

August 31, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I would like to sincerely thank you and Equal Justice America for awarding me the summer fellowship. Your generous support allowed me to intern at the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, where I was able to work with an extremely dedicated team as we served some of the most vulnerable and underrepresented members of our county. My work was extremely impactful, and it is something I will carry with me as I continue on my professional journey.

As a summer law clerk, I was assigned to work in two of the foundation's programs, the Mental Health Advocacy Project and the Pro Bono Eviction Clinic. Throughout my summer I was fortunate to be exposed to various clients as I handled intakes and attempted to address their legal needs. However, the most impactful cases were the ones that I was assigned to personally.

One of the clients I was assigned to in the Mental Health Advocacy Project was a man who was living with paranoid schizophrenia. The client could not work and depended on his public benefits in order to pay for his housing and his medical expenses. However, due to a misunderstanding the client mistakenly self reported that he no longer needed his benefits because he was receiving a large inheritance. The client found himself without any benefits and without an inheritance and came to us fearing he would become homeless. The majority of my work for this case consisted of working with the government agencies trying to reinstate the benefits. This became extremely difficult because the agency had very little experience working with people living with paranoid schizophrenia and thus could not understand that their symptoms could lead them to believe many different things, including that they would be receiving an inheritance. Although this work became very frustrating at times, I was

committed to the work because I knew that the client needed our help and that this work was the difference between him having a roof over his head and him living on the streets.

Working in the housing clinic was equally impactful. The clinic allowed me to gain experience in an area of law with very short deadlines. Most of our clients were facing unlawful detainers and had no idea what their legal rights and responsibilities were. Many of our clients did not speak English and were being taken advantage of by slum landlords, and unfortunately we were often limited to providing limited legal services due to lack of resources. This work evoked within me an extremely strong emotional response because I found something so sacred and pure in helping these clients preserve their home for their family. Many of these clients had multiple young children who did not deserve to be living out of a car or in the streets.

The grant from EJA allowed me to help some of the most vulnerable community members who find themselves caught in the complex tangle of our justice system. My law clerk position allowed me to gain real world experiences and lawyering skills while helping indigent clients find a voice and stability in their lives. This work has left such a positive mark in my life that I have continued to volunteer at the foundation as the school year has started and I plan to continue offering my work to protect those who need it the most. Thank you.

Respectfully,  
Yuridia Guerrero  
J.D. Candidate 2017  
Santa Clara University School of Law

# MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROJECT

*Law Foundation of Silicon Valley*

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August 31, 2015

Dear Katie,

I had the pleasure of supervising Yuridia Guerrero, a rising 2L law student from Santa Clara University, during her summer with the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley. Specifically, Yuridia worked with clients and staff in the Mental Health Advocacy Project (MHAP), Health Legal Services (HLS), and our pro bono Eviction Clinic.

MHAP and HLS are two of five programs of the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley, a private non-profit organization established to secure justice and protect human rights by providing legal advocacy, counseling and access to the legal system for those who would otherwise be unrepresented.

MHAP's goal is to empower people with mental health or developmental disabilities to live more independent, secure and satisfying lives through the enforcement of their legal rights and the advancement of their social and economic well-being. MHAP helps its clients resolve problems in the areas of mental health care and treatment, housing and financial benefits.

HLS provides direct legal services to individuals living with HIV/AIDS and diabetes in Santa Clara County. HLS staff provides assistance in a wide range of practice areas by assisting clients with disputes involving private and public benefits and insurance; advocating for clients in housing and consumer matters; assisting clients with simple estate planning; representing clients in employment discrimination and reasonable accommodation matters; representing clients with breach-of-confidentiality issues; and providing representation or referrals on other legal issues.

This summer, Yuridia gained hands-on experience with client communication, negotiating with third parties, legal writing, and legal research. Yuridia had the opportunity to work directly with clients facing crisis and stressful situations. She presented herself professionally and compassionately when dealing with clients. Yuridia already seemed to have good client interaction skills, but she further developed the ability to interact with particularly difficult individuals whose mental health disabilities posed challenges in communication.

It was clear that Yuridia was dedicated to her work this summer; she often delved in much deeper than expected on certain cases and came back with lots of innovative solutions to try on her own. The most unique aspect about Yuridia was her ability to problem-solve and issue spot, despite only having completed her first year of law school. Many clerks at her level are still hesitant to speak up or analyze a case with their limited knowledge, but Yuridia was very confident in her research and presentations during case review and one-on-one debriefs. Yuridia took charge of her cases and was not afraid to ask questions when she hit roadblocks. The two of us worked together to brainstorm solutions on cases, rather than my simply telling her what to do. While working on one case in particular, Yuridia showed naturally fierce determination as an advocate. She did not take "No" for an answer from a bureaucratic government agency known to say "No" whenever possible. She pushed the Social Security workers until she was able to get the best possible outcome for our client in that particular situation.

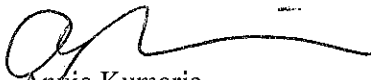
Yuridia not only handled cases with MHAP and HLS on issues ranging from a loss of Social Security benefits to analyzing Special Needs Trusts but she also divided her time with the Eviction Clinic on

housing issues. During the clinic, and even outside the clinic, it was very helpful to have Yuridia's Spanish language skills available when working with monolingual clients. Yuridia quickly learned how to write all the different types of pleadings in an eviction case and was able to do several of these legal writings on her own by the end of the summer.

At the end of the internship, Yuridia and I evaluated her experience with our organization. I gave her feedback on her performance and she also provided valuable feedback on how we could better our summer clerk program in the future. We were very grateful to have her help this summer!

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about this letter or Yuridia's work with MHAP and HLS this summer. I can be reached at (408) 280-2449 or [anjuja.kumaria@lawfoundation.org](mailto:anjuja.kumaria@lawfoundation.org).

Sincerely,



Anuja Kumaria  
Staff Attorney (MHAP/HLS)