

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

August 22, 2012

Dear Mr. Ruben,

As an Equal Justice America fellow in the Civil Action Practice at The Bronx Defenders, I had the opportunity to contribute to the organization's holistic, client-centered model as an immigration intern. Over the course of the summer, I worked with 8 clients on individual representation matters and about 25-30 clients on brief services matters. I interviewed clients to gather personal histories to write affidavits in support of their applications for immigration benefits. I conducted research to assess eligibility for certain types of relief such as cancellation of removal for lawful permanent residents. I also researched whether certain New York criminal convictions would render clients deportable from or inadmissible to the United States. I worked on a request for bond determination for a client being held in immigration detention. In addition, I worked on a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status application, completing all necessary documents and supporting affidavits to file in family court. Finally, I wrote a successful request to Immigration and Customs Enforcement to lift a detainer so that our mentally ill client could attend a drug treatment program.

At the same time as my individual representation projects, I assisted my supervisor in advising clients with cases in criminal court on the immigration consequences of certain plea agreements. About two times per week, I conducted brief intake with clients represented by criminal defense attorneys at The Bronx Defenders to advise on immigration matters. Most of the time, we were able to advise long time lawful permanent residents on how to avoid becoming deportable. If a particular client had an ongoing immigration issue, we offered to represent him or her. If there was no present issue, we offered to help with anything in the future.

I felt like I made an impact on one client in particular. Lisa (name changed) is a 48 year old HIV positive woman from the Dominican Republic who suffers from schizophrenia and depression. She has struggled with an addiction to cocaine for two decades. Lisa was arrested and incarcerated pending trial in early 2012. She was also placed in removal proceedings, threatening her lawful status in the United States for 38 years. As an alternative to a jail sentence, Lisa was offered a drug treatment program, an option she desperately wanted. However, because she was in removal proceedings, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) placed a detainer on her, meaning that she would be transferred to ICE custody as soon as she was released from jail. This detainer was preventing her from accepting the offer of drug treatment.

I wrote a request to ICE asking for the detainer to be lifted so that Lisa could attend this inpatient drug treatment program. To prepare the request, I met with Lisa in jail and at court to learn her story and her situation. I compiled medical records to support our argument. About a

month after we made the request, and about seven months after Lisa was arrested, ICE agreed to lift the detainer. Lisa will be placed in a drug treatment program and begin the path to recovery.

I gained tremendous perspective from working with The Bronx Defenders' clients. I feel confident that my work for the the Civil Action Practice assisted clients, like Lisa, who might not otherwise have access to legal services due to financial, language, and cultural barriers. I hope my work helped not only to achieve concrete legal ends, but also to empower my clients. My internship, enabled by the Equal Justice America fellowship, solidified my already-established commitment to working with low-income immigrant populations. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Jessica Swensen
J.D. Candidate 2013
Boston College Law School

August 27, 2012

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I'm an immigration attorney at the Bronx Defenders, a holistic public defense office located in New York, and this summer I had the pleasure of supervising Jessica Swensen. Throughout her ten week internship Jessica worked on a variety of legal issues ranging from legal research and writing to direct client contact. With each assignment she took on, Jessica demonstrated a keen understanding of the relevant law and a genuine interest in helping our clients. Having her here this summer was both a pleasure for our staff as well as our clients.

Throughout the summer Jessica worked on a wide-array of cases that required behind the scenes research and writing as well as direct client communication. In both of these areas Jessica excelled. One of the largest projects she worked on this summer was assisting a client with applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, a path for an undocumented child under 21 years old to receive lawful immigration status. This is a type of case that requires multiple steps and none of the immigration attorneys in the office had ever successfully filed one. In turn, very little guidance could be provided. Jessica took on the project with total enthusiasm, reaching out to practitioners in the field, researching the case law, and writing a substantive memorandum of law. Furthermore, she worked with the client and her family to gather the relevant story to support the case and explain the legal steps. In another case, Jessica was asked to work on a task many of us viewed as hopeless. A client was in criminal custody with an immigration detainer and Jessica was asked to write an advocacy piece to lift the detainer in order to permit our client to get out of jail and enter a drug treatment program. Again, Jessica jumped in feet first, met with the client at Riker's Island, and wrote an extremely persuasive advocacy letter. She proved us all wrong when she succeeded in convincing immigration authorities to lift the detainer.

These are just a few case examples of the work Jessica accomplished this summer. In addition to the larger projects mentioned above she took on small assignments with equal enthusiasm – eager to race to court, look into nuanced legal issues, and meet with clients. Without a question she was an enormous asset to have at the Bronx Defenders this summer.

Sincerely,

Ashley Kaper