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August 29, 2014

Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Re: Summary of an Equal Justice America Fellow, Summer 2014 at Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Santa Monica office.

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to provide a summary of my experience as an Equal Justice America Fellow with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles- Santa Monica office, where I served Summer 2014. Because of the generous grant from Equal Justice America, I was able to work extensively with individual clients as I spent almost every day at the Domestic Violence Clinic at the Santa Monica Courthouse. Because the clinic is staffed by two rotating attorneys and is open for half of the day, I feel that my contribution to the clinic was significant. I then spent most afternoons working on more involved projects for individual clients, ranging from conducting legal research and preparing motions to drafting essential trial documents.

Advocating for Women's rights is what drew me to law school. Working for the Domestic Violence Clinic at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles was working on the frontlines of women's rights. Our work was assisting battered women in obtaining Temporary Restraining Orders against their abusers. Our passion was assisting women in telling their stories and using their voice to end the violence in their homes. I prepared approximately a dozen declarations resulting in temporary restraining orders for almost every client I served.

One of the first clients I worked with impressed me with her resilience despite her fear and lack of resources. She was a low-income monolingual Oaxacan woman with a second grade education. She could not have been more than four feet and ten inches tall and when I interviewed her she had her two-year-old son present who was climbing all over her like she was a jungle gym. She smiled and played with him as she whispered her story to me in the halls of the courthouse. Her boyfriend the abuser is an American citizen born and raised in Los Angeles with half of his family still living in Mexico. He is the father of the young boy and continually threatens to flee the country with their son if she takes any action to stop the abuse which included no less than choking, punching, kicking and giving her only enough money to buy food for their son.

Her story was like many stories of the women we served. The abuser is an American citizen and the abused is not. The abuser promised to marry her and never did. The abuser keeps the

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marriage documents and the immigration papers sitting somewhere visible in the house as leverage, a means to control her behavior. The abuser is successful in isolating her from work, school, friends or family with power and control over her until one day she stands up.

On the particular day this client came to us she brought with her a written declaration and determination to get herself and her son out of the abusive environment. I prepared her declaration for the court in English, translating what she told me as well as what she wrote, albeit phonetic spelled, i.e. “oy”, instead of “hoy”, and we successfully pleaded her case to the judge. She and her son were granted a temporary restraining order with direct orders not to take the boy out of the county of Los Angeles until the date of trial. Three weeks later she was granted a permanent restraining order and peace of mind that he no longer had her under his control.

The experience of translating the story of this client from phonetically spelled Oaxacan Spanish, including the information received from the interview, for an English-only speaking judge was a milestone of my summer. As a future attorney and even as a law student I have the ability to speak the needs of my client in the legal language necessary to secure justice for her and her family. That is powerful and unforgettable.

After the summer fellowship, I have an inspired sense of how public interest attorneys must manage their client’s desperation through the judicial process. The lawyers I worked with showed kindness, patience and precision in handling the legal matters of our client’s lives and even in a highly chaotic environment remained focused on securing justice for the client. For all of the above reasons this summer gave me a better sense of why I am here, in law school, and why I am pursuing social justice law. Because of Equal Justice America’s Summer Fellowship I was able to use my skills to advocate for the rights of women and I will continue to do so for the rest of my legal career. Thank you for your generosity and the opportunity to serve.

Sincerely,

Keri Gross  
Juris Doctor Candidate 2016  
Santa Clara University School of Law

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