

August 16, 2012

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
135040 East Boundary Road  
Building II, Suit 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Summer Fellowship Experience

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I interned at Catholic Charities Immigration and Refugee Services in New York City. This organization provides invaluable services to the community, as it offers migration counseling, refugee resettlement, and legal aid. I was given the opportunity to work directly with my supervising attorney, a senior attorney at Catholic Charities, on asylum cases.

During my 10 weeks with Catholic Charities, I worked in depth on three cases. The first was a defensive asylum case, based on a political opinion claim for a female Russian journalist who had dedicated her career to speaking out against corruption and championing for transparency in government. As a result, she was blacklisted, persecuted with threatening phone calls, and detained on false charges. I prepared her I-589 form, declaration, exhibit list and memorandum of law, which drew the necessary connections between past persecution and fear of future persecution as stemming from her expressed political opinion. Being involved in every aspect of her asylum claim, I had a lot of personal interaction with my client and handled nearly all communication with her during my time at Catholic Charities. This experience was very meaningful because the importance of the work never escaped me; her life, in many respects, was in my hands.

The second asylum case I worked on was a religious persecution claim of an Egyptian Coptic Christian. I along with two of my fellow interns wrote an Opening Brief to the Second Circuit in this case. This client had been denied asylum and filed a motion to reopen based on changed country conditions, which was also denied. Thus, Catholic Charities took over the case to appeal the denial of the motion to reopen, because the Board of Immigration Appeals had made legal error in determining that the changed country conditions were preexisting. I was assigned to write a section of the brief that argued that the Immigration Judge should take “judicial notice” of the events transpiring in Egypt from the time of the denial to the present appeal. Because in this period of time Egypt had elected Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, to the Presidency, and Military Leaders suspended Parliament. Strategically we wanted the Court to take judicial notice of these current country conditions when deciding whether to reverse and remand because of the grave consequences they had for our client. This gave me the opportunity to delve into the particulars of asylum law as well as circuit splits on issues that are not covered by black letter law.

Lastly, I wrote a prosecutorial discretion memorandum to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office of Homeland Security, asking that it exercise its discretion and not pursue deportation of our client. Our client is a 12-year-old Ecuadorian girl who was brought into the U.S. undocumented by her mother, and then became the victim of rape. Our office was first attempting to get the girl and her mother status through U-Visa, however the girl's father died unexpectedly in Ecuador and the necessary family court proceedings were not able to occur. Thus, we sought prosecutorial direction, as outlined in John Morton's, the Director of ICE's, June 17, 2011 memo, which would prevent the young girl from being deported so that she may continue her education in the U.S. and stay with her family that is already in the U.S. Her eligibility for this discretion was clear because she had been a victim of a crime, aided the police in their investigation and was not a removal priority of the U.S. government.

I feel very lucky that I was given the opportunity to do significant and quality work this summer thanks to the Equal Justice America Fellowship I received. Immigration work is so exciting because you are actively and visibly helping people and getting to think critically about legal issues. This experience provided me a glimpse into the type of career I would like to have one day, and gave me invaluable experience with clients and in writing and research. Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Julia I. Catania  
Columbia Law School  
Class of 2014