

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

August 30, 2016

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to thank Equal Justice America for supporting my internship at the Community Activism Law Alliance (CALA) this past summer. CALA is a new legal non-profit organization that partners with community-based groups to create “community activism law clinics” for low-income residents in the South and West sides of Chicago. Through a model of “community activism lawyering,” CALA provides free neighborhood-based legal services in the areas of immigration, labor/employment, housing, and family law.

CALA’s model is a direct response to the growing centralization and practice area specialization among traditional legal service providers. Most of these providers are located in downtown Chicago and operate under traditional 9-to-5 hours. Most are increasingly specialized and divided into discrete practice area units. Given the dearth of funding for civil legal aid, many of these providers are also dependent on funding sources that restrict the populations they can serve and the services they can provide. CALA’s model fills in these gaps by partnering with grassroots groups, like Enlace Chicago, Centro de Trabajadores Unidos, and the Sex Worker Outreach Project, to bring legal services directly to the communities that most need them. Furthermore, through a collaborative partnership, CALA’s clinics are structured and operated according to community needs. Community partners decide what legal services should be offered, what kind of clients should be served, which neighborhood-based locations should be used, and when the clinic should be operated.

Over the course of ten weeks at CALA, I worked with community lawyers and organizers on immigration, labor/employment, housing, and family law cases. I conducted intake assessments and follow-up appointments at neighborhood-based legal clinics, performed legal and policy research, prepared U-visa applications, led DACA application workshops, participated in an Illinois Department of Human Rights mediation, submitted public interest FOIA letters, and drafted complaints, responses, discovery requests, and other documents for civil litigation.

Since CALA’s model focuses on un-served and under-served populations, my clients included undocumented immigrants, sex workers, and day laborers. Some clients came into CALA’s clinics on the verge of being evicted or having their homes foreclosed. Others came with immigration-related questions and wanted assistance with adjusting their status, filing a family-based petition, or completing an immigration relief application. Some of my clients were victims of serious crimes and qualified for U-visa status. Some were pursuing an order of protection against an abusive partner or fighting for custody of their children. Many were low-wage workers who had been exploited, abused, threatened, or harassed. Together, these clients and their stories embody the wide-ranging challenges faced by low-income people and highlight the important work being done by organizations like CALA.

I am incredibly grateful to have worked at CALA this past summer and to have gotten the opportunity to meet and work with so many great lawyers, organizers, and residents. I left this internship inspired by CALA's innovative model of "community activism lawyering" and even more committed to pursuing a career in community and movement lawyering. I thank EJA for making this experience possible.

Sincerely,

Oscar Londoño
NYU School of Law
Class of 2017



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September 6, 2016

Via email

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Internship evaluation letter for Oscar Londono

Ms. Toman,

I write in evaluation of Oscar Londono's recently-concluded summer internship with the Community Activism Law Alliance, funded in part by an Equal Justice America Summer 2016 Fellowship.

To effectively serve marginalized communities as a community lawyer, an attorney must possess a rare combination of intellectual lawyering skills, practical problem-solving abilities, cultural competency, and unyielding commitment to the populations the attorney serves. We observed all of these qualities in Oscar Londono during his 2016 summer internship with us.

The Community Activism Law Alliance is a non-profit legal services organization that partners with community activist organizations to bring free legal clinics into underserved communities in the Chicago area. Oscar interned with us full time for ten weeks, during which his work included attending community legal clinics to conduct intakes for new cases, providing research and writing support for ongoing cases, and managing his own caseload of primarily immigration cases. Oscar was impressive in all of these areas.

Much of his time was spent with clients, either while conducting intakes or counseling clients with ongoing cases. Oscar had to lead several particularly difficult client meetings with U visa clients who had been survivors of horrifying tragedy. In these conversations, Oscar displayed a natural ability to make clients feel both comfortable and respected, while still getting all the information that he needed as a legal advocate. He also effectively explained complex legal information in terms that his clients could understand (and was able to do so in both English and Spanish).

Oscar was also one of the strongest legal writers we have had in our internship program. He was able to tackle advanced writing assignments—examples include an employment discrimination complaint and a supporting cover letter for a U visa application—with very little direction and produce a high-quality piece of writing that required very little editing on the part of his supervisors.



Importantly, Oscar also has a deep understanding of what it means to be a community lawyer. He was eager to attend community meetings and work directly with community organizers. He is committed to using the law as a tool for social change and understands the kind of delicate cooperation needed between community organizations and lawyers.

Thus, we consider Oscar's internship with us a great success, for both him and us. We are very grateful to Equal Justice America and its funders for helping to make this possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact either of us with further questions.

/s/ Chad Baker

Chad Baker, Director of Community Partnerships

Community Activism Law Alliance

"Lawyering Beyond Boundaries..."

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