

**Lauren Almquist**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to thank you and Equal Justice America for my summer grant, which allowed me to spend an additional two weeks interning at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice in New York (NCLEJ). The organization focuses on protecting the civil rights of low-income individuals through impact litigation, and it brings a number of cases to ensure that individuals receive their government benefits in a timely manner. I found the internship to be an overwhelmingly positive experience for a number of reasons.

First, the internship gave me the opportunity to witness firsthand how litigation efforts proceed, from very early strategic planning conversations among staff attorneys to the filing of court documents. I was able to participate at all stages; for example, I sat in on a conversation between our director of litigation and an advocate based in Mississippi who wanted to know if Mississippi FEMA trailer residents would have a valid claim against FEMA for breaking the terms of a contract. On another occasion, we went to New Jersey and interviewed individuals outside the Department of Social Services to see if any were experiencing delays to their food stamps and Medicaid applications. This experience served as a helpful reminder of the goal of the litigation: to assist low-income individuals who need such government benefits to survive. We then used the information from these people to complete court documents and file lawsuits against city and state officials, asking that an injunction be put in place that would force them to comply with federal laws.

In addition to providing me with a chance to participate in all aspects of litigation, the internship allowed me to hone my research and writing skills. I conducted research on issues that arose around ongoing cases, examined if causes of action existed in potential cases, and analyzed whether we should appeal cases that had been dismissed. I learned quite a bit about poverty law

**Lauren Almquist**

and the federal laws in place to protect low-income individuals. All of this information will be directly applicable to my future legal studies and practice.

Lastly, the NCLEJ internship provided me with access to a wonderfully dedicated group of attorneys. The office is small and the attorneys were very busy, without much time to devote to close editing of our work; nevertheless, they all made an effort to include us and invite us to meetings around the city. Brown bag lunches were arranged with all of the attorneys to give us a chance to learn about their career paths and ask advice about next steps in our own careers. Because of the diversity of their interests and past work experience, I found that these lunches provided valuable insight into how a career in public interest can progress.

In sum, I am thankful to have had the chance to spend ten weeks with NCLEJ. The internship confirmed my interest in working to promote social justice and gave me ideas as to next steps in this process. While the focus of the organization's litigation on government benefits is quite narrow, it provided me with a strong foundation in impact litigation, which I can apply to a number of other civil rights issues. I greatly appreciate EJA's support and am already looking forward to an equally fulfilling internship next summer.

Best regards,

Lauren Almquist