

August 15, 2014

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

Mr. Ruben,

I spent this summer interning at the Political Asylum/Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project. The PAIR Project is a legal services organization located in Boston, Massachusetts that focuses on immigration work. The two main aspects of immigration law that the PAIR Project focuses on are asylum and the representation of those immigrants who are in detention. In addition to representing as many of these people as possible, the PAIR Project has a network of pro bono attorneys recruited to represent those in need. The directors and attorneys at the PAIR Project hold trainings and act as mentors for these pro bono attorneys, as many of them have very little, if any, experience in the field of immigration law.

As an intern at the PAIR Project, I would say that most of my time was focused on the asylum work done by the organization. This means helping people fill out asylum applications, doing country conditions research, and working on a letter brief in support of a client's asylum application. One memorable experience in terms of the time I spent working on asylum projects is filling out an application for a student from Iran. The student had participated in student demonstrations and had been interrogated and nearly tortured by the Iranian police for doing so. I worked through the student's story in our initial meeting and later, with the assistance and guidance of one of my supervisors, helped fill out the asylum application and mail it to the appropriate office. I truly enjoyed this experience and felt as if I had made a difference, as the student's fear of returning to Iran was immense and paying attorney's fees was not an option.

As for the PAIR Project's representation of immigrants in detention, I made two trips to the Bristol County House of Corrections to meet with detained immigrants. During these trips, we informed people of their rights in immigration proceedings and conducted intakes. The intakes help the PAIR Project in figuring out whether it is possible to represent the immigrants or find them a pro bono attorney. During these detention center visits, I learned a lot about the dire situation of those immigrants who are detained. Many of them are desperate for help and unaware of their rights or even how the process works. Although the PAIR Project is unable to represent all of the people we met with, I feel that it makes a difference to the detained immigrants to at least receive a better understanding of the entire system.

Aside from my time spent working on projects relating specifically to asylum and immigrant detention, I also worked on other aspects of the immigration process that affect the PAIR Project's clients. This includes writing internal memoranda on laws, cases, and agency practice, assisting clients in filling out and filing the correct documents for work authorization, and working with clients to get Social Security cards. In particular, I remember an asylee who was struggling to receive an unrestricted Social Security card. Although the regulations clearly state that asylees must be given unrestricted Social Security cards, this asylee had been denied twice. Due to these denials, another intern and I escorted the asylee to the Social Security office.

We brought the related rules and regulations, along with internal memoranda from the Department of Justice and Social Security Office to support the fact that this asylee must be given an unrestricted Social Security card. We were initially denied. However, upon asking for a supervisor and speaking with the person in charge, we were able to get this asylee the correct Social Security card. The asylee was so incredibly thankful, and I was so happy to have helped her move on and begin to settle into a new life in the United States.

One final piece of my internship at the PAIR Project was attending hearings in the Boston Immigration Court. With permission, I followed one particular asylum applicant's case over a period of two months, and attended four hearings relating to the applicant's case. This applicant was represented by one of the PAIR Project's pro bono attorneys, and was ultimately granted asylum. I also attended the asylum hearing of an applicant who was unrepresented, and was denied in a much shorter hearing and overall process. I think it was invaluable experience to see how the actual hearings play out and how the process works behind the scenes. I thought it was especially interesting to see the differences between a represented asylum applicant and a pro se asylum applicant. It really taught me how important representation is in immigration court.

Overall, I had a great summer interning at the PAIR Project. I learned a lot about immigration law, and now realize that this is the field I would like to work in after graduating from law school. There are far too many unrepresented immigrants in this country, and the entire immigration process is extremely confusing and daunting. After interning at the PAIR Project, I feel that I can make a difference in the lives of at least some of those who are struggling with immigration issues, but cannot afford the assistance or advice of an immigration attorney. Interning at the PAIR Project was truly incredible, and I am thankful to have had the opportunity, in part because of my Equal Justice America fellowship, to spend my summer interning with such a well-respected, amazing organization.

Sincerely,

Remi Vespi
Boston University School of Law
Class of 2015



POLITICAL ASYLUM/IMMIGRATION REPRESENTATION (PAIR) PROJECT

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RE: Remi Vespi, Equal Justice America Fellow at the PAIR Project

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing this evaluation for Remi Vespi, who interned with the PAIR Project during the past summer, from May 2014 – August 2014. I am the Asylum Attorney at the Political Asylum Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project, a non-profit organization that represents asylum-seekers who have fled from persecution throughout the world, and that advises non-citizens in immigration detention. I supervised Remi during her internship at PAIR.

Remi is a passionate law student who cares deeply about her work with indigent asylum and detention clients from diverse minority groups. She worked with clients from Haiti, Ghana, Syria, Iran, and Russia. She quickly mastered complex asylum issues, interviewed many asylum seeker clients, helped the PAIR staff update our 500-page asylum manual, and conducted thorough legal research for asylum and detention cases, including drafting memoranda on country conditions and legal theories for asylum. From her work, we gathered that Remi has a deep commitment to immigrants.

Remi assisted with the asylum intake; met with clients and helped them file various immigration applications; prepared human rights documentation to support asylum claims; and assisted the PAIR detention attorney to reach out to the hundreds of detainees being held in Massachusetts. She also intaked immigrants being held by ICE in local facilities; helped to correspond with immigration detainees about their cases and various forms of relief available to them; and traveled to detention centers to conduct “Know Your Rights Presentations” to immigration detainees. Remi worked well in our fast-paced and demanding office environment.

If you have any questions about her work at PAIR or the organization itself, please feel free to contact me at 617-742-9296.

Sincerely,
Anita P. Sharma