

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I hope all is well. I am writing to thank you for making my public interest work possible by funding my fellowship at Equip For Equality (EFE) this past semester. This semester was my last in law school. While many friends and co-workers encouraged me to “take it easy” in my last few months of school, I knew that I wanted to return to doing work that was both important and fulfilling. Your support enabled me to continue doing the very work that I came to law school to do.

Before I go any further, I would also like to share some good news with you. As you know, this past semester was my second “tour of duty” with Equip for Equality and the second time I have received support from your wonderful organization. Thanks to you, your donors, and your staff, I am also pleased to say that this will not be my last time working with EFE. In fact, I have been awarded a post-graduate fellowship to establish a new 2-year project at EFE to represent low income and minority families of children with Learning Disabilities.

I cannot overstate how important your organization’s support has been to helping me obtain this post graduate fellowship. Last summer, you helped support my work at EFE for three months. During that time, I helped numerous clients but also gained valuable experience in the special education law field. EFE’s attorneys mentored me and taught me the “ins and outs” of special education law. In short, they prepared me to represent clients in need long after my internship ended. Moreover, they recognized my hard work and approached me about applying for post-graduate fellowships. Your organization, by supporting me then and now, provided me with opportunities in public interest and disability rights advocacy. Without your support, I would not have been partnered with such a great organization like EFE, gained this work experience, and been mentored by such committed attorneys. In short, I would never have had the opportunity to turn my internship work into a brand new project.

This past semester was also a remarkable experience. Having worked at EFE in the past, I was even better prepared to effectively advocate for my clients. Over the last few months, I represented over 20 families with various special education concerns. Moreover, I represented students with a wide range of disabilities including learning disabilities, blindness, autism, emotional disabilities, and cerebral palsy. Some of my clients were denied eligibility for special education services and we were able to negotiate with school districts to ensure that these students were determined to be eligible under federal law. In other situations, these children were already eligible but were not placed in classes appropriate for their needs. In these situations, we were able to attend IEP meeting and design new and effective special education programs based on their needs. In other cases, students were denied services necessary for them to participate in education (for example, being denied transportation to and from school) and, with the support of the law, we were able to intervene and obtain these “related services” for these students. In each case, our organization was able to assist parents in obtaining services that their children were being denied but that they were entitled to under the law.

As I have said to you in the past, there’re few organizations as worthy of support as Equip For Equality. EFE’s clients face many more challenges than the average person. Parents of children with disabilities are often unaware of their legal rights. Many times, they are struggling just to learn about their child’s disability and how they can best support their children. Moreover, the great majority of the clients I worked with this semester were also in low income households. With resources, children with disabilities may have access to tutors, private therapy, and other special education support outside of school. With fewer or no resources, these individual rely on the public education system to follow the law and provide them with the support they are entitled

to. EFE's advocacy is important in many instances, but is crucial when our clients are from low income families. By supporting my work, you enabled us to reach more families in need of crucial legal help.

Thank you again for providing me with a fellowship to work with Equip For Equality. This fellowship helped me represent children with disabilities this semester but has also enabled me to help them far into the future. For that, I offer my most heartfelt thanks.

Best,
Daniel M. Hochbaum



Advancing the human and civil rights of people with disabilities

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June 13, 2012

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Daniel was a law student intern with Equip For Equality's (EFE) Special Education Clinic (Clinic) from January through May 2012. Daniel began interning with the Clinic during the 2011 spring semester of his 2L year. After completing his spring internship, Daniel stayed on as a full-time intern for the summer of 2011, then returned for the 2012 spring semester of his 3L year. During his internship with EFE I found Daniel to be exceedingly intelligent, a hard worker, and someone that consistently presented a pleasant demeanor, tackling each of his assignments with dedication and enthusiasm.

Daniel's internship with EFE involved conducting telephone intakes with callers that have a child with a disability and a legal issue involving special education. Daniel did an exceptional job communicating with clients and was enthusiastic about the opportunity to have direct contact with clients. In turn, our clients were always comfortable speaking to Daniel. He was skilled at focusing the caller on the issue and gathering relevant information.

The intakes led to Daniel assisting EFE in providing legal services to these families, through either self-advocacy assistance or direct representation. This often involved researching various special education issues as well as drafting documents and correspondence. Whether he was drafting a legal document or writing a research memo for a staff attorney or drafting correspondence that involved a complex legal issue so that it could be understood by a client, Daniel's writing was exceptional. It was thorough, yet concise and appropriate for the reader. Daniel's strength as a writer is also evidence of his strong research skills.

Some of the highlights of Daniel's internship included his attendance and involvement at IEP meetings, negotiations with school districts, trainings, and outreach events. Daniel assisted with the preparation for IEP meetings and negotiations by conducting research and reviewing records. Also, at these meeting Daniel often made meaningful suggestions and observations, which set him apart from other interns.

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One case which exemplifies Daniel's excellent work during his internship involved Robert, a high school student with a severe learning disability who, even after eight years of special education, could not read or write. Daniel identified through an in-depth records review that Robert was not getting the support that he needed from his school despite his extreme deficits and was instead being suspended repeatedly. Daniel represented Robert at a meeting to discuss how his behavior resulted from his inability to read and then worked with him to target research-based reading programs which he would attend instead of his neighborhood school. Daniel then drafted a powerful due process hearing request which outlined the school district's repeated failure to meet Robert's needs. Although the case is on-going, Daniel's advocacy has provided unparalleled opportunities for Robert so that he can finally achieve academic success.

Daniel also assisted families by drafting Illinois State Board of Education Complaints and Due Process Hearing Requests, on behalf of our clients. Daniel always had a willingness to take on challenging projects. And we were always confident that Daniel could handle these projects well.

Overall, Daniel was an excellent intern, one of the best that we have had at the Clinic. He is intelligent and hard working, and his research and writing skills are strengths. He communicated well with both clients and staff, frequently providing thoughtful insights and consistently presenting a pleasant and professional demeanor. He was an asset in every case that he was involved in. Daniel has a passion for this area of the law and it was evident throughout his internship.

I have the highest opinion of the work that Daniel did for EFE this past semester. Should you require additional information regarding Daniel and his internship with EFE, please feel free to contact me at 312-895-7321.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'OP' or 'Olga Pribyl'.

Olga Pribyl
Vice President, Special Education Clinic
Equip for Equality