

August 18, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I was honored to work this summer with the Equal Justice Center (EJC) in Austin, Texas. It was not an easy decision to leave my full-time job of more than ten years, but it was one of the best decisions of my career.

Before accepting the internship position, I had heard from lawyers and non-lawyers whose opinions I value that the EJC is a respected organization doing great work. After working there for just over two short months, I can say that I wholeheartedly agree and am proud that I had the opportunity to be a small part of it.

I remember being struck, at the end of my first day, how little I understood the circumstances in which many low-wage workers live. I already knew that many working adults do not make a living wage, that people working in the service industry and other low-wage industries need to work many more than 40 hours per week to support their families, that immigrants are often discriminated against, and that undocumented workers face particular and severe challenges. But I was surprised at how often and how many employers do not pay their employees the wages as required by law. More fully understanding this reality spurred me to do as much as I could in my time at the EJC.

All of my clients (whose cases I worked on with lead counsel and my law student partner) were either underpaid or unpaid for work they had performed. More than half of them work in the service industry and were not paid minimum wage or overtime as required by federal and state law. The others worked in the construction industry and were either underpaid or not paid at all for their labor. In my ten weeks at the EJC, I was able to meet with clients several times, investigate aspects of their claims, file petitions in state court, respond to removal proceedings, draft discovery, and file FOIA requests with various federal and local agencies. Most of the cases were already in progress, and because of this, I had the opportunity to negotiate a settlement agreement with opposing counsel on behalf of a client who had done work several months ago for which he had not been fully paid.

Although it was for such a short time, I was grateful to work on behalf of people who are laboring long hours to support their families. It was especially advantageous that at least two clients came to the office with their children, so that we had the opportunity to tell them that their respective parents were courageous for standing up for their rights.

Thank you for the support that allowed me to be a part of this important work.

Sincerely,

Theresa Clarke  
Candidate for Juris Doctor, May 2015  
St. Mary's University School of Law