

August 24, 2009

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I cannot thank Equal Justice America enough for providing me a fellowship so that I could undertake a public interest position this summer. My internship was a crucial time in my development as a lawyer-in-training, and I must offer many thanks to you and your organization for facilitating this fellowship.

EJA helped enable me to spend my summer at the Nationalities Service Center in Philadelphia, providing an eye-opening look at the difficulties that immigrants and asylees face in trying to obtain legal status in the U.S.

One of the more rewarding experiences was getting to work on providing support for a Liberian asylum claim in the last days before an immigration judge was to render her decision. The client's immigration status had been in limbo for years, ever since he came to the U.S. ten years ago. His father had been forced to flee Liberia a few months prior to the client's arrival in the U.S., and because of a few mistakes and missed deadlines in the filing of his paperwork on behalf of his son, he jeopardized his son's ability to ever obtain legal status. The client was then placed in a position where he might actually be deported even though he came to the U.S. as a child and his only ties to Liberia were distant relatives. The case had taken a tumultuous course over the past decade and when I arrived in the office one of my first tasks was country condition research to demonstrate what the situation was in Liberia when the client first left the country. Several different Department of Homeland Security attorneys had worked on the case over the past few years, and while some were amenable to negotiating an extraordinary conclusion to the case because of the equities involved, it was very unclear what the outcome would be when my supervising attorney and I went into the courtroom for our client's individual hearing.

Fortunately, the government attorney decided not to push the issue and to encourage the judge to decide in the client's favor, allow him to stay with his family in the U.S. The judge agreed, and what was possibly going to be a long fought campaign came to a quick resolution.

While I had only a small part in this case, relegated to researching and preparing a filing, this research helped show the court and government attorney that there was a wealth of information supporting the original asylum claim. The tension that had marked the client and his father's demeanor prior to the hearing was quickly swept away with the judge's decision, and they were now elated that this long-term struggle for a legal solution had finally arrived. The client could now continue with his education and even get work authorization for the very first time, helping to secure his future here in the U.S.

This was one of the few positive outcomes I saw this summer, as most cases I worked on are still pending and have very low odds of success—not because of poor legal counsel but because of the way the system has stacked the odds against so many immigrants. I had a general sense of the difficulties immigrants faced before starting at my summer placement, but now I understand many of the specific impediments to legal status and how to overcome at least some

of them. I know I'll carry these lessons into my future work in the Philadelphia immigrant community, and I look forward to using this skill-set and knowledge base to help secure the futures of others who are sometimes forced to live in fear at the margins of society.

Again, my most sincere thanks to EJA for equipping me in my future career serving marginalized communities.

Sincerely,

Ted Oswald  
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Class of 2011