

September 8, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to thank Equal Justice America Fellowship for giving me the opportunity to work with Greater Boston Legal Services this summer. I worked with the GBLS Immigration Unit, which is dedicated to serving the low-income asylum seekers, victims of domestic violence and other violent crimes, and unaccompanied juvenile immigrants. Throughout my summer, I was not only able to meet with clients shared their innermost traumas and stories of suffering but also I was able to improve my skills on legal research and argumentative legal writing by working on GBLS's appellate brief submitted to the First Circuit.

During my time at GBLS, I learned about how the immigration law scheme sometimes imposes a burdensome or unfair corroboration requirement to legitimate asylum seekers although it is true that the US does provide various ways in which undocumented immigrants can gain lawful status in the country.

For example, our Unit worked on an appellate case on a Honduran client who sought asylum based on persecution due to her affiliation with a left-wing political organization, domestic violence of her ex-partner in Honduras, and a brutal rape committed against her by a Honduran soldier. It was frustrating to see how our client did not seem to have had a full and fair opportunity to present her compelling case because of procedural roadblocks and minor confusions in her extensive affidavits. In her case, although there was no explicit adverse credibility finding in the Immigration Judge's opinion, the government argued that our client was found not credible by the Immigration Judge and that she did not satisfy her burden of proof. Also, another point at issue was whether the Real ID Act, which lets an Immigration Judge to base an adverse credibility finding on any inconsistencies in the petitioner's testimony, contained a notice requirement, which provides the petitioner an opportunity to obtain corroborating evidence or an opportunity to explain why that piece of evidence is not available. Because the First Circuit Court has not yet decided on this particular issue, I had to conduct an open-ended case research on the topic and was able to analogize to different cases from circuits outside the First Circuit.

Another memorable legal issue I worked on was the question of whether the First Circuit Court had jurisdiction over a "mixed" Board of Immigration Appeals, which granted our client withholding of removal but denied his application for asylum and protection under Convention

Against Torture. Because there was a circuit split on what the courts regarded as an appealable “final” decision, the jurisdiction issue was a quite important piece of our brief. I really enjoyed witnessing firsthand how seemingly technical issue of legal statutory interpretation can significantly impact a petitioner’s case. The outcome of both appellate cases that I worked on is still pending.

In addition to having the opportunity to research cases, develop arguments on statutory interpretation, legislative history, and applicability of different international law obligations, I was also able to meet with clients from countries like Honduras, El Salvador, Cambodia, Guatemala, and Algeria. It was an invaluable experience to listen to their life stories because it seemed that I was able to play a role in helping these victims and survivors secure legal status and safety in this country. I learned to how to communicate to clients who are from different cultures and speak different language from me.

I really enjoyed working at Greater Boston Legal Services this summer and I want to thank Equal Justice America again for giving me the opportunity to have a valuable summer experience.

Leah Park
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Class of 2018