

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

November 1, 2016

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer I had the opportunity to complete my Equal Justice America Fellowship with the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) in Tacoma, Washington. NWIRP is the largest immigration legal services provider in the state and helps thousands of low-income immigrants and their families each year. I worked in the organization's Tacoma office, which exclusively serves the approximately 1,500 noncitizens detained in the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC), a for-profit detention center in the tideflats of Tacoma. I was able to participate in several of NWIRP's ongoing representation and advocacy projects and learned so much about what it means to be a public interest immigration attorney in my home state.

I participated weekly in NWIRP's Legal Orientation Program (LOP), performing individual intakes with detainees to determine what forms of relief, if any, they could be eligible for. When possible, I communicated with LOP participants in English and Spanish, and otherwise utilized third-party telephonic interpreters through NWIRP's partnership with Pacific Interpreters. I conducted roughly 40 intakes during the internship and had each intake assessed by NWIRP attorneys.

While most of our intakes ended with instructions on how detainees could proceed pro se in their custody and removal proceedings, I wrote referrals for several noncitizens in an effort to help them secure pro bono representation – including referrals for an HIV-positive Cameroonian woman who had endured two brutal rapes, attempted female genital mutilation, and imprisonment and torture by the government on account of her political opinion, a Gambian man fleeing violence because he refused to allow his extended family to circumcise his two young daughters, and a Nepali man who had been severely beaten by an extremist Nepali political party on account of his political opinion. One of the detainees referred has already been placed with a pro bono attorney and another referral was sent out recently.

In addition to referring intakes for representation, one of the attorneys and I were also able to arrange for an LOP participant to receive a new Credible Fear Interview (CFI). While meeting with a Haitian woman, I discovered that she had experienced severe child abuse and relationship violence in Haiti that she had not been able to disclose during her CFI. The IJ's review of the negative CFI affirmed the holding and she had been waiting for two weeks to be deported. As our meeting was concluding, the woman was informed that she was to go immediately to "intake," presumably to be told she would be leaving the NWDC soon. The supervising attorney and I were able arrange for her to quickly request a stay and a new CFI. She had her new CFI on August 4, 2016.

I also had the opportunity to be a part of the Spanish Legal Orientation Program (SLOP) group presentations once a week, which were one of my favorite activities. I worked primarily with the men detained at the NWDC, but was also able to do some presentations with detained women.

Apart from the LOP responsibilities, I was also able to work with the office's directing attorney to represent a detained, undocumented single father of three children in his removal case. Mr. CP had been taking care of his 21-year-old son and his twin 16-year-old U.S. citizen children since his wife left the family when the twins were eight. He applied for ten-year cancellation of removal based on the exceptional and extremely unusual hardship the twins would face if forced to relocate to Mexico given that they could not read or write in Spanish, had never been to Mexico and had never met their family members in Mexico, required special academic/credit recovery and therapeutic programming at their public Portland high school, and had been diagnosed with various trauma/adjustment disorders after their mother's abandonment.

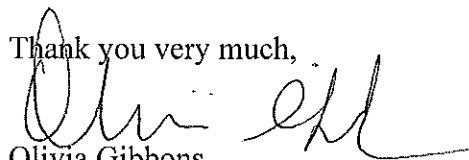
When we began representing Mr. CP, he had already been detained for over three months and had already been denied bond. We opened his case and began constructing our theory of the case. I wrote declarations for Mr. CP, his three children, his niece who had gone to school in Mr. CP's home village, drafted letters on behalf of his brother and sister-in-law, secured letters of support, numerous documents including medical records, school records, and letters from his probation officer, priest, and the HR manager of the company that employed Mr. CP for 13 years. I also wrote the pre-hearing statement in support of the application. I also prepped Mr. CP and his twin children to be prepared to testify and drafted a closing statement.

During his individual hearing, I directed and redirected Mr. CP. Unfortunately, Mr. CP's individual hearing was not successful and he was granted pre-conclusion voluntary departure. In the week between his hearing and his flight to Mexico, I made arrangements for his children to drop off a suitcase of clothing for him to take with him. While we were all very disappointed and upset that he had been denied the relief he deserved, Mr. CP and his children expressed their gratitude and told me that it had meant so much to them to be able to have someone advocating for them during the process.

In addition to participating in LOP and my own case, I also drafted portions of a rulemaking petition for increased language access protections for detained asylum seekers. I conducted research to draft sections of the petition including the background and history of Executive Order 13166 and Title VI's language access protections, reasons for creating the rule, logistics and data surrounding detained asylum seekers, and an analysis of the constitutional due process owed to detained asylum seekers in removal proceedings.

It was been my privilege to be a small part of NWIRP's outstanding work and, most importantly, to be able to connect with the brave men and women in the NWDC and their families. I feel humbled by the courage and kindness of the people I met at the NWDC and I am eager to continue my legal career fighting for their release and relief. I am especially grateful for the Equal Justice America Fellowship, which enabled me to pursue this opportunity in public interest law.

Thank you very much,



Olivia Gibbons

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