

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Raymond Chavez and I am a second year student at Loyola Law School. Early last Spring I was offered an amazing opportunity to work for the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST). I have always had an interest in combating human trafficking and I had never had the opportunity to serve that particular population in the past. Needless to say I was quite thrilled when I received an offer to intern as a law clerk at CAST for the summer of 2017. I was quickly faced with a daunting realization; I did not have the means to support myself while working full time for free over the summer. I come from a low income background and can only attend law school because I was fortunate enough to receive generous scholarships. The internship at CAST was quickly looking too expensive for me to consider. Because cast is a non-profit organization they naturally cannot afford to pay legal interns for their services. In addition I would need to drive an hour and a half to get to work each day, pay for my own food as well as pay for parking at a fifteen dollar a day rate. To offset those costs I applied to become an Equal Justice America fellow for the summer of 2017 and was awarded funds which allowed me to pursue my passion and work at CAST this past summer, and for that I am extremely grateful.

While at CAST I had the honor of meeting many inspiring individuals. The clients whom CAST serves have shown themselves time and again to be some of the hardest working people I have ever met. While at CAST I served a large group of migrant farm workers, all of whom are survivors of human trafficking. They suffered years of abuse and mistreatment at the hands of their trafficker, an experience which could drain the hope from even the strongest of people. And yet even after surviving all that they had, the migrant workers never stopped working for a better future. After they liberated themselves, they continued to work hard to support themselves and

their families and ultimately applied for their green cards in the hopes that one day their children could receive the protections afforded to United States citizens.

The job definitely wasn't easy. There were times where I wondered how the attorneys at CAST could find the willpower to keep going in the face of so much hardship. The cases they took on were difficult, the stories they heard were heartbreaking, and the hurdles they had to surpass to be zealous advocates for their clients were immense. My answer came in the form of a client who I met half way through the summer. She was a young woman who had been forced into prostitution by her trafficker for a few years. She was now working to support herself and her young child. One day during a meeting I asked her what she planned to do when her case was over and she answered that she wanted to find work as an employee at a university. I must have looked a bit puzzled because she proceeded to smile and elaborate that she had heard some universities offer tuition remission benefits for dependents of their employees. She said that she wanted her child to have opportunities that were never afforded to her, and that she was ready to work hard to help her child earn a degree someday. This moment more than any other has made a lasting imprint on me. In that moment I saw a brave young mother who had survived things which would have broken many others and yet at the end of the day still gives all that she has to offer her child a better future.

If I had to impart the boil down what I learned at CAST into a single lesson it would be this: the way we currently view human trafficking in the U.S. is flawed. Too often we make stories of human trafficking about the traffickers themselves, and view the victims of those traffickers as precisely that, victims. But the reality is they are more than just victims of a crime, they are survivors. They are men and women who despite every hardship, have endured and believe that a better future is something worth fighting for. The story of human trafficking is the

story of its survivors. When I looked into their eyes and heard them tell me about the hopes and dreams for a better tomorrow which they were undauntedly pursuing, I saw the American Dream made human. I will forever be grateful to both CAST and Equal Justice America for providing me with this experience, and I hope to one day return the favor by continuing to serve the community I have grown to love.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Raymond Chavez", with a stylized, cursive script.

Raymond Chavez

Loyola Law School, Class of 2019