

September 6, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My summer internship at Community Legal Services was an exciting and transformative experience. There, I was able to participate in various types of legal advocacy, from direct services, to legislative advocacy, to impact litigation.

I spent this summer interning in CLS's Welfare Unit, assisting clients with public benefits problems, from SNAP reductions to Medical Assistance renewals. I am grateful for the knowledge I obtained about public benefits and the broad layout of this field of law. My internship began with a great deal of trainings sessions. CLS's intentional front-loading of information was appreciated and much-needed. Public benefits law is quite complicated; there are many exceptions to the rules and, without the fundamental tools and resources to approach client problems, one could lead their client astray. Because of CLS's training and guidance, I felt comfortable speaking to clients about their public benefits problems and advocating for them in my interactions with the Welfare Office. When I was unsure about how to best approach an issue, my supervisor, Maria Pulzetti, was always available to guide me in the right direction.

Outside of the CLS office, I had the opportunity to participate in legislative advocacy in Harrisburg to urge state legislators to oppose a bill that sought to eliminate Pennsylvania's General Assistance cash assistance program. Maria and I met with lawmakers and staff and attended a press conference in an attempt to keep the program open for low-income Pennsylvanians. But this bill passed this June, and the program was slated to end August 1, 2019. Following the legislative elimination of General Assistance, I was able to assist CLS in their legal challenge by conducting legal research and drafting pleadings. This experience showed me CLS's drive, passion and the dedication to this work. Unfortunately, the General Assistance program has not been revived, but I am hopeful that CLS's impact will lead to a positive outcome for those affected by this cut.

My experience at CLS showed me the benefits of having an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and multi-tiered approach to lawyering. Because CLS's main focus is direct services, the attorneys and staff members interact with clients every day, learning about their individual problems, while also learning about trends in the community. From these trends, CLS has been able to advocate for their clients in talks with the various Philadelphia Welfare Offices about issues of like language barriers that may affect recipients' ability to promptly appeal an unfavorable determination and ensuring recipients' due process rights are not violated with late or vague notices. CLS is also able to engage in legislative advocacy with policymakers and legislators to further advocate for clients. In the event that there is a clear legal violation that will affect a number of clients, like in the case

of the elimination of General Assistance by the Pennsylvania legislature this summer, CLS is able to file impactful litigation on behalf of their clients and similarly situated Pennsylvania residents. All of this work is done with the assistance of partner organizations and an understanding of the varied factors that may influence the lives of those who live in poverty.

I would not have been able to work at Community Legal Services without Equal Justice America's generous grant and support. I will cherish my time as an Equal Justice America Fellow and will encourage other students, at Penn Law and other law schools, to apply to the program.

Sincerely,
Jarron McAllister
University of Pennsylvania Law School
Class of 2020