

Heather McLinn  
August 31, 2019  
Equal Justice America

Dear Dan Ruben,

Without the financial support and generosity of Equal Justice America, I would not have been able to spend my 2L summer internship at The Legal Aid Society's Prisoners' Rights Project ("PRP") in Manhattan. Working in this office has been one of the greatest joys of my law school career because I was able to perform invaluable direct service work to my incarcerated clients while being surrounded by supportive and brilliant mentors— from the attorneys on staff, my fellow interns, and my clients themselves.

The Prisoners' Rights Project utilizes class action lawsuits and direct client services to address the countless injustices of incarceration in New York state. Over the course of the summer, I worked on PRP's city team, meaning I made weekly visits to New York City jails, including Riker's Island, to conduct client interviews. These interviews often revolved around a client's experiences of violence or the withholding of medical treatment while incarcerated. After conducting client interviews, I used all the tools available to me, of which there are relatively few, to advocate for my clients. Sometimes this advocacy was successful, like the numerous times I was able to secure a transfer for a client away from a dangerous situation to another facility, or when I was successful in making sure a client was taken to a desperately needed doctor's appointment. However, sometimes advocacy was unsuccessful, largely due to the inherent violence and bureaucracy of the prison industrial system at large.

Over the course of the summer I wrote an informational memo, for the purpose of being sent to clients, describing the process of filing a pro se notice of claim after the 90-day filing deadline. My hope was that the memo could give our clients the autonomy and knowledge

necessary to control their own legal situations by proceeding pro se (if willing and capable). The production of this memo was part of a larger effort, on the part of PRP, to produce a library of self-help and know-your-rights materials for interested clients.

Before my internship, I had a vague understanding of the New York prison and jail system. I also had a vague understanding of the conditions of incarceration that detainees are forced to endure. However, after this internship I can say that I have seen the violence and injustice of our prisons and jails. I will likely never know how it feels, first hand, to have my dignity and freedom stripped from me in this way, but now I understand the cruelty and inhumanity involved in the business of incarceration.

The United States makes it incredibly difficult for the rights of incarcerated people to be fully realized. But the mission of speaking through and not for our incarcerated clients, and always seeking the most just outcomes for our clients, is what attracted me to PRP in the first place. I met incredible people who have been through impossible situations. I was also lucky enough to meet and attend the meetings of local activists and grassroots organizers whose mission is to end solitary confinement.

I will always be grateful to Equal Justice America for giving me this opportunity and allowing me to have this experience. I will always be grateful to the lawyers and employees at PRP, and the clients who were so open with me. I hope to bring the things I learned this summer with me into all of my future legal experiences.

Best,

Heather McLinn



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Dear Dan Ruben:

I write as a supervising attorney in the Prisoners' Rights Project ("PRP") of The Legal Aid Society to evaluate Heather McInn, who worked with PRP this summer.

As a summer intern with PRP, Heather was responsible for conducting intake interviews and subsequently advocating on behalf of individuals who are incarcerated in the New York City jail system, primarily on Rikers Island, but also in borough facilities in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Heather also completed a legal research and writing assignment concerning substitute jail orders and helped PRP prepare self-help materials for clients concerning the filing of a notice of claim against the City of New York for personal injury claims arising during a client's time in custody.

Heather was a responsible and reliable intern who took the responsibilities of the job seriously. She was faced with some difficult clients over the course of the summer, including transgender clients facing assault and harassment and individuals with serious mental illness, and she handled those situations well. Heather sought out advice from PRP attorney staff when needed, but also gained comfort and confidence over the course of the summer. This allowed her to draft emails and letters on behalf of clients without always having to ask what she should do in any particular case. I review all emails and letters sent by interns on behalf of clients and I found in most cases, Heather's writing was clear, persuasive and required little editing. She also seemed to have great empathy for the clients with whom she met and spoke and she was driven to find solutions for what at times were complicated issues. Finally, Heather was a friendly, pleasant presence in the office who got along well with the other interns and permanent staff.

It was a pleasure having Heather intern with PRP this past summer. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [vvela@legal-aid.org](mailto:vvela@legal-aid.org) or at 212-577-3530.

Very truly yours,

Veronica Vela  
*Supervising Attorney*