

Mr. Daniel Ruben
Equal Justice America
13540 E. Boundary Rd.
Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 30, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you because, thanks to you, I had an extraordinary summer. I use the word ‘extraordinary’ not just because I learned in a hands-on, empowering environment where the staff were fierce advocates for their clients and came into work every day passionate about their jobs, but also because the stories of the people I served were far from ordinary.

Take, for example, the man from India who had lost everything. A fellow intern and I were assigned to his case as his direct representatives for the duration of the summer. But when I first read his file and his criminal history, I was not even convinced that we would be able to help him. Over the course of the first few weeks, I began to get to know him and as we built trust, his story spilled out. I learned about the many physical and mental health struggles that had brought him to this point. He came to the United States 20 years prior and had started out doing quite well, was granted asylum and eventually became a legal permanent resident. But when tragedy struck his family, he went on a downward spiral, committing a series of crimes that made him “removable” under the U.S. immigration laws. In short, he had no money and no one left to defend him. Without an attorney to empower him to tell his compelling story, I have no doubt that any judge deciding his case would have had the same reaction I did when I first looked at his record.

As his case progressed, I saw how having attorney impacted him far beyond the improved odds of winning his case. While we were hard at work on gathering evidence, coordinating social service agencies that could take him in upon his release, and preparing him to tell his story in court, I noticed significant changes in him. He was smiling a lot more each time we met, was exercising for several hours a day, and had applied for two jobs in the detention facility. He woke up every day at 5 a.m. because he wanted to feel useful; he said he was feeling good again for the first time in years. Before we started working with him, he felt hopeless. He thought he was doomed to being cast out into a country entirely unfamiliar to him, where he had experienced severe trauma and would not have access to the physical and mental health care he needs. We instilled hope in him again, and as we could tell from his copious thank you’s, we had changed his life.

In Spanish, the word for “lawyer” and for “advocate” is one and the same. This summer shaped my belief that this is truly the dual role of a lawyer: to use the privilege of earning a legal education to be not only an agent of the law but also an advocate.

I feel empowered after spending a summer putting my legal education to work for people from all over the world who are so deserving yet so under-served. I represented immigrants during hearings and credible fear interviews (the first step in the asylum process), conducted client intake, and even presented a bond motion in front of a judge in immigration court. I was able to use my Spanish skills to contact family members, translate documents, and be a listening ear to people feeling isolated in the detention centers. The staff and supervising attorneys were beyond supportive, but they were adamant that the interns take the lead on each project, and I am so grateful for their trust. I truly believe there is nowhere else where a first-year law student could better develop lawyering skills.

I am deeply grateful to Equal Justice America for its financial support and for enabling students like me to have experiences that will shape our legal careers. The fellowship signals to the legal community the importance of investing in legal services for low-income individuals and reinforces advocacy as an essential role of a lawyer. As I continue on in my legal education and career, I hope to continue to be a voice for this message and support this honorable organization's mission.

Kind regards,

Margaret O'Connor

Margaret O'Connor
The University of Chicago Law School
Class of 2017



Working to ensure all immigrants are treated with fairness, dignity and respect for their human and civil rights.

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August 18, 2015

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

Re: Margaret O'Connor

Dear Dan,

Please accept this letter from the Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition as an evaluation of the fellowship completed during the summer of 2015 by Margaret O'Connor. Let me begin by stating that Margaret's performance was exemplary and she was a valued asset to our programs.

For over a decade, CAIR Coalition has worked collaboratively with community groups, pro bono attorneys, volunteers and immigrants from the District of Columbia, Virginia and Maryland to ensure that all immigrants are treated with fairness, dignity and respect for their human and civil rights. To accomplish that mission, we rely on volunteers, interns, and fellows. Without their help, we could not do the important work that we do.

During the summer of 2015, Margaret took on multiple tasks in support of our Detained Adult Program, including:

- Directly representing a client that petitioned for Legal Permanent Resident Cancellation of Removal , including managing the litigation, working with government trial attorneys, research, writing, and filing a brief; family follow up, and appearing in Immigration Court;
- Conducting hundreds of client intake consultations at local jails alongside our staff attorneys;
- Representing individuals seeking asylum during Credible Fear Interviews;
- Conducting legal research and preparing legal memoranda;
- Working with social service agencies to develop post-release plans upon securing their release from detention; and,



Working to ensure all immigrants are treated with fairness, dignity and respect for their human and civil rights.

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- Taking part in the intake and legal follow-up aspect of client screening, including family follow up and research.

In doing this work, Margaret was excellent, efficient, effective, easy to work with. All of our staff was impressed with Margaret's work ethic and work product. I am happy to answer any questions about Margaret's time with us at CAIR Coalition. Please contact me at 202-331-3320 ext. 13 at any time.

Michael Lukens

Pro Bono Coordinating Attorney
CAIR Coalition