

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director, Equal Justice America  
Building II, Suite 204  
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Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben

I write to express my deep gratitude to EJA for providing me with funding that allowed me to have a long and fruitful internship with the Lutheran Social Services of New York's Immigration Legal Program this summer. Thanks to EJA, I was able to dedicate ten weeks of my summer to assisting immigrant communities in New York and had the opportunity to work closely with a wide range of clients and learn more about immigration law.

Over the course of my summer internship I was able to work closely with many clients and learn more about various facets of immigration law and the work of immigration attorneys. Working at a small office meant that I was deeply imbedded in the work of all of the attorneys in the organization, and able to see many different areas of immigration law.

During the summer I worked on cases for asylum seekers – both those in removal proceedings and those affirmatively seeking status – from throughout Africa and Central America, clients from Haiti seeking to renew their temporary protected status and identify next steps if TPS is not continued for Haiti, women seeking status under the Violence Against Women Act, young students seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, and unaccompanied minors (UACs) who had fled serious gang violence, among others. In addition to the in-office legal work for clients, I also joined my supervising attorneys in attending policy focused meetings with other providers as well as court hearings and ICE check-ins and supervision meetings with our clients – providing a glimpse into the workings of the numerous agencies involved in immigration law and enforcement. The variety of cases and environments I was able to experience allowed me to meet a vast range of clients and see the many ways immigration law impacts immigrant communities.

In addition to the many cases I assisted my supervising attorneys on, I was also able to serve as the lead advocate for two cases where we were seeking Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for young adults. As the lead on these cases I worked very closely with these two young clients – aged 19 and 20 – and their guardians. I was honored that both of these clients were so willing to share with me their stories, including the very difficult and painful struggles that led them to leave their home countries. In addition to the details and narratives needed to build their legal case, though, both clients also shared with me their hopes and dreams for the future, which were truly inspiring and truly underscored of how crucial these cases were to their rest of their lives.

One client in particular, a young man from the Ivory Coast, shared with me his dreams of attending college. An incredibly impressive young man, he had already been accepted into a handful of colleges nationwide but was told by his dream school – a public New York city university - that his immigration status was preventing them from accepting him. Though it went beyond the scope of the work I was doing for his immigration case, I was determined to help him achieve this dream. My supervising attorney encouraged me – with the client's permission – to work with him to identify ways to make his dream school a reality. After reaching out to contacts

at the New York City Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs I was able to confirm that his immigration status should not prevent him from being accepted. Armed with this knowledge, he was able to push the school and advocate even harder for his acceptance. When he learned he had finally been accepted to the school of his dreams he immediately e-mailed myself and my supervising attorney. Though it wasn't a court win, it was still one of the most amazing moments of my internship. Though my internship technically ended before I was able to see his case through the courts, I was able to return for his first court appearance in family court, and will be able to attend his second (and presumptively final) court appearance later this fall before assisting in filing his immigration status adjustment paperwork. While I am very proud of the work I put into his case on the legal side, and seeing the positive reactions the court has already had to our motions and filings, it has been more fulfilling to see how the work I put into his legal case has aided him in other aspects of his life. He is now in his first week of college and has already reached out to update me on how excited he is – and to let me know he is already thinking ahead to attending law school after graduation.

This summer was a particularly interesting time to be doing immigration work, given recent changes in the politics surrounding immigration enforcement and the priorities for immigration enforcement. Over my ten weeks I saw directly how these changes in priority and enforcement – as well as changes to how judges and immigration officials were reading and interpreting the law – impacted my clients and the types of advocacy attorneys in the field could be successful with. The impact on our clients was particularly intense as we saw many clients who had cases that changed drastically in terms of what relief they could reasonably seek and how likely they were to be successful. There was also a drastic increase in the number of clients in need, and particularly the number of clients who were deeply afraid.

Given the increase in number of clients in need, and the increased intensity of immigration enforcement, I am especially grateful that I was able to assist LSSNY this summer. Many of the clients I was able to assist – including both of the cases that I was lead advocate for – had been on a waitlist for services for months. With a small staff and limited resources, my office was unable to take these clients on until I, and the other legal intern this summer, started. Knowing that my presence allowed additional clients to be helped is incredible and humbling – and I am grateful that EJA helped make it possible.

I will forever carry the memories of our clients and their wins – from getting into their dream college to learning after many years of anxiety and worry that they have been granted status and can one day apply to be a U.S. Citizen. Their joy and the joy of their families was incredible, and truly reminds me why I seek to do public interest law – to help people. This summer helped reaffirm my commitment to public interest lawyering, and a career providing legal services for those most in need.

Thank you, EJA, for helping me assist clients this summer and for allowing so many other law students to spend their summers helping people in need.

Sincerely,  
Emily Harris  
NYU Law, Class of 2019



# LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF NEW YORK

August 30, 2017

Dear Dan Ruben,

I am an attorney at Lutheran Social Services and supervised Emily Harris during her internship with us this summer. We are extremely grateful to her for her invaluable assistance to us and our clients in the past months and we are also grateful to EJA for enabling her to dedicate this summer to benefiting our immigrant community.

As our organization was undergoing extreme staff and resource shortages at this time, I am certain that we would not have been able to serve the clients we represented this summer without Emily. She worked on a wide range of cases as part of her internship and demonstrated utmost professionalism, creativity and empathy in all her interactions with clients as well as her excellent work product in and out of court.

The Immigration Legal Program is a very small office of four attorneys/representatives and we handle a wide range of affirmative and defensive immigration cases, responding to emerging crises as needed. Emily worked alongside us and was indistinguishable in terms of her work from attorneys in the office. The range of cases she worked on include preparing asylum evidence through extensive client interviews with applicants from Gambia and Bangladesh, and preparing an entire Family Court case for a young person from Ivory Coast.

The latter case warrants highlighting as she confidently and competently stepped into the role of attorney, met with the client and his family while I, her supervisor, was out of the office for a week and she was able to complete all tasks associated with preparing the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status application for the family court without needing any oversight. Besides preparing documents and affidavits for the petition, she most importantly formed an incredible bond with our client, becoming engaged in many aspects of his life. Emily showed exemplary compassion and empathy as she guided her client through the worst moments in his life, encouraged him every step of the way as he neared his graduation from high school and navigated the college admissions process. Emily even coordinated with the Mayor's Office to resolve a bureaucratic obstacle in his application to his dream college, and he was eventually admitted and has started attending that school. Notably, Emily has returned to accompany her client to family court for his first hearing after the end of her internship period, thus showing her client her continuing investment in his case.

Another project Emily essentially pioneered for our office was creating a know your rights materials for our young clients, who face exceptional hardships in the present times based on discriminatory enforcement policies targeted towards immigrant populations. She became a substantive expert in the policy underlying the flyers, created engaging and visually imaginative design for the flyer, and sent them to our clients. The materials she prepared will reach dozens of young immigrants over time and will prepare our community for their interactions with law enforcement representatives.

Emily has been not only essential to our functioning as a legal services provider during a very difficult time this summer, but she has inspired us all with her talent for engaging with our clients, making them feel safe and gaining their trust. She has been incredibly sensitive to the particular needs of our clients with experiences of trauma, and she has benefited our office and community immensely. Please contact me if you would like me to further discuss the many contributions of Emily to our office this summer, and thank you again for helping her engage in this essential work.

Sincerely,

Setenay Akdag, Esq.

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## **New LIFE Center-Midtown**

### **LIFE Shield**

Refugee and Immigrant  
Services Program

### **Family LIFE**

Children's Services

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## **Administrative Offices**

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