

## LUMINA SATO

September 12, 2010

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

Dear Director Ruben,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Equal Justice America for funding my summer internship at Prisoners' Legal Services.

Prisoners' Legal Services is one of the only organizations that works in the field of prisoners' civil rights in Massachusetts. The advocates at PLS engage in class action and individual litigation, individual advocacy to prison administrators in pre- or non-litigation contexts, as well as education and outreach on issues that most affect prisoners. Throughout my summer at PLS, I was able to gain experience and learn about the various aspects of PLS' work.

My time was divided equally between litigation support and individual advocacy. My biggest litigation project was conducting research and drafting a memorandum on the issue of pre-judgment interest in a 4,500-plaintiff class action case against a sheriff's department, where a state takeover of the sheriff's department during the pendency of the suit gave rise to a sovereign immunity claim.

I also visited prisons and interviewed clients in several different contexts. In one visit, I interviewed several prisoners who had information to share about a suicide by a prisoner who had recently been taken off of his pain medication that he had been prescribed after receiving cancer treatment. I also interviewed a dozen prisoners at a maximum-security prison after some prisoner went on a *de facto* strike against the prison's implementation of new policy. I also visited a county jail that has been ordered to decrease its detainee population by court order for years. I spoke with dozens of detainees who were class members of the original lawsuit to find out what their thoughts were on the State's recent proposals to move several hundred detainees to the county prison.

Finally, I worked on several individual advocacy projects, where the clients were facing legal difficulties in prison as a consequence of their particular pleas to certain crimes. One client had been deemed a security threat because of gang affiliations and was sent to Arizona without a shred of due process. I advised him on how to navigate through the maze of two states' regulations on prisoner classification and placement, and how to go about challenging the underlying designation as a gang member. Another client was told by the Department of Correction that, contrary to what the Court and his attorney had informed him, he had pled

guilty to a charge that made him statutorily ineligible for earned good time off of his sentence. After conferring with the Court and his defense attorney, I explain to my client how to apply to the public defender's office for representation to seek post-conviction relief. I worked with another client who had been subjected to extreme conditions of confinement in a special segregation unit called "bubble segregation" in a county jail while he awaited trial. He had been given minimal out-of-cell time, and had been quarantined from all of the other prisoners for months.

While I had worked with detainees prior to working at PLS, I had not dealt with many long-term prisoners. My experience with clients and with the advocates at PLS gave me a deeper understanding of the particular vulnerabilities of prisoners serving long sentences – how prisoners could be subjected to up to 10 years in segregation as a disciplinary sanction, how the sensory deprivation can cause severe mental breakdowns for many of the prisoners, and the extreme measures that some will take to be taken out of segregation and into a psychiatric prison facility. Through the prison visits, I had the honor of meeting several members of the board of Prisoners' Legal Services who were themselves current prisoners. Some have been incarcerated for most of their adult lives and are serving life sentences without parole. I was inspired by their sense of purpose in bringing to light the issues that most effected prisoners, and in serving as an example to younger prisoners, many of whom have a chance to carve out a different life for themselves after their release.

Thank you for your generosity in giving me an opportunity to work with Prisoners' Legal Services.

Sincerely,

Lumina Sato  
Boston College