

September 24, 2013

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

RE: Summer Fellowship Experience

Dear Mr. Ruben,

First of all, I would like to thank you and Equal Justice America for enabling me to spend a summer with the Bronx Defenders and to work with indigent clients. Without the funding I received from EJA, the experience would not have been possible.

Working at the Bronx Defenders was great. When my supervisors became comfortable with the work I was doing and saw how much I enjoyed working with clients, they gave me every opportunity to work with clients. I am grateful for the experience; it solidified my commitment to public interest/public defense work.

I would like to tell you about one of my clients, Ms. Jones (I have changed her name to keep her identity confidential). When I first met Ms. Jones, her case was ostensibly about her inability to access thousands of dollars worth of money to pay her rent arrears. However, as I learned more about her, I found her story to be a perfect (albeit frustrating) example of the difficulty of navigating a complex bureaucratic system.

Ms. Jones is a veteran and a cancer survivor. Two years ago her benefits case was transferred from one welfare office to another. Because of the two offices' inability to communicate effectively with each other, her benefits were cut off, including rent payments, when she was transferred. While trying to reinstate her benefits, she petitioned her new office to schedule a doctor's appointment to determine whether she had a disability. She still suffers from side effects of her cancer treatment and often cannot get out of bed. For some reason, she was never referred to a doctor. Several times she was scheduled for work training appointments and failed to attend them because of her cancer treatment side effects. As a result, her benefits were terminated three times. She should have never been scheduled for work training appointments.

Despite feeling ill the majority of the time, Ms. Moore fought the agency for nearly two years by herself. She waited in welfare offices, dealt with confrontational benefits workers and wrote letters to supervisors at her welfare office. She appealed her benefit terminations and appeared at administrative hearings where she repeated the same story over and over again: She could not work, she needed to see a county doctor and please reopen her case so that she could start receiving benefits again.

Her case came to the Bronx Defenders as a housing case because she had not paid her rent in two years and the Housing Authority was trying to evict her. I came on board during when lawyers at the Bronx Defenders were trying to determine how Ms. Jones' case went so wrong two years ago. As I developed rapport with her, I was given more responsibility over her case until finally I found myself advocating for her in an administrative hearing (which we won) and then sitting with her in the welfare office for two days straight with the intention of sorting out her benefits (which we did). In the end, Ms. Jones received a check for \$7,000 to pay her arrears. I delivered the check personally to her housing project's management office. They literally could not believe that I was handing them two years worth of rent.

The work I did with Ms. Jones was very satisfying. I learned a lot about her, gained some real insight into the difficulties she was facing and was able to advocate effectively for her. It was privilege representing Ms. Jones and I am very happy that I got to meet her.

EJA made all of this possible. It is so important to allow law students to have experiences like this because it proves that the work that we do as lawyers really does make a difference. Seeing the results we can achieve as law students is a powerful way to learn that a career in the public interest is a righteous and worthwhile choice after law school. Because of my summer at the Bronx Defenders, it has been impressed upon me that I must continue to serve clients like Ms. Jones. EJA had a huge part to play in that experience and I am grateful for it.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Peter Borenstein
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles
May 2014