

August 9, 2014

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Yesterday was my last day at Bay Area Legal Aid in San Francisco, CA and I am thrilled to report that I had a wonderful experience. I served with one other law clerk with the Legal Barriers to Employment Project (LBEP) and we were supervised by three advocates. With LBEP, I was exposed to a number of legal issues ranging from public benefits and domestic violence to immigration and tax issues.

My largest project at the beginning of the summer was to assist one of my supervisors with preparing for an appellate oral argument. Our client was a mother who had witnessed abuse to her son by her son's father and suffered physical and emotional abuse herself. Her initial application for a restraining order for herself and her son had been denied for failure to first file for guardian ad litem. I conducted research and helped my supervisor strategize how to best argue both our interpretation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and how the trial court's proposed administrative process imposed overly restrictive barriers to survivors of domestic violence. Mid-way through the summer we learned that the court had ruled in our client's favor and just last week learned that the opinion would be published to provide future guidance.

The client with whom I worked most independently was Mr. Gutierrez (name changed). Mr. Gutierrez, a public benefits recipient, had called our office asking for help with renewing his Green Card and applying for United States Citizenship. When Mr. Gutierrez met with us, we learned that there were several years in which he had not filed taxes. We referred him to the IRS office to request an account transcript and shortly thereafter learned that he owed several hundred thousand dollars. After speaking with Mr. Gutierrez further we learned that his former employer had paid him with a check for a construction job and directed Mr. Gutierrez to cash the check and use the money to pay the entire crew, whose citizenship statuses were unknown. Mr. Gutierrez's employer had then falsely reported that Mr. Gutierrez earned more than \$350,000.00 in one year. In reality, he had earned a small fraction of that. I conducted further research, had Mr. Gutierrez come back in, and spent more than three hours calling the IRS to get him on "Currently Not Collectable" hardship status. With this status, Mr. Gutierrez will not face collections or additional penalties while he moves forward with both filing missing tax returns and pursuing a fraud claim against his former employer. That day was very powerful for me because Mr. Gutierrez so confidently put all of his trust in me and in giving the IRS worker his consent for me to speak on his behalf.

Another phone call that I will not soon forget was to Ms. Zaya (name changed). Ms. Zaya, whose primary language is Mongolian, is also a public benefits recipient. She is a domestic violence survivor with three children and a fourth on the way from her abuser. She and the father have since separated and, when she came to our office, she was barely able to make ends meet. Because of the Maximum Family Grant Rule, which requires families to go off of aid for two months prior to adding another person to the "assistance unit," Ms. Zaya was only receiving benefits for one of her three sons and did not expect to receive benefits for her unborn child. This rule had never been explained to Ms. Zaya in her native language. With the help of an interpreter, my supervisor and I explained the rule to Ms. Zaya and applied for a Domestic Violence waiver to the rule. We learned on a Friday that Ms. Zaya's waiver had been granted and that she would receive retroactive and proactive benefits for her two younger sons and her unborn child. Though I had an appointment scheduled with Ms. Zaya and the interpreter for that Monday, I could not wait to tell her the news. I called her and very slowly and as simply as possible told her that her application had been granted, she would start receiving benefits for all her children, and would not have to go off of aid before her baby was born. The gratitude she expressed both during that phone call and again when I explained it more thoroughly with the interpreter on Monday made every struggle of my 1L year worth it.

I am so inspired by the work done at Bay Area Legal Aid and am honored to have been a part of it. I feel refreshed and ready to return to school for my second year with a renewed commitment to public service. Thank you so much for including me in this summer's Equal Justice America group.

Best Wishes,  
Monica Porter  
The George Washington University Law School, Class of 2016

Alex R. Gulotta  
Executive Director



# BAY AREA LEGAL AID

WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE

September 2, 2014

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
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Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: evaluation of Monica Porter's work  
with Bay Area Legal Aid over Summer 2014

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to provide your agency with an evaluation of the work done by Fellow Monica Porter with us over the summer of 2014.

Ms. Porter worked at Bay Area Legal Aid's San Francisco office in our Legal Barriers to Employment Project (LBEP). LBEP advocates work in collaboration with the San Francisco Human Services Agency to help public benefits recipients become self-sufficient. We help clients obtain drivers and professional licenses, clear criminal records, deal with debt and credit issues, and other barriers to permanent employment. While our clients are still receiving public benefits, we also assist them with any problems of eligibility for aid and supportive services, such as childcare.

Ms. Porter handled intake calls for prospective LBEP clients on our dedicated phone line. She worked directly on a variety of different client cases, including:

- Documenting domestic violence for a CalWORKs (TANF) recipient so that her family could receive additional benefits;

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- Obtaining police reports to verify a client's criminal record;
- Helping to prepare a staff attorney for oral arguments in front of the California Court of Appeals;
- Preparing for and attending a training for advocates at a local agency helping pregnant homeless women;
- Producing a research memorandum on how the California Election Code would affect efforts to change San Francisco's cash aid & employment program for single adults.

Ms. Porter consistently completed assignments on time, and asked what else she could do. She worked well with our clients and our staff. She was enthusiastic and quick to learn, and took advantage of every possible opportunity to learn more. Most importantly, Ms. Porter showed dedication to our mission: providing top quality legal services to the poor.

I have personally been training and supervising law students for fifteen years, and I found Ms. Porter's work to be top notch. Thank you for funding her work with us.

Sincerely yours,



Kristen Washburn

Staff Attorney