

31 August, 2016

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
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Midlothian, VA 23112  
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I had the opportunity to work at Public Counsel in Los Angeles, CA. Public Counsel is the largest pro bono law firm in the nation, and practices many areas of law, including children's rights, community development, consumer law, education rights, homelessness prevention, and immigrants' rights, to name a few. I was assigned to the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP), specifically in Public Counsel's unique program, CARES, which stands for Connecting Angelenos to Resources and Essential Services. The purpose of the CARES program is to ensure benefits recipients are not experiencing any administrative barriers in applying for or receiving their benefits, which has long been an issue here in Los Angeles County. Due to the eligibility requirements of these benefits, the clients we serve are the most vulnerable and economically challenged; for the most part, we were advocating on behalf of Los Angeles's homeless population and low-income individuals. Many suffered from physical or mental disabilities, others were recently released from incarceration, but all were desperately seeking any means by which they could afford basic necessities such as food, medication, and shelter.

The program works by training volunteers (usually law students) on their roles as advocates and then going out to local Department of Public Social Services offices for direct, on-site advocacy. Our advocacy is unique in that it is comprehensive, by helping welfare recipients navigate the public service system and working closely with social services representatives to promote effective and efficient benefit distribution. The benefit of being a law clerk at Public Counsel in the CARES program is that I was not only able to complete trainings and do the on-site advocacy, but I was also able to conduct the trainings and supervise law clerks from top law firms during their on-site advocacy.

I am taking away so much from my experience with Public Counsel. Working with homeless individuals and learning about the state of homelessness in my city was humbling and eye-opening. It was also extremely gratifying to connect with our clients, to have them open up to us about their struggles and about the hardships they regularly endure by being without regular shelter and minimal income. Additionally, I enjoyed connecting to my fellow law students who were representing these very successful law firms. While at first they may have entered our training with preconceived notions about the population they would be serving in the DPSS office, by the end of the day, you could tell they were equally transformed by the experience.

Thank you for this opportunity to give back to my community. I will always remember my time with Public Counsel.

Sincerely,

Krista Thayer  
Southwestern Law School  
JD Candidate, 2017