

August 23, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer, I had the incredible privilege of interning with the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic of Greater Boston Legal Services under the supervision of Attorney Jane Rocamora. Jane proved, time and time again, to be an exemplary supervisor, educator and mentor. Due to her constant commitment to her role as an educator, I leave my summer co-op with a far deeper understanding of immigration law than I thought possible at this stage in my legal education.

During my time at GBLS, I worked primarily on affirmative and defensive asylum cases, with the vast majority of the clients that I worked with coming from the Middle Eastern and Central African regions of the world. Doing this work in the context of the current political climate has been both a harrowing and inspiring experience. Faced with a profoundly and unapologetically xenophobic and outright anti-immigrant administration, I often came into the office hearing expressions of outrage and frustration from attorneys and fellow students in the Immigration Unit. I also witnessed their determination to meet this rhetoric with hard work, aggression and compassion on behalf of their clients so that these people might be less affected by the hate around them.

The clients I have been lucky enough to work with have continuously and unfailingly reshaped my view of what it means to seek asylum in this country and to live in it as an immigrant. I met a brilliant man who was terrified that the United States government was going to pursue his family in the way that the government in his home country had because of the frightening language he had heard on the news; at the same time, this man was thrilled to find that he was eligible to apply for his employment authorization and overjoyed at the prospect of his younger brother continuing his education in the United States. I met a journalist who had risked her life by exposing government atrocities in her home country through the media. I met a mother who is relieved simply because she no longer has to live in fear that her child will be taken from her for her crime of believing in the wrong faith. I met two young men who reminded me of my younger brother in their sense of humor and the way that they carried themselves, who had fled from their home as teenagers and have been making it on their own here ever since.

Again and again, I was surprised and moved by the strength of these people, and by many others. Some surprised me with their relentless optimism in the face of a difficult legal struggle and a society that often appears to be trying to cast them away. Others surprised me with their patriotism and love for a country which had not yet even agreed to allow them to make a home here. Still others moved me with their strength to simply keep trying despite having overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles only to be faced with more. I will be honest; I needed little convincing at the start of the summer to continue to pursue immigration law, but the people I have had the tremendous fortune to get to know through this internship have exponentially deepened and strengthened that resolve.

I came to GBLS angry and pessimistic. I leave inspired. I am extraordinarily grateful to Equal Justice America, and to Greater Boston Legal Services, for granting me this experience.

Best Regards,

Meagan Antonellis, Northeastern University School of Law, Class of 2019