



Legal Aid
Foundation
of
Los Angeles

Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles

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Our File Number 12-01204563

August 9, 2013

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

Re: Equal Justice America Summer 2013 Fellowship

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Over the course of the summer, I worked full time in the Veterans Justice Center at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. I have helped indigent veterans and their families in all areas of civil law from landlord-tenant disputes and reasonable accommodation requests to expungement of criminal records, and demand letters for employment matters and illegal bank levies on veteran's benefits.

Because of this fellowship, I was able to make a difference in the lives of over 50 veterans. I helped with factual and legal investigation for five VA Benefits claims and I petitioned the Board of Correction of Military Records to upgrade the discharge status of a deserving veteran. I also helped remove employment barriers for three to five veterans through debt negotiation and filing expungement petitions on their behalf. I educated roughly fifteen people about their rights as tenants, including the right to written notice before termination of a tenancy. I also helped at least two indigent veterans stay in their homes by drafting reasonable accommodation requests for their disabilities.

Several stories stick out to me as I think back over my summer. First, I investigated the case of an elderly man who is also disabled. He injured his knees while in service and has had trouble holding a job because of his disability. He worked as a security guard for most of his life, after his service, and for the last five or six years he has been unable to work because he cannot stand for more than 30 minutes at a time. This veteran became depressed as a result of his inability to work and twice attempted suicide. He has been on-and-off homeless for the last five or six years. I helped to establish his eligibility for nearly \$1,000 more a month in veteran's benefits, which will lead to stable housing and continued recovery from his depression. He may even be entitled to back benefits totaling more than \$20,000.

Second, I helped a Vietnam era veteran stay in affordable housing. This veteran was exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam and suffers from a variety of neurological effects as a result. He had trouble with his short and long term memory, and a variety of side-effects from his medications used to treat the disorder, including restlessness, agitation and anxiety. As a result of this

condition, my client had trouble complying with program requirements for the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. VASH assists veterans with their housing needs through a voucher program. I helped our client stay on the program when he was threatened with a termination of his voucher by requesting a reasonable accommodation for his disability. The accommodation request ultimately resulted in a withdrawal of the Termination Notice and a trial period to give the client a chance to comply with program requirements with the help of Legal Aid.

This summer has been a life-altering experience. While I will not get to see the outcome of every case that I have assisted on, I have seen the difference that I can make in the lives of the indigent. In part my job has just been as a middle man. I listen and let them tell their stories. And then I tell their story to those institutions that may not have listened in the past: the Court, their landlords, and the government. With the help of Legal Aid, I have been able to make their stories heard.

As a law student hoping to make a difference with the law as my tool, I could not have hoped for a better experience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Olsen". The signature is written in black ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Michael Olsen