

August 9, 2018

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II – Suite 204  
13540 East Boundary Rd.  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America for my fellowship grant and to share a bit about my internship at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) this summer.

I spent the summer in GBLS' Elder, Health, and Disability Unit. I split my time between working on elder housing cases and social security benefits cases. I was fortunate enough to hone my legal skills, such as interviewing clients, case investigation, legal research, writing, and even oral advocacy.

One of the cases I worked on was a social security benefits case that involved an overpayment of tens of thousands of dollars as a result of my clients, a married couple, allegedly receiving income from a foreign pension. My clients were refugees who surrendered any expectation of receiving government and employment benefits when they fled their former country and immigrated to the United States. However, the pension accounts still existed in their names, and were still depositing payments into their foreign bank accounts, which their family members would occasionally use for their own significant medical needs.

Our case hinged on the fact that there was no legal way for our clients to transfer their pensions to the United States. Meanwhile, their Social Security benefits had been significantly reduced and our clients, who spoke almost no English, were barely getting by and were unable to effectively advocate for themselves due to the language barrier, their unfamiliarity with the

Social Security Administration, and some cognitive and memory disabilities that they suffered as a result of their advanced age and significant medical challenges.

While working at GBLS, I had the opportunity to draft the brief for their case, interview the clients, research both foreign and domestic laws that would prohibit the transfer of these pensions to the United States, and represented my clients in a hearing before the Administrative Law Judge as their oral advocate. The work was challenging but extremely rewarding – I felt, for the first time since starting law school, that I was able to use my legal education to make a difference in someone’s life. My experience at GBLS was a formative one, and one that has influenced the way I approach my legal career moving forward. I learned not only about the severe challenges facing low income elders in our communities, but about the significant gap between those elders and available legal aid. Countless low income residents have limited legal aid due to understaffing and lack of available resources, and they are frequently unable to effectively advocate for themselves without an attorney guiding them or representing them. I was humbled to be a part of GBLS this summer and to contribute to their mission of providing legal advice and representation for these communities, and it would not have been possible without my grant from Equal Justice America. The grants from Equal Justice America allowed students like myself to work at GBLS this summer at no cost to them, which allowed them to take on more cases and serve more clients. I am sincerely grateful to Equal Justice America for enabling my experience.

Sincerely,

*Tara McCortney*

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Harvard Law School

