

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you for making my time at Empire Justice of Albany possible, without this financial assistance, I am doubtful that I would have joined their team as a law clerk for Summer 2016.

During my summer at Empire Justice, I worked under the leadership of Mrs. Susan Antos in the Public Benefits Unit. Many of my assignments were research and writing driven, where I would search through online hearing banks, use Lexis, and West Law tools to find cases in support of how we wanted the judge to decide in our cases. Other tasks included presenting the attorneys with updates on my research and varied tasks, serving adverse parties, and delivering documents to the Court of Appeals and the State Supreme Court.

Within my first week at Empire Justice, I attended a hearing at the Department of Social Services for one of Susan's ongoing clients. She was so respectful and made it a point to express her appreciation for the work Susan did for her! It was great to see the two of them interact on a human level, and that Susan's interaction on her client's behalf made her life more enjoyable. This devotion to making every client feel important and worth the help they were receiving was a recurring theme I witnessed throughout the rest of my time at Empire Justice.

Thereafter the first week of the summer, I was thrust into sitting in on conference calls, presentations to members of the NYS government (given by Empire Justice employees), and attending board meetings as the attorneys and heads of organizations planned the various ways in which they hope to make the laws negatively affecting the poor more advantageous. My mentor's commitment to helping the poor was evident in the many boards she serves on who effectively work with legislature to have bills enacted, and to broaden the protection or benefit that current laws have on the poor.

Aside from all of the "behind-the-scenes" work Susan and her colleagues do, I was afforded the privilege to shadow the attorneys meeting with clients to go over retainer agreements, and to get a better sense of why they need our assistance; and in return, the client's were given detailed and comprehensive insight into how their issues may be solved.

For instance, I accompanied a group of attorneys in the Benefits Unit as they met with individuals who were barred from receiving the SNAP benefits they once had, due to a new statutory provision which took effect on January 1, 2016. Recipients of SNAP benefits who we are able bodied adults living without dependents (ABAWDs) would only be given SNAP benefits for three months unless they were working a minimum of 20 hours per week. However, this effectively harmed many people who are not ABAWDs, as their services were unjustly cut off. In meeting with these individuals, I quickly realized how many people may actually have been exceptions under this rule. There were clients who were taking care of their elderly parents, ones who were diagnosed with illnesses that were absent to the naked eye, but certainly would put them outside of the category of "able-bodied," thus making them unable to be employed for

22 hours a week. It was both heartbreaking and infuriating to know that these type of occurrences could not be avoided by the government, with just a little more care in seeing that that notices and interruptions exclusively effected those within the enumerated class. Meeting after meeting, be it with clients or organizations, I learned about the damaging effect the government's carelessness—in drafting and implementing laws—has on the poor and underrepresented.

I can only hope that the goodness that Empire Justice is providing for those in the Capital Region will spark and effectuate a change in other parts of NY, so the poor are not being discriminated against and given unfair treatment in the wake of their current bad circumstances. This was an invaluable opportunity that I would recommend to each and every law student. It is important to see what powers we will possess, as attorneys, to make life a little more pleasant for all human beings—regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Yours truly,

Candace Williamson
Albany Law School,
J.D. Candidate, 2018