

20 Mellen Street, Apt. 2
Cambridge, MA 02138
August 29, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I worked as a legal intern in the Public Benefits unit of the Legal Aid Society of Washington, D.C. This internship provided valuable experience in the field of direct legal services. I acquired not only tangible skills in areas such as legal research and writing, but also a more informed perspective on providing legal services for the poor.

The bulk of my substantive work at Legal Aid was on cases involving appeals from denials of Social Security benefits. I was involved in every step of the cases, including initial client interviews, factual information gathering, substantive research, brief writing, and attending hearings. Even though I was at Legal Aid for only ten weeks, I was able to see several cases through from start to finish; this allowed me to develop a more global understanding of how public benefits cases progress through the adjudicative system.

While I had many opportunities to research legislation and regulations and to prepare briefs, memos, and letters, the most rewarding aspect of my internship was the direct client interaction I experienced. I worked one-on-one with clients throughout their appeals, which gave me a sense of ownership on the cases and allowed me to develop meaningful relationships with the clients.

One individual I worked with over the course of the summer stands out. This client came to Legal Aid because she had been denied Social Security Disability benefits (SSDI), which she applied for after undergoing major surgery that left her completely incapacitated and unable to perform any type of work. From the beginning, I was struck by the client's strong desire to get back to work as soon as possible; the prevailing (and, as I saw throughout the summer, incorrect) stereotype is that people who apply for government benefits are trying to "beat the system" and avoid working. As I did legal research for the client's brief, I also met with her frequently in order to develop the factual section of the brief. As a result, I formed a close relationship with this client. She had gone through an overwhelming amount of hardship throughout her life, but was committed to getting through her illness and working with her attorneys on her case in order to turn her life around. Her faith in us was humbling and very motivating.

During the last week of my internship, I was able to attend the hearing for this client, in

which she was awarded SSDI for the rest of her life. I will never forget seeing the client celebrate with her mother, saying, "I'm finally going to get my life back." While my average day at Legal Aid was certainly more mundane than that moment, I believe that attending that hearing is what finally allowed me to grasp the power and importance of direct legal services.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to work at Legal Aid with an Equal Justice America fellowship.

Sincerely,

Rachel S. Marx
Harvard Law School 2009