what she should expect in a school setting for her special needs child. Julia also did great legal research in this area, drafting an excellent memo summarizing SSI child disability policy and the issues of the case.

I have been practicing for many years and have supervised many paralegal and law student interns. Julia is one of the most impressive law students I have had the pleasure of working with. I have no doubt in my mind that wherever she lands, she will make a difference in people's lives. She has a passion for her work, a passion for the law and a passion for equal justice, a combination of attributes that have made her internship here a wonderful experience for our office. Thank you for the opportunity to communicate my opinion of Julia. If you require anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Brenda L. Marrero
Staff Attorney