

August 31, 2018

Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Building II, Suite 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I had the privilege of working in the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Unit at Community Legal Services (CLS) of Philadelphia. This experience strengthened my commitment to civil legal aid and direct service. I am very grateful for Equal Justice America's support in pursuing this opportunity.

CLS provides a full range of free civil legal assistance to low-income Philadelphians. These services range from individual representation to class action litigation and community education. The SSI Unit represents clients facing termination or denial of SSI benefits. I learned from committed advocates who encouraged me to learn by doing, by discussing, and by critically examining the legal process.

In my capacity as an intern, I had the opportunity to work on a variety of cases and assignments. I primarily focused on appeals of adverse SSI disability determinations, though I also advocated cases involving allegations of overpayment by the Social Security Administration (SSA). I analyzed medical evidence to develop a theory of the case, wrote briefs, interviewed clients, and researched case law and administrative rules. Most importantly, I had the opportunity to directly support our clients through explanation of the administrative process, preparation for testimony, and direct representation.

One case in particular stands out to me. The client had long-standing impairments due to severe depression and anxiety, yet the SSA found he was no longer disabled, and therefore ineligible for SSI benefits. I worked on this appeal from beginning to end, collecting evidence, preparing a brief, and representing the client at the reconsideration hearing. I remember his frustration and confusion as he explained the impossibility returning to work or meeting basic needs without receiving SSI benefits. I will never forget the look of relief on his face when he learned that his benefits would be reinstated.

My experience at CLS helped me to better understand the barriers our clients face in seeking modest benefits. Our clients suffer daily from severe medical impairments while also confronting bureaucratic limitations (claimants in Philadelphia wait more than 2 years for a hearing!) and dangerous misconceptions of disability. Even when medical records provide strong evidence of disability, these individuals lack the capacity and resources needed to navigate the legal system alone. I am more committed than ever to providing direct services to vulnerable individuals.

Thank you again for your support in pursuing this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Sarah Ottone  
Georgetown University Law Center  
Class of 2020



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August 30, 2018

Katie Toman  
Equal Justice America

Via email: [katie@equaljusticeamerica.org](mailto:katie@equaljusticeamerica.org)

Dear Ms. Toman,

Sarah Ottone worked at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia this summer under my supervision. Every year CLS takes on 20 or more law student summer interns. The process for selecting the interns is highly competitive since we often get hundreds of applicants. Sarah was one of those interns that was chosen and had excellent credentials. Her performance exceeded our expectations.

Sarah was assigned to the SSI unit and was assigned writing and research tasks as well as interviewing clients and advocating cases involving payment issues involving the Social Security Administration. She did an excellent job. Her research and writing skills are very good and her approach showed a great deal of imagination. She also represented a client in a reconsideration hearing and did a very good job. We were all pleased that she won the case.

I have been working in legal services for a long time and have supervised many law students. Sarah is one of the best interns I have supervised and I do not say that lightly. I predict a long and successful career for her and I recommend her wholeheartedly. Not only does she have excellent skills but she is poised and well-spoken and has very good rapport with our client population. She is also a pleasure to



work with and fit right in with our diverse work force.

Thank you for allowing us to meet and work with this excellent candidate.

Yours truly,

*Richard P. Weishaupt*

Richard P. Weishaupt

Senior Attorney