

August 31, 2017

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

As an Economic Justice Intern for the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville this summer, I was able to see cases in each stage of the litigation process. I conducted meetings with clients, wrote trial briefs and grounds of defense, researched possible claims for clients, and had the opportunity to represent clients in hearings before administrative law judges, appeals examiners, and hearing officers. My clients faced many issues, with some facing more than one at a time. I worked on housing cases where leases were being terminated for at no fault of the client, a Social Security case in which I represented a homeless man the agency claimed they overpaid, and a Medicaid case in which an immigrant was losing her Medicaid because she had not naturalized despite the impossibility of doing so, among others. The opportunity to help these clients navigate and understand their legal issues was a truly rewarding experience.

The administrative law judge I argued before ultimately decided in favor of my homeless client and some of his overpayment was waived. The amount of money at stake would be considered relatively small for most people, but for someone in his situation, was the difference between being able to find shelter and feed himself. Under the supervision of an attorney, I was able to help this man get back money he desperately needed and was owed, something that was extremely important and made a significant difference in his day-to-day. It was amazing to be able to help make such an impact on someone's life right from the first day of my internship.

I also represented a client in an unemployment benefits hearing. Through questioning and our closing argument, we effectively demonstrated that the employer had not carried the burden of proof on the claim that the client had been terminated for misconduct. The examiner ordered she be paid the unemployment benefits she was owed. One of the things that became particularly

apparent to me this summer was that the law really is not easily understood by the layperson, and is not written in a way best for the layperson's interpretation. The client needed help to prepare for the hearing so that she could understand what was going to happen and different things that might come up and different reactions she might have to deal with while on the spot. This process has taught me how scary it is to think that not everyone is able to afford legal representation and cannot have it constitutionally provided for them.

Many of our clients face more than one legal issue. It is a struggle for them daily. While many face the same issue over and over, many are also facing their multiple issues all at once. You never have a real appreciation for how much something like \$100 could change a person's life until you meet with them and see the fear they feel and how grateful they are for not only your legal help, but also just the idea that you'll listen to them and work on their behalf. For example, a client in a lease termination case was facing termination because despite acting in self-defense, she pled guilty to a charge rather than raise said defense because she feared the potential repercussion of losing her housing. She feared losing her housing due to her disability in which she required in-home care, which she would not be able to keep up in jail. I could never imagine feeling pressured to plead guilty to something I only did in defense of myself or others. They say that there is always a choice. For many of our clients, there is no good choice, and they are left choosing between only the bad ones, without any real idea of what the legal repercussions might be because the law was not made for the layperson to understand.

Sincerely,

Nicole Llinares

Nicole Llinares
University of Virginia School of Law Class of 2019

 **LEGAL AID
JUSTICE CENTER**

August 28, 2017

Sent via email to: Dan@EqualJusticeAmerica.org

Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II - Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Equal Justice America Fellow, Nicole Llinares

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC), a civil legal aid program that provides representation to low-income Virginians and engages in advocacy, education, and local and statewide organizing to address injustices that keep our clients in poverty. I coordinate LAJC's Affordable Care Act Program as well as our work in public benefits law. I also serve as adjunct faculty with the University of Virginia School of Law where I teach and supervise students in the Health and Employment Law Clinics LAJC runs in conjunction with the School of Law. LAJC was lucky enough to have Nicole Llinares intern with us in the summer of 2017 with a fellowship through your organization, Equal Justice America.

As a law student intern, Nicole worked under my supervision throughout the summer and handled cases in a variety of areas including employment, housing, public benefits, and consumer law. Nicole was often the point of contact for clients and represented clients in administrative hearings as well as researching issues for larger cases and doing community outreach. Specifically, she handled an Administrative Law Judge hearing on behalf of a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) client, handled an unemployment appeal hearing, wrote a trial brief for a housing case, worked on our ongoing Charlottesville gentrification survey to assess the effects of gentrification on our client communities, handled a Medicaid appeal hearing, and more.

While Nicole expertly handled many cases and approached every situation with enthusiasm and ingenuity, one case that particularly stands out was her representation of a homeless client in a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) appeal with the Social Security Administration (SSA). The case involved challenging an alleged overpayment of benefits because SSA claimed our client was receiving housing from his sister, when he in fact only listed his sister's address on forms for mailing purposes due to his homelessness. Nicole was able to delve into those facts while navigating a complex bureaucracy to find the best possible approach to present our client's case. She approached our case thoughtfully and prepared thoroughly, but was not afraid to think outside the box and propose creative arguments. It was clear, both to me and the client, that she cared about the case and felt the injustice of the client's situation almost

as keenly as the client himself. Ultimately, the SSA administrative law judge agreed with Nicole's position.

Throughout the summer, Nicole was willing to take on any project or client, and whether her work involved interviewing clients or researching complex legal issues, she was invariably enthusiastic and resourceful.

In addition to her legal skills, Nicole's reliability and motivation stood out. She did what she needed to do without being reminded, she followed up to make sure she was on the right track, and even in tense, stressful situations, she remained creative and positive in her approaches to problem solving. I am pleased to give Nicole an excellent evaluation for the work she did this summer.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please do not hesitate to call me at (434) 529-1839.

Sincerely,

Mary Frances Charlton