

Dear Dan Ruben, Executive Director at Equal Justice America:

My name is Greta Wiessner and I am a law student from the University of Pennsylvania. I spent my 1L summer at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, in the Employment Unit. My role was to advocate for my clients in variety of employment related issues: discrimination, wrongful termination, wage theft, and other violations of both Pennsylvania state law and the Fair Labor Standards Act. I worked directly with clients every day of my internship. My primary client work was wage theft cases with immigrant clients. I was charged with interviewing clients who came in through our in-take process and claimed that an employer had failed to pay them. I worked with several clients who had been threatened based on their immigration status. Based on my interviews, I would write demand letters to employers explaining the relevant and law and requesting payment. I also negotiated with employers on the phone to receive payment. Negotiating with an adverse party boosted my confidence in explaining legal concepts, especially under stressful situations. The most satisfying feeling was having my client come back in and receive their check after an employer paid a claim! For those cases that did not end in a settled negotiation, I also worked with attorney's on building a legal case. I even went to a Rule 16b) conference with a federal judge for a wage theft case we filed in the EDPA.

Besides wage theft, a lot of my work focused on removing employment barriers. I worked directly with clients on Pardon applications, which was incredibly rewarding. Through the Pardon process, I was able to build a relationship with a client and help them write a strong application. Going through the process opened my eyes to harsh collateral consequences of criminal convictions, even those that are dozens of years old. The Pardon process, however, helped my clients to see how much they have grown, changed, and contributed to society since

their conviction. Finally, I also worked with clients on expungement petitions for non-conviction arrests. Removing these barriers was incredibly important for my clients. I was able to go to the Criminal Justice Center and see how the petition process works, which at times was frustrating. However, I always felt vindicated when the court granted a contested petition! The expungement clinics in the community were a highlight for me. I saw different neighborhoods in my community and heard stories of how interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system affected my clients employment opportunities.

After this summer I am confident that I want to pursue a career in public interest law and continue advocating for those living in poverty. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for facilitating this opportunity for me.

Sincerely,

Greta Wiessner

University of Pennsylvania Law School, Class of 2019