

August 31, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I received an Equal Justice America (EJA) fellowship to work at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia (CLS). My experience at CLS has cemented my commitment to working with low-income populations in Philadelphia. I am thankful for EJA and the support that it provided me to pursue my interest in the public interest.

At CLS, I was assigned to the Energy Unit, which assists clients whose utilities have been shutoff and staffs a hotline advising callers on how to avert shutoffs. The bulk of the representation for individual clients consisted of my advocating on their behalf with the utility companies. This advocacy included assisting in filing medical certifications to suspend shutoff, facilitating the enrollment of clients into the various low-income plans offered by the utility companies, and negotiating payment arrangements. When working on the hotline, I provided callers with self-help advice on their rights to low-income plans, medical certifications, payment arrangements, and financial assistance.

When a utility company fails to comply with a regulation, a customer can make a complaint to the Public Utility Commission (PUC), a state agency. As a safe-guard against causing great harm to those suffering from medical conditions, state regulation allows a utility customer to file medical certifications that postpone planned shutoffs for thirty days. Renewals of these thirty day medical certification is supposed to be limitless as long as a customer continues to make “equitable payments” on all current bills.

Michelle came to CLS because her gas utility had been shutoff and she was on the verge of losing her electric service as well. Her husband desperately needs electricity and air-conditioning because of various medical ailments. Without power, he would be at serious risk of grievous harm. Michelle and her husband had accrued high back balances on their utilities accounts, like so many others, because of a long delay between the onset of the husband’s illness and the approval of his disability. For over a year, this couple could not afford the bare essentials of life. Choices had to be made between food, medicine, rent, and utilities. Early on, Michelle decided gas was the least essential and allowed it to be shutoff. As a result, though, her electricity bill the following winter skyrocketed, as she was forced to turn to space heaters for warmth. She was unable to keep up with the increased electric bills and by the summer she was

facing shutoff. In the meantime, her husband's disability was finally approved and the couple had a new, stable source of income. For the first time in over a year, Michelle and her husband were able to keep up with their current monthly bills.

To stave off an electric shut-off, Michelle began using medical certifications. Every month, she paid her current usage and whatever else she could to pay down the back balance. After three months, however, in violation of state-regulation, the electric company refused to honor any additional medical certifications. First, I tried to resolve the matter directly with the utility company but the company had a policy that the entire bill—the back balance as well as the current charges—had to be paid in order to receive additional medical certifications. In response, I assisted Michelle in contacting the PUC and helped her make a complaint. While the PUC considers her complaint, the electric company cannot terminate her service. By the time I left to return to school, the PUC had yet to make a decision but in the meantime Michelle and her husband will have electricity. This will give them the time and security they need to make decisions on how to proceed, including a decision on whether to file for bankruptcy protection.

Although I helped many people in resolving their issues, I also encountered a handful of clients whose problems were intractable. These cases were the hardest to handle but taught be valuable skills and lessons. I had to develop the skill to deliver bad news in a kind and supportive ways. These experiences also showed me precisely how the social safety net fails to protect certain people and this knowledge will inform my advocacy for system change.

Thank you for making this summer a possibility for me. I learned many lessons and will carry them with me into my career.

Sincerely,

Jacob Eden
American University – Washington College of Law
J.D. Candidate May 2014



August 23, 2013

VIA E-MAIL

Katie Toman
Equal Justice America
Building II - Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: Jacob Eden

Dear Ms. Toman,

It is with pleasure that I write to report on the performance of Jacob Eden as a fellowship intern in the Energy Unit at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia. From the outset, I want to express my gratitude to your organization for funding the contributions of hard-working, intelligent law students (like Jacob) to the legal work of CLS. I have performed a supervisory role over the past six years, beginning in practice at a large corporate law firm, and for the past three years at CLS.

Throughout his internship, Jacob appropriately prioritized a challenging workload, effectively and enthusiastically responding to the most urgent client needs while steadily progressing to completion of a legal research assignment. Jacob was also a positive, inquisitive, and collegial coworker, with whom I enjoyed lively discussions, and who excitedly seized the opportunity to contribute to unexpected legislative advocacy work that arose during the summer.

Jacob's contributions enabled the Energy Unit to manage an increased caseload over the summer months, and assisted our team in evaluating the likelihood of pursuing strategic litigation on a utility collections issue that has troubled us for several years. Jacob's contributions to the Energy Unit's accomplishments are best displayed in the services he provided to individual utility customers and applicants.

Together with another intern, Jacob managed a hotline for utility assistance, logging over 300 contacts with low-income Philadelphians requesting assistance with utility shut-offs, denials of service, billing and other disputes, gas and water service liens, and sheriff's sales. Jacob skillfully interviewed hotline callers, identifying the relevant legal issues and potential resolutions, and provided much-needed advice to assist those callers in resolving their utility issues. Jacob assisted in the direct representation over 20 individual clients, resolving the majority of their utility issues and resulting in the preservation and restoration of life-essential

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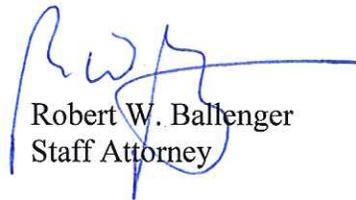
utility service. Jacob's individual client skills are clearly among the strongest indicators of his future success as a public interest lawyer.

During his internship, Jacob was also asked to investigate the potential claims involved in a utility collection practice, involving research into state and federal debt collection law and civil procedure. Jacob demonstrated his excellent legal research abilities in this process and went "beyond the call" in venturing to the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas to determine from original filings those facts that could not be ascertained by examining the dockets and published decisions. He used this information to assemble a thorough analysis of the issues we may encounter in pursuing claims against the utility and its collection agent, assembling a portrait of the landscape that could lie ahead in future litigation. Jacob's legal research and writing skills will certainly serve him well in his future advocacy endeavors.

Throughout the summer, Jacob demonstrated zeal and enjoyment in his work. He worked diligently and efficiently, demonstrating both initiative and resolve. He got along extremely well with other staff members and it was a pleasure to work with him.

Should you have any desire to discuss Jacob's performance or abilities further, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Ballenger
Staff Attorney