

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

September 29, 2009

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to thank you for providing me with an Equal Justice America Fellowship to fund my work at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest this summer. Because of your generosity, I was able to serve low-income clients in New York City in a time of unprecedented economic crisis. In light of the unique circumstances that befell many people this past year, I was especially grateful to have the opportunity to serve the public interest in housing and special education matters.

For the first half of my summer at NYLPI, I provided direct services to low-income clients with disabilities in housing discrimination and reasonable accommodation matters. Even in New York City, where tenants' rights are especially strong, many tenants experience a constant and tiring battle with public housing authorities, building managers and landlords when they attempt to invoke their rights. Many of my clients were at their wits' end after having made unsuccessful attempts to get approval for amenities such as: a physician-recommended mattress to alleviate pain from gunshot wounds; grab bars in a bathroom; and a functioning elevator in common areas. As an advocate, I was able to look at my clients' legal issues with a fresh perspective and assist them in the fight to exercise their rights to reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Whether it was a phone call, a letter, or a complaint, my efforts served to ensure that clients had support, and—most importantly—were instilled with the sense that they could empower themselves. With a little persistence, my clients and I worked together, and were able to get my clients' needs met.

Later in the summer, I joined the Education team at NYLPI and worked on several projects advocating for students' rights to be identified as having disabilities, and to be provided with special education services. One such project involved a student who wanted to continue his tutoring services after High School. As a student with a disability, he had responded very well to special education services and was determined to go to college. His school had initially provided him with insufficient tutoring services, but the Department of Education later corrected the problem in a mediation proceeding by providing him with a tutoring voucher. Unfortunately, the DOE claimed that his voucher would expire once he graduate from High School, even if he still had hours left to complete. As an advocate, I knew that his ability to retain the remaining tutoring hours on his voucher could mean the difference between his succeeding or failing in college. I conducted extensive research on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and identified arguments that we could use in a hearing to assert the student's right to continue his tutoring services. My research not only provided rigorous arguments in favor

of his right to retain his voucher but it became part of a manual for other advocates to assist them in negotiating with the DOE on behalf of low-income students with disabilities.

My summer at NYLPI confirmed my absolute commitment to use my academic and professional privilege to advocate for the rights of individuals who are most vulnerable in American society. I am grateful to organizations such as EJA, who stand shoulder to shoulder with young advocates and make possible our opportunities to further our passion for social justice.

Thank you again, very much.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Martindale

*JD Candidate, 2010
UC Berkeley School of Law*