

Dear Dan Ruben,

This summer I interned at the Amara Legal Center. Amara is a small legal non-profit that focuses on helping victims of human trafficking in the Maryland, DC, and Virginia Area. Many of these victims are arrested for prostitution charges but are being forced to do this work by pimps. Amara helps represent these girls in their criminal charges and helps them to come forward with information about their pimps so that the police can find them. When a person is a victim of trafficking, it is an affirmative defense to a prostitution charge but the victim must be willing to give up information about their trafficker or they cannot use the defense. Amara also helps to connect these victims with resources that they desperately need, such as food, shelter, medical aid, and psychological aid. There are only two full time attorneys and one part-time attorney who works at Amara and their jobs are hectic and busy as they work to help these victims.

At my internship, I worked with all three of the attorneys, aiding them in a variety of things. I began the summer by filing out court appearance documents and retainers for our clients. As I gained more responsibility, I would make phone calls or meet the clients to get their story on their arrest and on what help that they needed. Being able to work closely with these girls was an amazing opportunity and helped me to really learn what it is to be a victim of human trafficking. I was able to see one client's case from start to finish this summer. She was arrested for prostitution that she was being forced to do but was unfortunately unwilling to give up information. However, since she was so young and it was her first charge, the court was lenient and she only has to complete a therapy program that is focused on victims. Through the Amara Legal Center, this client has been able to turn her life around and has also enrolled in college. I was also able to write documents that I have not been able to before, like an independent contractor contract as well as a demand letter. The demand letter was one of the first assignments I had and the client was able to get pictures of herself taken down from a website that posted them without her permission with the help of the demand letter. This internship meant I was able to have a positive impact on these clients as well as get their lives back.

The fellowship allowed me to work full time for this amazing non-profit and learn about an area of law that I most likely would not have been able to had it not been for the fellowship. I was able to fully focus on this internship which helped me to develop a desire to continue helping those in need, whether it is through a non-profit or pro bono work. Without this fellowship, I would not have been able to gain skills, nor would have I been able to see a client's case from start to finish and turn her life around. It allowed me to open my eyes to a very big problem in this country that most people don't know is happening. This fellowship allowed me to engage in meaningful work that I don't think I would have been able to do without it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Shuster".

Megan Shuster

Columbus School of Law, 2018