

September 21, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, I was fortunate to work as a fellow for the University of the District of Columbia's Human Rights and Immigration Clinic. The clinic works to assist immigrants with matters before the Arlington Immigration Court, many facing removal, and/or seeking to gain lawful status. Their matters are varied: the gambit runs from immigrants with removal orders to VAWA petitioners to immigrants seeking U-visas. As a fellow, my responsibilities were to maintain the docket. I was responsible for the active cases. In total this summer, I worked on eight cases. The cases were also challenging because the clients largely needed non-traditional legal services, such as help getting state identification.

A couple of the cases involved VAWA (Violence Against Women Act). In the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), there are several provisions that protect certain spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizens and spouses and children of permanent residents. These individuals can file for legal status without their abusers knowledge. Thus, it allows victims to seek safety and independence from their abusers.

This summer, I worked on a case where I was responsible for assembling a VAWA petition. This involved, for example, finalizing documents for translation, entering attorney appearances, and collecting police reports. For another client, I was tasked with writing a memorandum of good moral character. In order for a petition for VAWA to be approved, the petitioner must show that he or she is a person of good moral character. In order to show this a petitioner must put forth evidence: affidavits attesting to the petitioner's good moral character, police clearance reports, and the petitioners own statement. I complied and wrote all of these documents, which were sent to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

The most vulnerable group I worked with, however, were the UACs (unaccompanied alien children). UAC is a legal term meaning a child who: has no lawful immigration status in the United States; has not attained the age of 18 years old; has no parent or guardian in the United States, or for

whom no parent or lawful guardian in the United States is available to provide care or physical custody. My role with this group was to appear at their Master Calendar hearing and prepare them for court. At the Master Calendar hearings, I entered my appearance as their representative and made legal pleadings. In order to be eligible for relief, the UACs had to be deemed removable. Preparation for court included making sure they were comfortable and had advance knowledge of the questions that the Judge may ask them. Additionally, I also went over the proceeding- explaining its necessity in the process to ultimately get them relief from removal.

Another group that I worked with were asylum applicants. These applicants were largely from Central America, specifically El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Their asylum claims were largely based on domestic violence. Although domestic violence based asylum is not what I initially conceived of when I thought of asylum relief, working with this group expanded my knowledgebase. Domestic violence based asylum is founded on solid case precedent. For example, women depending on their home country may be able to show that they as a group are persecuted because of the well-defined perceptions of their subordinate status in their society due to their gender. I was fortunate to work with this group and to work in this expanding area of immigration law.

As mentioned in the introduction, a significant amount of my time dealt with non-traditional legal services, which were more akin to social services than law. This was due in large part to the socio-economic population that the clinic served: low-income immigrants who had language barriers and educational barriers that left them lacking in basic areas. For example, I was tasked with helping a client get state identification. Though my client was entitled to get the identification, communication barriers and mental issues made it difficult.

In sum, as a future immigration lawyer being afforded the opportunity to work in my future field as an advocate was invaluable. The fellowship gave me the resources to help these populations who but for the free legal services that the clinic provides would have no legal representation. The work that I did this summer solidified my decision to work in the public interest.

Sincerely,
Sharla Dixon
University of the District of Columbia