

**Dan Ruben**  
**Executive Director**  
**Equal Justice America**

August 30, 2017

Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to you to tell you about the extraordinary internship experience I had this summer with Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition. My name is Paulina Rivera, I am a 3L and am specializing in Criminal Defense, Human Rights, and Immigration.

CAIR Coalition is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote equal justice for all immigrant men, women, and children at risk of detention and deportation in the DC metropolitan area through direct legal representation, know your rights presentations, impact and advocacy work, and the training of attorneys defending immigrants in the immigration and criminal justice arenas.

As a legal intern, I was tasked with one main client with a hefty case for the summer, jail visits for intakes on new potential clients and follow-ups from previous intakes and current clients, and shifts on the CAIR Coalition hotline where inmates can call for updates on their case or to talk to their lawyer.

As per the work for my main client, my teammate and I were given a 209(c) waiver for application for permanent residence/Convention Against Torture (CAT) case. Our client had severe mental illnesses, qualified for adjustment of status, but for his criminal record, and if deported, would have been severely tortured because of his illnesses. Getting to know the client and the circumstances under which his mental illnesses first appeared and how they progressed and took him on a downward spiral of crime was heart-wrenching. Personally, I have never been in any major trouble, but if I had lived the hell he endured in his childhood, I do not honestly know I would have made better choices.

In an abbreviated fashion, I got to hear dozens of other stories from most of the people I met during jail visits and on the hotline shifts. Their stories were drenched in violence and loss. I kept thinking, how can one call it justice to impose severe sanctions on someone who was once a victim and was never rehabilitated or received any retribution? How can we justify sending someone to their home country when that means certain death?

As with all clients at CAIR Coalition, our client was detained and that docket moves fairly quickly. We had approximately two months to put the case together which resulted in a 45-page brief and approximately 550 pages of evidence. From country conditions and declarations to filing in court and litigating the case, we did it all.

Coming back to school this Fall I have heard all about my peers' experiences in their internships and how they got to 'observe' cases while my teammate and I got hands-on experience of what litigation in criminal immigration really requires. I had the privilege of being supervised by Claudia Cubas and Saba Ahmed. Their guidance, insight, and feedback gave me a truly unique experience that confirmed my passion for criminal defense and allowed my teammate and I to win the case.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Equal Justice America for the fellowship you granted me. The funds allowed me to focus all my energy in helping someone in desperate need and to engage in truly rewarding work over the summer.

Best,

Paulina Rivera  
JD Candidate, 2018  
American University  
Washington College of Law



*Fighting for equal justice for all immigrants  
at risk of detention and deportation*

[www.caircoalition.org](http://www.caircoalition.org)

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August 29, 2017

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RE: Paulina Rivera  
Summer Intern and Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship Recipient

Dear Mr. Ruben

This letter is to confirm that Paulina Rivera was a full time summer intern at the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition. As a Senior Program Director at the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition in Washington, D.C., I directly supervised Paulina in her capacity as a full time legal intern in the summer of 2017. Over the course of our ten-week summer program Paulina demonstrated initiative, professionalism, integrity, and a commitment to improving the legal profession.

CAIR Coalition works with over 1,000 immigrants detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in jails throughout Virginia and Maryland. We visit these individuals in rural county jails, giving legal rights presentations in Spanish and English, identifying cases for representation, providing direct representation, mentoring pro bono attorneys, and assisting immigrants to fight their cases pro se. Because our work focuses exclusively on providing legal services to detained individuals, our staff and interns must learn to establish and maintain various relationships with jail personnel, immigration officers, administrative and criminal court judges and attorneys, and immigrants with various criminal histories and mental disabilities. Paulina actively participated in all of these responsibilities while at the organization, specifically doing the following:

- Representing a client pro bono from the start to the end of his case;
- Assisting counsel to prepare a client for a contested trial; and
- Conducting jail visits and follow up research for cases eligible for pro bono placement.

As a legal intern, Paulina's main assignment was to provide representation for an in-house client. Under my supervision, Paulina and another law student represented a detained client who was a refugee from Sierra Leone and had several convictions related to theft, including a carjacking conviction. Paulina and her teammate worked diligently to obtain medical information confirming a recent diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, educating and rallying his estranged family around him, and highlighting the client's refugee traumatic experience. Their hard work

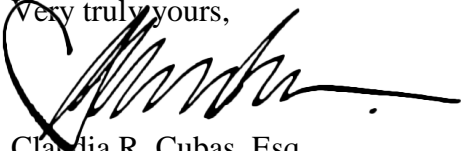
proved successful, as a result, the government stipulated to allow the client to stay in the United States with a green card.

As an intern, Paulina met all briefing and research deadlines on time. She was also a very willing intern volunteering on one occasion to accompany a staff attorney on the weekend to visit another client in jail to prepare testimony for a very contentious hearing.

There is no doubt Paulina is a hard worker and has a strong commitment to working with an immigrant population. As recommended, she would benefit from taking an affirmative approach to asking follow-up questions when assigned a task in order to ensure her work product adequately addresses the issues.

If I can provide any further information, please feel free to contact me.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claudia R. Cubas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Claudia R. Cubas, Esq.  
Senior Program Director