

Mr. Dan Ruben  
**Equal Justice America**  
Building II - Suite 204,  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Before I begin, I would like to express my sincere thanks to you and Equal Justice America for the work that you do. Public interest legal work on behalf of those who would not otherwise be able to afford legal services is both extremely important and extremely fulfilling. As is widely known, law students are frequently worried about money. Some want to make as much as they can while others, like the students you fund, think that just enough is plenty as long as it sustains them in doing this kind of work. Your organization makes our work possible and we are all indebted to you for it.

I spent this past summer working at Equip For Equality (EFE). EFE is a disability rights agency in Chicago that deals with a wide variety of legal matters related to our clients' disabilities. My work was in the Special Education Clinic where I advocated for the rights of students with disabilities. My work was also wide ranging and covered issues from eligibility for special education services to improper graduation.

Over the summer, I dealt with an upsettingly large number of cases in which the local school district was denying eligibility to students with disabilities. Unfortunately, even when a medical professional diagnoses a student with a particular disability, the student must still go through the statutorily prescribed procedures in order to be eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Often, schools fight eligibility because they know it will commit them to costly special education services. Most of the cases of denial of eligibility that I handled were for students with Learning Disabilities. In one instance, a school had denied a mother and her son eligibility on prior occasions and the student, now in his second year of high school, was failing English classes. I provided self-advocacy assistance to the mother and taught her how to draft a letter to the school district formally requesting a "case study evaluation" (an evaluation to determine whether he had a disability) and a meeting to determine eligibility. After learning how to draft this letter with the relevant legal language, the mother submitted it to the district and her son was found to be eligible and began receiving academic support.

In another case, I helped represent a class of parents of students with allergies. The parents contacted our organization because the district had decided to roll out a "breakfast in the classroom" program in which all students would be provided with breakfast prior to the start of the school day. The parents agreed with the purpose of the program but were concerned about its implementation. The parents were concerned because the school decided to serve the meals in classrooms and thus, the students would be exposed to harmful, and in some cases deadly, allergens. After discussing this issue with attorneys in our office, I drafted a demand letter to the district asking them to comply with disability laws and make accommodations for students with allergies. The letter subsequently lead to negotiations and we were able to convince the district to

remove most allergens from the menu, move meals in some schools to the cafeteria where proper cleaning could be done, and in other schools, require cleaning of the classroom prior to the start of class. Additionally, I also worked with individual parents to ensure that their children's "504 Plans" and emergency action plans had language in them that would force the schools to provide adequate protection.

In an additional case, I helped prepare for an administrative hearing on behalf of a student with an emotional disability. In this case, the student had been moved out of the general education environment and into an environment where he was being educated only with students with disabilities. As a policy matter, the law prefers that students be educated in the least restrictive environment in which they can make progress so that they are socially integrated with non-disabled peers. This student had shown that he was capable of being in the general education environment. I helped prepare for the administrative hearing by drafting motions, opening and closing statements and lists of questions for direct and cross-examination. Our agency was successful at the hearing and we were able to set up an agreement in which the student would be able to transition into general education classes at his neighborhood school as he met certain benchmarks.

These are just a few examples of the more than 50 clients I worked for this year. There is nothing else I would have rather spent my time doing than helping these students. In my mind, students with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable populations in the country. As people with disabilities they face an uphill legal battle just to secure a level playing field and equal opportunity. As minors, they are often marginalized and cannot fight for themselves. Few groups need advocates more than children with disabilities and I am proud that I was able to be an advocate for them, even if only for a few brief months. I hope and expect that this summer will be the launching point for a long and successful public interest career.

Thank you again.

Best,

Daniel Hochbaum  
Loyola University Chicago, School of Law  
Class of 2012