

May 21, 2014

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Laura Zaragoza and I am a graduating 3L at the Yale Law School. I am writing as a recipient of an Equal Justice America fellowship to thank you for your support of the Yale Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) Project. First and foremost, the support that I have received from Equal Justice America has allowed me to provide invaluable assistance to victims of domestic violence. The Yale TRO Project serves victims of abuse by guiding applicants through the temporary restraining order application process. Each year, the TRO Project encourages dozens of Yale Law students to assist hundreds of women, men, and children, most of who are from low-income Hispanic and African-American families. Furthermore, on a personal level, this fellowship has allowed me to participate in one of the most rewarding experiences of my law school career.

During my time with the TRO project, I have worked to improve access to justice for victims of domestic violence in a variety of capacities. I have provided direct services to our clients by assisting them in completing TRO applications; navigating the courthouse; and serving TROs on respondents. We at the TRO project have also worked to educate our clients about the TRO application process on a one-on-one basis and also by producing educational materials to clarify the legal procedures regarding service of process and TRO hearings. Moreover, our directors have worked to collect data regarding the efficiency of service of process in Connecticut, raising concerns about marshal service to judges and local family law practitioners. In January 2013, a TRO director, with the assistance of Judge Conway and NHLAA, organized a brown bag lunch to bring together judges, marshals, police officers, lawyers, Yale faculty, and members of the Office of the Victim Advocate in order to discuss how rates of service may be improved so that more recipients of TROs can confidently enforce their orders against their abusers. Since that time, our organization has continued to work with local organizations to lobby for legislative change regarding service of process in Connecticut.

My experience as a director of the TRO project has offered me an unparalleled opportunity to learn and grow as a law student and as a person. For the last two years, I have met so many women with incredible strength who have been through unimaginable trials and were trying to reclaim control of their lives. For many of these women, I was the first person with whom they had ever shared their stories – the first person they looked to for help. Although I could not always help every single client I met, I felt privileged to have sat with them and listened to their words. The work that I did last year and the stories of the women I have met will stay with me for years to come.

Furthermore, being a Latina woman myself, I felt particularly honored to be given the opportunity to work primarily with clients of my own minority community. Since I was very young, my parents have encouraged me to give back to the immigrant community. My father was born in a village in Irapuato, Mexico, and immigrated to the United States when he was fourteen years old. My mother is the daughter of immigrants from Manila and the Ilocos Sur province of the Philippines. As I grew up, my parents worked very hard to give me a great education and incredible opportunities, but every step of the way they urged me never to forget my cultural roots or the modest circumstances from which they and my grandparents have risen. The values they emphasized have encouraged me to commit myself to community service and ultimately to apply to law school to explore public interest law.

In high school in Los Angeles and at Yale College, I volunteered my time as a tutor and mentor of black and Hispanic students. I also committed myself to community service in schools and orphanages in several countries, including Mexico, Costa Rica, Argentina, and Spain. Now, at the Yale Law School, I am continuing in this spirit of service. I joined the TRO project during my first semester at law school and since served as a TRO director for four semesters. I am also a member of the Legal Services for Immigrant Communities Clinic, in which I assist low-income Latino clients in matters regarding family, employment, and immigration law. I am also a member of the Advocacy for Children and Youth Clinic, in which I represent children in abuse and neglect proceedings. Additionally, last year I served as the chair of the Public Interest Auction, which raises money to fund other public interest projects. The summer following my 1L year, I worked at the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law, working with low-income victims of domestic violence on a range of family law issues including restraining orders, child abuse, divorce, custody, paternity, and child support.

My time with the TRO project has been a truly transformative experience. I am so lucky to have had the chance to work in a subject area about which I am truly passionate, to work with a community with which I am personally connected, and to work for a project that does unparalleled work and has helped me grow as a young lawyer-in-training.

Once again, thank you so much for this opportunity and for all of your support.

Sincerely,

Laura Zaragoza
Yale Law School, Class of 2014