

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13450 East Boundary Road
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 31, 2016

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America fellow this summer. The grant I received helped fund my summer as an unpaid legal intern with Mil Mujeres Legal Services in Washington, D.C. Mil Mujeres provides low-cost legal services to low-income Hispanic immigrants and their families. They specialize in immigration benefits for survivors of domestic violence, including U Visas (for victims of violent crimes), T Visas (for victims of trafficking), and VAWA (for victims of domestic violence by U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents.)

As a legal intern, I focused on drafting immigration applications, declarations, and cover letters for humanitarian relief for over 30 clients from across the country. I reviewed documentary evidence for relevance, appropriate usage, and accuracy, and compiled applications for final review by an immigration attorney. In doing this work, I heard many life stories of people who have come to this country for a better life, often as young children. I had the opportunity to interview clients in person and over the phone, and help assess the immigration benefits for which they qualified.

Beyond the drafting and compiling, I worked extensively on two large projects regarding immigrants who found themselves in unique situations. In one case, a woman had applied for a U-nonimmigrant visa based on being a victim of a felonious assault and being helpful to the police in the prosecution of that assault. As such, she was able to petition for her minor children, who lived in El Salvador, to be derivatives on her application. In the process of adjudication, her son was threatened several times by gangs in his home country – to the point that he felt he had no choice but to flee. We received word that he had been apprehended by Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and was being held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody. I worked with the child and his mother to make sure that ICE knew that he as a derivate of a pending U-Visa, and applied for his release under humanitarian parole grounds. Although we were able to fast-track the U-Visa petition, the case was still pending at the end of my internship.

In another case, I had to research and develop a strategy after a U visa was denied because of crimes that had been committed in the client's youth, which made him inadmissible. This particular man had had a difficult life and made some mistakes when he first came to the U.S. as a teen. On top of that, he had petitioned for a U visa because his young daughter had been the victim of a sexual assault at the hands of a family friend. I worked with a colleague to contact four different police departments and courts and get the records and final dispositions for our client's offenses. Additionally, we were able gather evidence that our client had taken

advantage of multiple forms of rehabilitation and learned the error of his ways. We argued that our client met the statutory requirements for a U Visa and that discretion should be given in his favor regarding the inadmissibility issue because 1) the sentences he received were always below minimums for the respective crimes, 2) he had taken advantage of available rehabilitation programs and classes, and 3) at least one charge was because of a cultural misunderstanding that happened shortly after her arrived in the United States.

I thoroughly enjoyed my internship experience, both with my co-workers and my clients. Given the nature of current the immigration system, I was not able to see very many outcomes of the cases that I worked on, but I was able to see the results from previous cases. Listening to people's stories of overcoming some of the most difficult times of their lives and how our organization was able to contribute really solidified my desire to stay in low-income immigration services.

I greatly appreciate the financial support provided by Equal Justice America, which helped make this experience possible.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexandra Williams', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alexandra Williams
American University Washington College of Law, Class of 2017