

August 31, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Courtney Lee, and I am a third-year student at Georgetown Law and proud recipient of the Equal Justice America 2014 Summer Fellowship. This summer, I interned at the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition to further its mission in support of detained immigrants in the DC metropolitan area. With the aid of the EJA Fellowship, I was able to attend weekly jail visits and serve over 100 detained immigrants over the course of fourteen weeks. In addition, I won my first immigration case and learned how to be a lawyer and advocate for underserved communities. The purpose of this letter is to share with you my experiences at CAIR Coalition this summer in order to convey just how grateful I am to have been an EJA Fellow.

I, along with a fellow CAIR Coalition intern, had the distinct honor to serve as student attorneys on behalf of an older Somali man seeking cancellation of deportation. To that end, we gathered and submitted over 400 pages worth of evidence, filed motions with the Immigration Court, prepared our client and witnesses for trial, and argued before the Immigration Judge. The entire process took over a month, and I learned three incredibly valuable lessons along the way.

First, I learned that lawyering requires a lot of foresight and initiative. I recognized this in the context of gathering affidavits from family members. My client had several siblings and half siblings, most without access to cell phones, email, or fax. For weeks, I sat and waited for first drafts of their affidavits. I became frustrated with myself, my client, and his family. I struggled because I was not used to being so dependent on others to complete my own assignments. It was then when I realized that I had to do it myself. I made phone calls and collected stories. I drafted the affidavits and drove around the DC area for two days reading letters to family members, finding notaries, and obtaining signatures. In the end, I was proud that I was able to coordinate a community of people supporting my client.

Second, I learned that building a strong relationship with the client is key to effective representation. My client was a 51-year-old man with a long history of mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. I first met with him in person to offer him representation, and he was skeptical because I was young and inexperienced. I made sure to speak with him every week, passing along messages from his family and friends, and updating him on the progress of the case. He came to trust me, which proved important

when it came time to prepare for trial. During his testimony, I asked him difficult questions about his history with mental illness and drugs, which made him uncomfortable at first. Because he trusted me, though, I was able to push him and challenge him to face his discomfort in an honest and meaningful way. In this sense, I was able to support him as a counselor and a friend.

Finally, I learned that lawyering for underserved communities is not meant to be a selfish endeavor. In other words, it's not about me; it's about the client. As we neared trial, I was stressed and worried that we would lose. I explained to my client that his case was not entirely sympathetic, and there was a real possibility that he would be deported. "Courtney, no matter what happens, everything is going to be okay," he said calmly. I was humbled. At that moment, I recognized that advocacy is not about winning or losing a case. It is about zealously advocating to defend and protect a real human life. With this in mind, I was able to help write a compelling brief and affidavit, and ultimately convinced the Immigration Judge to exercise discretion in favor of my client.

My time at CAIR Coalition was truly valuable, and I am incredibly grateful to have been afforded the opportunity to meet and conduct intakes with so many detained immigrants in the DC area. Moreover, I am the most grateful to my first client, who always kept me grounded. I am honored to have played but a small part in his life, having helped him remain in the United States and make significant rehabilitative efforts. Thank you again, Mr. Ruben, for the opportunity to make a difference in peoples' lives this summer.

Best regards,

Courtney Lee  
Georgetown University Law Center  
J.D. Candidate, May 2015