

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
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Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I want to thank you and the Equal Justice America Fellowship Program for the opportunity I had this last summer. I was able to work at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago's (LAF) Special Education and School Discipline Project because of funding I received from this program. The Education Project represents wards of the state in special education and school discipline cases.

As an intern, I was thrown into interesting work immediately, drafting due process complaints, conducting legal research and writing, and advocating for students at Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. With a background in teaching, this work was especially rewarding, because I was able to help children access the regular education curriculum through special education services. After the summer internship, I have stayed on to continue the internship this fall.

One case in particular stands out in my mind. "Susy" was a fifth grade student with a medical throat disorder that made swallowing and chewing difficult. As a result of this condition, she was also nonverbal. Though she was in the fifth grade, Susy was still not able to communicate with others to indicate her wants and needs, and as a result, the usually cheerful Susy would break down into tears because she was unable to communicate what she needed. Susy's foster mother, also her great-grandmother, came to the project to have us advocate for Susy to receive instruction in sign language and support in communication. Though her great-grandmother had requested these services multiple times, the school had not responded with appropriate testing or services. When the project took her case, I ended up visiting Susy and her grandmother, reviewing her school records, and drafting a due process complaint to get Susy appropriate testing and services. Currently, the case is in progress and the school district is providing appropriate testing to respond to Susy's needs.

Thank you again for providing the support and resources that allowed me to work at LAF this last summer and to pursue a career in public interest law.

Sincerely,

Verity Sandell

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