

September 30, 2009

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

RE: Summer Fellowship Follow-up Letter

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing this letter to share with you some of my experiences this summer working as a legal intern for the San Mateo Regional Office of Bay Area Legal Aid. Bay Area Legal Aid is the largest civil legal services provider in the Bay Area with offices throughout. Bay Area Legal Aid provides free legal help for low-income individuals on issues relating to housing, domestic violence, public benefits and access to health care.

This summer, I worked as a Summer Law Clerk in the Immigrant Survivor of Domestic Violence Advocacy Project. I worked in both family and immigration law, helping people who are trying to get out of dangerous or abusive home situations. I assisted pro se applicants in the San Mateo Office's Domestic Violence Restraining Order clinic, as well as assisting full representation attorneys provide comprehensive legal services.

One of the many things that impacted me this summer resulted from my work in the Domestic Violence Restraining Order Clinic. I was shocked at the complexity of the restraining order form. As someone who had just finished their first year of law school, I had to be trained on how to fill out the form, what judges are looking for, and the implications of not asking for certain types of protection at this stage. I can not imagine how someone who is trying to fill out the application on their own would figure out all the subtleties, much less a victim of domestic violence, facing the very real imminent danger of physical and/or emotional abuse. By the end of the summer, I was able to run the clinic on my own. And although dealing with the rejections/denials of restraining orders was hard, I found the situations where an applicant was granted a restraining order extremely fulfilling. Every person had a unique story and every person granted the restraining order reacted differently, but the feeling that I had helped empower that particular woman or man was one of the highlights of my summer.

I also worked for a full representation attorney at the San Mateo Regional Office this summer. One of my jobs this summer included preparing a "Removal of Conditions" application for a client who had her conditional green card but was the victim of domestic violence. At first, from the initial intake with this client, I did not think we would have much to go on for examples of domestic abuse. However, in a three hour meeting with her to start her declaration, this client opened up to me about the abuse that had been ongoing for years. She described in detail the physical and emotional abuse she suffered at the hands of her ex-husband. She told me about the nightmares that she still has to this day, how her self-esteem has suffered and how she sometimes bursts into tears, unprovoked. I urged this client to make the time to go to counseling, both for herself and for her son. Finally, when I was almost finished with her declaration, she had called me to inform me that she had finally made an appointment with a counselor. It may seem small,

but this made me so happy. Her story touched my heart in that, the way it unfolded, I could see how it could happen to anyone, much less an undocumented immigrant woman who was threatened with the loss of her son if she chose to leave her abuser. This woman was only 23 years old, my little sister's age. I have heard many stories of abuse throughout my experience and work with domestic violence and violence against women in general. However her story, one that is common to too many women's stories in the United States, is one I will never forget.

This summer I not only emotionally learned and developed, but my lawyering skills, in an area I am dedicated to pursuing with my law degree, improved and developed under the supervision of the wonderful attorneys at Bay Legal. None of this would have been possible were it not for Equal Justice America and your continuing support to students like myself who desire to use the skills they have acquired for the public good. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to you and your organization, thank you!

Sincerely,

Negin Avaregan  
Juris Doctor Candidate, 2011  
UC Hastings, College of the Law