

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

August 30, 2012

Dear Dan Ruben,

My summer spent at Farmworker Legal Services in Kalamazoo, Michigan was invaluable. Not only was I able to positively contribute to an isolated community, but gained new legal skills. Coming from metro-Detroit, I previously had little knowledge about the farmworker community in Michigan. Upon arriving in Kalamazoo at FLS, I was given rigorous training on both important legal precedents, and some of the cultural and social issues facing this often-overlooked community.

I applaud FLS for giving its interns training at the beginning of the internship, however, I soon learned that some aspects of this job cannot be taught. The second week of work was the first time I did outreach with two experienced staff members. To say that I was shocked is an understatement. Arriving at the first camp, I heard how families had been living in less than adequate housing, with many small children. One woman we spoke with would only talk through her screen door, fearful that the crewleader would retaliate against her and her family for talking to us. She was willing to talk with us at the camp, but as soon as I attempted to reach out to her via phone, she said that she couldn't talk to us. I was quickly learning that creating client relationships would be a challenge, a theme that continued throughout the internship. At the second camp on my first day of outreach, we encountered a Caucasian migrant family from Illinois, desperate for food stamps for the pregnant wife and equitable pay for the husband. Their "home" was infested with bedbugs, no running water, holes in the floor and missing screens and doors. Immediately I could not understand how anyone could allow this to happen – who had licensed this camp? Why had these people not received better services? I struggled, and continue to struggle, with this question. Luckily, we were able to get food stamps for the family, as well as some back-pay for the husband through contact with the farmer.

The singular experience that had the largest impact on me was assisting clients in Sturgis, Michigan. On a Friday, our office received a call that sixteen migrant workers were stranded in a hotel in Sturgis, without food nor a way to return home. Their crewleader had stolen their last checks, leaving them without enough money to go home to Florida. Within three hours, we had mobilized three interns and an attorney, with another intern providing support from the office. After calling approximately twenty organizations, we were able to find food from a local church support group. We quickly learned that the emergency services that are supposed to be in place to help in this type of situation are often not responsive to these needs. I learned the need for individuals to fight for legislation and political support for farmworkers in Michigan. Upon arriving at the hotel, we conducted intake and information sessions for all sixteen workers, attempting to allay fears of immigration and police involvement. Many were confused and scared, as many were undocumented. After four hours in a small hotel room, the clients were

left with more information, food, and possibilities to get home. The case is ongoing, and will continue to require constant contact and information to the clients.

Outreach not only consisted of visiting camps, but giving presentations on deferred action and wage and housing issues at community meetings, in conjunction with local education agencies and help centers. After each presentation, I was able to individually answer questions, and while not all of these resulted in cases with our office, I was able to provide helpful information to many people.

Beyond outreach, I was exposed to new areas of law that I was not previously familiar with. Learning about the intersection of federal, state and local law as both aiding and hindering migrant populations has made me want to pursue this line of work. I intend to continue to aid migrant workers as I will be doing outreach in my community, and promoting the organization to my classmates. Because of the Equal Justice America fellowship, I was able to provide effective services to an isolated population and learn lessons about myself and how to continue to positively contribute to my community.

Sincerely,

Jessica Wayne
Juris Doctor Candidate, May 2013
Wayne State University