

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 24, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am very grateful that you awarded me the Equal Justice America Fellowship to fund my work in the Public Benefits Unit of Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE). Your support gave me the opportunity to work with the client population of my choice—the elderly—and it solidified my decision that this is the population that I hope to work with for the rest of my career.

The D.C. government has placed a premium on helping low income D.C. residents age in their homes with the proper community supports. I advocated for clients in formal and informal ways to support this worthy goal. One such client was Ms. H, a 68-year old client who suffers from a number of disabling conditions. The government determined that she is entitled to 16 hours of personal care aide services per day, but the home health agency delivering her services was threatening to terminate them. Under the direction of my supervising attorney, Rebekah D. Mason (“Ms. Mason”), I was able to help Ms. H by:

1. Writing a motion for mediation in an attempt to resolve the conflict between the home health agency and the client so her services would continue (granted)
2. Reviewing the case with and requesting consent for mediation from a senior attorney at a law firm that represented the home health agency
3. Setting up technology so Ms. H could participate in the mediation by videoconference
4. Serving as point person for Ms. H and addressing her concerns during the mediation
5. Notifying the DC Ombudsman of the home health agency’s inconsistent and unstable service delivery
6. Communicating with D.C. government officials to acquire retroactive food stamps benefits (~\$350) owed to Ms. H

Unfortunately, the mediation was unsuccessful. Ms. H, with LCE’s counsel, decided to proceed with a transfer to a different home health agency that might better serve her. But 18 agencies—all state actors—refused to accept her as a transfer. After strategic planning with Ms. Mason, I drafted an email to DC government attorneys assigned to the case to reiterate the purpose of these home and community-based services regulations and challenged them to think critically about how to best implement them in situations like that of Ms. H. For now, Ms. H will continue to get services from her current home health agency with oversight from DC Ombudsman and the Office of Administrative Hearings until a safe and successful transfer can be effectuated. These types of cases take determination and patience, but they are incredibly important in the fight to uphold our clients’ dignity.

During my time at LCE, I also worked on Veterans Benefits and Social Security/Disability issues. Mr. L served in the Marines for three years during the Vietnam War. He received an “other than honorable” discharge, which meant he was not entitled to VA healthcare benefits, pension or compensation. He asked LCE for assistance in obtaining VA benefits. Ms. Mason advised him that LCE could submit a claim for compensation and pension along with a statement

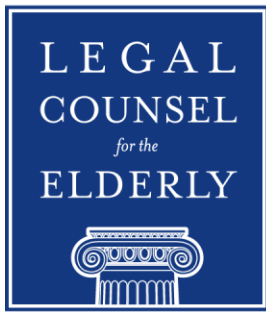
in support of these claims. This would prompt the VA to conduct a character of discharge evaluation. Mr. L had never heard of this option, and he agreed to it. Ms. Mason then assigned the case to me, and Mr. L proceeded to tell me about his life and time in the military service, including stories of racial prejudice, drugs, alcohol, and mental illness. I was able to write a comprehensive statement that addressed his “other than honorable” discharge in support of his compensation and pension claims. He told me how much it meant to him to have someone listen to his story. This claim is still pending with the VA.

The last client I’ll mention is Mr. P. Under the direction of my other supervising attorney Daniela de la Piedra (“Ms. de la Piedra”), I drafted a disability brief for Mr. P, whose disability had been denied based on physical conditions. When our client shared that he suffered from serious depression in addition to physical disabilities, Ms. de la Piedra asked the court to grant a hearing on remand based on new and material evidence. I collected information from social workers and psychiatrists, researched disability briefs in the Thomas Busch manual, and drafted a portion of the disability brief on Mr. P’s behalf for his hearing scheduled for December 2017.

Thank you again for your generous support and giving me the opportunity to feel fulfilled at work. It was an honor to work with such dedicated staff at Legal Counsel for the Elderly.

All the best,

Sarah Grunberger
J.D. Candidate, May 2019
University of Michigan Law School



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August 31, 2017

VIA EMAIL TO katie@equaljusticeamerica.org

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Sarah Grunberger, EJA Fellowship Applicant

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Sarah Grunberger joined Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) as a summer intern during the summer of 2017. LCE provides free legal and related advocacy services to improve the quality of life for older District residents. LCE advocates for the rights of District seniors to basic human needs such as income, housing, public benefits (including health care and personal care assistance), personal autonomy, and consumer protection.

Sarah worked with LCE's Public Benefits and General Services Unit, which works to empower low-income DC residents 60 and older by ensuring they obtain the income and benefits they are entitled to receive. The two unit staff attorneys, Daniela de la Piedra and Rebekah D. Mason, supervised her work.

During Sarah's time with us, she worked full-time (40 hours a week) in direct client work and in support of client goals under our supervision. Almost immediately Sarah became an integral and trusted part of the team in advocating and advancing vulnerable clients' needs. Sarah worked with clients and with colleagues on Social Security Disability cases, Department of Veterans Affairs benefit claims, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program cases and much more.

In her time working on these cases she was respectful and kind in her dealings with clients. She communicated well with clients with disabling conditions, mental impairments or those with limited cognitive functioning. Upon her own initiative she conducted home visits with clients for Medicaid cases, as well as for a potential financial exploitation case where she coordinated with other units in our office who handle those matters.

Sarah was personable and professional in her dealings with our requests and a joy to be around. In the time she was here, our office was engaged in a move from one building to another, she was thoughtful and flexible in how she dealt with administrative challenges within the context of our



accommodations. Every once in a while our office finds an intern who sets herself apart; who excels in assignments, issue spotting and finding creative remedies and solutions. Sara is just such an intern and she set the bar for other interns to follow.

It was our pleasure to supervise and work with Sarah. She has a wonderful and engaging personality and asked thoughtful questions about career paths in advocacy. Our efforts to serve DC's most vulnerable seniors were truly expanded thanks to her work this summer.

We have asked Sarah to keep in touch with us the years ahead because we are looking forward to see what next steps she takes in her career. Please contact Rebekah D. Mason at (202) 434-2208 or rdmason@aarp.org or Daniela de la Piedra at 202-434-2291 or ddelapiedra@aarp.org if you need anything further.

Sincerely,

/s/ Daniela de la Piedra
Daniela de la Piedra
Senior Staff Attorney

/s/ Rebekah D. Mason
Rebekah D. Mason
Staff Attorney