

August 9, 2005

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am writing to you at the conclusion of my summer clerkship with Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid (TRLA) in Austin, Texas. TRLA provides free civil legal services to low-income residents of Central, South, and West Texas. In 2002, four local legal aid programs in Austin, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and El Paso merged with Texas Rural Legal Aid to form the current day TRLA in an effort to pool resources and expertise. Today, TRLA comprises six statewide attorney teams, each of which is committed to a particular practice area. The Austin office, which claimed the majority of TRLA's summer clerks, includes members of the Economic & Social Justice, Domestic Violence & Family, Housing, Individual Rights, Labor & Employment, and Public Benefits teams.

Officially, I split my time between the Economic & Social Justice team and the Individual Rights team in Austin. Unofficially, I assisted attorneys across practice areas throughout the state, often traveling to branch offices in Laredo, Weslaco, Harlingen, and Edinburg. Over the course of my ten weeks I researched and wrote legal memoranda, interviewed clients, attended community meetings, met with local activists, and drafted pleadings. Additionally, I represented a client at a telephone administrative hearing concerning his unemployment benefits eligibility.

My primary summer project concerned a City of Laredo employee and client who claimed that his employer refused him a discretionary raise due to his union advocacy and political activism. Under the supervision of the chief attorney in the Laredo office, I researched case history regarding government employer retaliation against employees for protected speech activities. The Fifth Circuit, I discovered, narrowly defines adverse employment decisions and has enumerated a short list of actions that constitute retaliation. Other federal circuit courts, in contrast, have broadly construed First Amendment workplace protections. During my research, I learned that many legal scholars feel that this issue is ripe for Supreme Court review, and the Laredo attorney informed me that he hopes to file suit on behalf of our client to expand the 5<sup>th</sup> Circuit's list of adverse employment actions. Accordingly, I traveled Laredo to interview our client and document his union advocacy and political activism. Weeks later, I submitted a lengthy legal memorandum assessing the likelihood that our client can satisfy the prima facie elements of a government employer retaliation claim.

Although I have worked with Texas public interest legal concerns before, I was astounded at the extent of local poverty and the urgent need for indigent representation in Texas. TRLA attorneys handle heavy caseloads and strive to meet the needs of their client communities. Their workloads and schedules, however, precluded close supervision of my work this summer. This arrangement had advantages and disadvantages. For instance, I quickly earned the trust of my supervisors and traveled and met with clients on my own. But I also rarely received critical feedback on my legal research and writing—a strange experience following my first year of law school, which was fraught with criticism and revisions. Still, this arrangement forced me to painstakingly edit my own work before submitting it to my supervising attorneys. Notwithstanding this small shortcoming, I doubt that many of my fellow students gained the same breadth of experience that I enjoyed this summer.

In closing, let me thank Equal Justice America for its financial assistance this summer. I greatly appreciate your support. I look forward to sharing my experiences with and learning from other fellowship recipients this fall when I return to Cornell.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Gosselin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sathya" and last name "Gosselin" clearly distinguishable.

Sathya Gosselin  
Cornell Law School  
Class of 2007