

August 31, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

I had the opportunity this summer to serve an Equal Justice America Fellowship with Public Counsel. I worked within the Statewide Education Rights Project and served community organizations and individual clients around issues of school accountability, climate, discipline, and special education. Three of my most salient projects were: supporting the advocacy efforts of community organizations around school Local Control Accountability Plans; brief client services such as reviewing education records, writing record requests and creating record chronologies; and providing full education representation for a system-involved client.

First, in order to support the advocacy efforts of local community organizations, I monitored and analyzed Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP) of five different school districts. Local Control Accountability Plans are documents approved annually by school districts in which they commit to specific annual goals to support high-need students and in which they demonstrate that the school district has committed the resources necessary to make progress towards those goals. While school districts must create opportunity for public comment on the LCAP, districts often publish drafts only a few days prior to the public meeting and opportunity for comment. To support several parent and community organizations, I communicated with the groups to understand their advocacy priorities, analyzed the LCAPs, and wrote letters for the organizations that highlighted the priority issues for the groups. These letters focused on such issues as addressing disproportionate use of school discipline of students of color, providing supports to foster youth, and school climate. Writing letters to and on behalf of the community groups allowed them to participate more meaningfully in the public comment process and to improve the LCAP. This experience highlighted for me the challenges of meaningful democratic participation in accountability processes. I believe that my role as an advocate was to understand the goals of the community organizations and provide the relevant information to the groups for the furtherance of those goals.

Second, I provided brief services to several clients. I conducted intake with several parents. I reviewed the education records, created education chronologies of the records, and wrote records requests on behalf of the clients. For most of these clients, I was unable to work with them long enough to appreciate the impact of my services. That being said, I was able to listen. Most of the individuals I spoke with expressed deep gratitude for my "help" when all I had done was listen, ask questions, and promise that I would check with my supervisors to see what support we could provide. My brief services work emphasized the power of listening.

Third, and most impactful, I worked with a client in Juvenile Hall to ensure that he would receive the special education supports he needed for an opportunity of success in school. B.T. is a fourteen-year-old boy with several behavioral disorders and learning disabilities that have qualified him for special education. I participated in an Individual Education Plan meeting at Juvenile Hall with B.T. and met with B.T. before and after the meeting to understand his education needs and goals. Throughout our interactions, I realized how hungry B.T. was for positive interactions with adults. He was kind, trusting, and brought a sense of humor to our interactions. At the same time, many parts of his personality and his responses seemed developmentally atypical for a fourteen-year-old boy. It was heartbreaking to witness the tragic connections between disabilities and juvenile justice. Working with B.T. and all individuals with disabilities caught within the juvenile justice system underscores the importance that advocacy engage with both the education and justice systems simultaneously in order to support our clients.

These experiences complemented and reinforced each other. Analyzing Local Control Accountability Plans demonstrated the opportunity for system-wide supports for vulnerable students. Working with individual clients demonstrated the need for improvements across entire school districts while highlighting the unique needs of each individual student.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alexandria Sadler".

Alexandria Sadler
University of California, Berkeley School of Law
J.D. Candidate 2018



THE PUBLIC INTEREST LAW OFFICE OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY AND BEVERLY HILLS BAR ASSOCIATIONS
The Southern California Affiliate of The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

August 15, 2016

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing in regards to the Equal Justice America Fellowship that Alexandria (Ali) Sadler served with Public Counsel this summer. Ali has been an excellent addition to the Statewide Education Rights Project of Public Counsel, undertaking a variety of projects for several team members.

These projects included drafting several formal legal memos and other research projects, submitting records requests on behalf of clients and corresponding with school districts, as well as meeting with clients and community organizations. Her research focused on school governance, accountability, and school climate—research that will directly support the current and future advocacy efforts of Public Counsel with clients, local school districts, and at the California legislature. Her assistance was particularly helpful with regards to analysis of Local Control Accountability Plans, where she analyzed and summarized the complex school district documents for staff members and community organizations. As a part of this work, Ali drafted letters on behalf of community organizations that targeted both the goals of the community group and conveyed the appropriate tone for the sending group and receiving audience. Ali also gave public comment at several school district board meetings to advocate for additional supports in the LCAP and budget. It became clear that Ali is quite adept at synthesizing complicated information and drilling down to the critical messages that are necessary for our policy advocacy.

Ali is reliable, efficient, well-organized, hard-working and a pleasure to have in the office. One of Ali's strengths is her ability to communicate well – this is true whether it is with a young person or parent, community member or fellow team member. I particularly appreciated Ali's initiative – she was always ready to accept new projects, suggest work opportunities and take feedback. She is also excellent at prioritizing work (responding to urgent needs and balancing projects in multiple areas), and communicating about various team members' needs. I was impressed by how quickly Ali got up to speed not only with the substantive content of our work but also with the various systems utilized internally within the office with very little supervision. Notably, Ali has developed a good sense of the power dynamics of various coalitions and government entities, which is helpful not only to understanding things like legislative advocacy, but also to ensure that she is reflective on the role of a lawyer in a variety of spaces.

The Public Counsel Statewide Education Rights Project has been grateful to work with Ali Sadler this summer and for the support of the Equal Justice America Fellowship.



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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials "LB" in a cursive, flowing style.

Lauren E. Brady

Directing Attorney
Statewide Education Rights Project