

August 31, 2015

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for your extraordinary support through the Equal Justice America Fellowship. Because of your support, I was able to work as an Equal Justice America Fellow at the Greater Boston Legal Services in their Elder, Health & Disability Unit.

My work specifically involved Social Security disability advocacy, and so I want to share with you my experience working with one client in particular. This client had severe mental and physical disabilities that prevented him from working. He has suffered complications from surgery, diffuse osteoarthritis, as well as bipolar disorder and major depression. He has a history of incarceration and has been homeless for several years. He has struggled with treatment and medication compliance.

We took this case because no one else would, and because we believed in this client's story, which no one else would listen to. I spent many hours with this client, in person and over the phone, sifting through the details of his medical records, which totaled over 1000 pages. In Social Security disability advocacy, medical evidence is the cornerstone of disability determination. As such, I drew on both my medical and legal training to compose a brief that argued that there were severe mental and physical limitations resulting in profound decreases in the claimant's functional residual capacities, and that his treatment was not successful despite therapeutic blood lithium levels that suggested he was in fact complying with his medications. I also used my medical knowledge to directly work with the claimant's medical providers in order to bolster the medical evidence.

Our client was extremely grateful for our patience and our assistance. Although the Administrative Law Judge returned an unfavorable ruling for our client, we have filed for an appeal, as we have no intention of backing down given the merits of our case.

As a result of this fellowship experience made possible through EJA, I have learned the disability standards and what it takes to argue before an Administrative Law Judge. Most importantly, I have become passionate about providing medical substantiation and legal representation for individuals with complex medical and mental health problems who qualify for—but are facing an unjust denial or termination of—their Social Security disability benefits. I will continue to help clients overcome multiple system barriers, including insufficient documentation from medical providers and a lack of representation during the Administrative Law Judge hearings, and I hope to achieve justice for all of my future clients with disabilities.

Gratefully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matthew Young', with a stylized, flowing script.

Matthew H. H. Young
JD / MD Candidate
Harvard Law School / Harvard Medical School
Class of 2018 / 2019