

August 3, 2012

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer could not have been a more rewarding experience. With the help of my supervisor, myself, and my fellow law clerks, the majority of my clients ended up resolving whatever issue they were having with receiving or maintaining their public benefits. This means that their benefits were either reinstated, their sanction/termination was removed from their record, they received some additional benefit they were entitled to, or they successfully applied for benefits for the first time or reapplied. Almost all of my homeless clients were able to obtain emergency services including expedited same-day food stamps, hotel vouchers, and bus tokens.

Over the course of the summer, I was able to assist over one-hundred people, and of those one-hundred, I was able to secure a positive outcome for nearly every client. Some of the successes of the clients that I served through advocacy at the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) offices include having their public benefits reinstated after a termination due to failure to report income, failure to comply with their welfare to work program, or some other failure to comply. Many of these clients had a difficult time maintaining their benefits due to mental illness, resulting in numerous sanctions on their record. With each sanction comes a higher penalty in the form of some period of time when the client may not receive public welfare benefits. Over half of the clients that I served were eligible for SSI due to a physical or mental disability, and I referred each of them to organizations that could help them navigate the challenging process that is applying for SSI.

During the summer, I was also able to do client intake at My Friend's Place, providing brief legal services to homeless youth residing in Hollywood. I was able to help one client request community service in lieu of paying over six-hundred dollars in traffic offense fees. I was able to help another client request a reduced rate from the newspaper to publish a notice of her name change. If this client had been unable to change her name, she would not have been able to obtain financial aid that she needed in order to go back to school.

Another client whose case was a great success was one that came to me through our general help line at Public Counsel. This client's General Relief welfare benefits were unexpectedly reduced, and when he inquired about the reduced amount, the DPSS alerted him that there had been an overpayment that they had classified as participant error. Upon some investigation, I was able to determine that the overpayment was in fact due to the error of the DPSS, so the client's reduced pay was refunded back to him. These are just a few of many success stories that I was able to be a part of this summer.

I am so fortunate to have been able to help so many, and perhaps more encouraging than any one client outcome was the countless clients who assured me and my fellow clerks every day that when we were around, they felt more secure, were treated better by the DPSS, and for once believed that someone actually cared about them. Each time we went to the DPSS office, someone would tell us that things ran more smoothly when we were there, and people actually got the benefits they are entitled to. I will never

forget how generous these people were with their trust, because they have been overlooked by so many, and have cause not to trust anyone claiming to be able to help them.

Just this week, I assisted a client who had a big impact on me in the South Central Department of Public Social Services office. I will refer to her as Dana to maintain confidentiality. Dana was in the office from the time that me and my fellow clerks arrived, a little after one, until four o'clock, when she finally asked me for help. Before four, she just sat by herself patiently and silently, waiting for her name to be called over the loud speaker so that she could get cash aid and food stamps and get back to the shelter she was staying in Pasadena before six o'clock. After six, her bed would be made available for someone else. When Dana finally said, "Excuse me. Do you know why my name hasn't been called yet? I have been here since nine this morning," I was so relieved, because I had had my eye on her all afternoon. The reason that I was paying close attention to this client in particular was because she did not look a day over twelve years old. After speaking to Dana, I found out that she was eighteen, or at least she claimed to be. She had no I.D. card with her. I went up our advocate liaison, a DPSS employee assigned to look into our clients' cases for the afternoon, and asked why this girl had not seen a worker yet. The advocate liaison assured me that she would be seen. I insisted that she call the worker and check how many clients were in front of Dana, alerting her to Dana's predicament about the shelter. She called the worker begrudgingly, who told her that Dana would be called next. Within thirty minutes, Dana's name was called over the loud speaker. I approached the window with Dana, adamant on going into her meeting with her to make sure she felt comfortable and that everything was being explained to her in a way that she would understand. When I told the man at the window that I would be her advocate, he replied that she wasn't actually going to be seen, but that she would be given a return appointment to come back tomorrow and see her worker. Dana and I went back to the advocate liaison and I insisted that her worker be called immediately. After some coaxing, the liaison called her worker, who now claimed that he would see her, but there were four people in line ahead of her, so she would have to wait. This meant that she would possibly lose her bed at the shelter, but the DPSS said "It's her call." To make a long story short, I sat by Dana's side the entire afternoon, and when all was said and done, it was seven o'clock and she was given emergency benefits, expedited food stamps, and had arranged to stay with her uncle for the night. I was thankful to help her obtain these benefits, because had I not been there, she would have been told to come back another day, and maybe told the same thing again.

That is just a brief look into my summer at Public Counsel, but I am happy to share more! I absolutely loved the work I did, I love this organization, and I am thankful to have had the support of Equal Justice America throughout.

Sincerely,

Caroline Holmes  
J.D. Candidate, May 2014  
UCLA School of Law

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August 13, 2012

Katie Toman, Dan Ruben  
 Equal Justice America

Re: Letter for Caroline Holmes

Dear Ms. Toman and Mr. Ruben,

I am an attorney in the Homelessness Prevention Law Project at Public Counsel. I am submitting this letter on behalf of Caroline Holmes, who worked as a law clerk under my supervision during the summer of 2012, which describes the work that Caroline completed during her 10-week clerkship.

Caroline's main responsibilities included conducting and organizing research, completing writing assignments, communicating with clients and community partners, working with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), conducting client intake, and providing indispensable direct services for the homeless and indigent of Los Angeles County.

Caroline performed invaluable outreach in the community by working with pro bono volunteers and law students to service the most destitute persons in the county through Public Counsel CARES: Connecting Angelenos to Resources and Essential Services, formerly known as the General Relief Advocacy Project. Caroline was required to train volunteer summer law firm associates and attorneys and to supervise outreach in the DPSS offices. Through her advocacy in the DPSS offices, Caroline demonstrated compassion for disadvantaged clients and a commitment to reaching the right result.

Caroline also assisted me and other attorneys in my office on a variety of public benefits cases. She conducted client intake and resolved clients' issues with their cash aid, food stamps, and other benefit programs primarily through administrative advocacy with DPSS. She also assisted with a legal clinic at My Friend's Place, a drop-in center for homeless youth in Hollywood, conducting intake and helping clients resolve issues involving tickets and warrants and public benefits, as well as providing referrals and resources for other miscellaneous legal issues. Caroline also drafted an informational brochure for homeless clients dealing with tickets and fines associated with minor quality of life offenses such as panhandling and metro fare evasion, which will be a useful resource at the My Friend's Place legal clinic.

Caroline's substantive writing assignment involved drafting a memorandum for a staff attorney that may be used in support of the re-opening of a Social Security Administration ruling which denied disability insurance benefits to a HIV-positive client.

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I would be happy to answer any further questions you might have regarding Caroline. I can be reached at (213) 385-2977, ext. 168 or by email at [raizman@publiccounsel.org](mailto:raizman@publiccounsel.org).

Very truly yours,

Rebecca Raizman  
 Staff Attorney  
 Homelessness Prevention Law Project