

August 31, 2012

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

Dear Dan:

This past summer I worked at the Equal Justice Center in Austin, TX. The Equal Justice Center's mission revolves around empowering low-income workers and families to receive equal treatment in the workplace and in the justice system. We work to remedy unpaid wages, minimum wage violations and unjust firings, and combat other basic injustices. The Equal Justice Center works for systemic reforms that strengthen employment rights and expand access to the justice system for all low-wage workers.

I was responsible for handling wage recovery cases for low-wage workers who were unjustly deprived of compensation. These workers were exploited by employers preying on their vulnerable immigration statuses. I had the opportunity to help low-wage workers support themselves and their families, and uphold their own dignity through fair compensation for their honest labor. I worked on the systematic reform of the justice system to help these individuals gain essential access to the justice system, regardless of poverty or immigration status.

During my fellowship, I handled various stages of litigation - from initial intake interviews, and investigations, to negotiations with opposing parties, discovery, motions and hearings, and, if necessary, trial. Through this hands-on experience I was able give legal aid to those who needed it most. One of my most memorable clients was a very jovial man from Guatemala. He had been working as a cook for a local restaurant and only made an average of \$4.00 per hour while working upwards of 70 hours a week. His total claim amounted to almost \$70,000 in unpaid minimum wage and overtime claims. I engaged in several negotiations with the opposing party, but their highest settlement offer was only \$3,000. Consequently, I was forced to write a petition and file an official lawsuit. Although this case is ongoing, our client now works as a cook at different restaurant. Through the education he received at the Equal Justice Center, he realized that he was being underpaid at his new place of employment as well.

Through the empowerment the Equal Justice Center gave him from his case we were handling, he was able to convince his co-workers who were also being underpaid to bring a collective action against their employer. This was probably the most meaningful experience for me this summer. It was amazing to see that our work with one low-wage worker in turn empowered ten other workers who were also not adequately compensated. This case is an example of how work in helping low wage workers not only empowers them, but creates a network where they will gain a fair price for their honest labor. This type of work at the Equal Justice Center will lead to systemic reform in our justice system.

I gained an immense amount of legal knowledge while at the same time furthering equal justice for transnational workers in America this past summer. The Equal Justice Center is committed to remedying the plight of transnational workers in American and abroad. Not only was I helping low-wage workers on an individual level, but through my efforts I affected change by using the American justice system to benefit those that need it most.

Through individual employment cases and advocacy projects the Equal Justice Center supports workers' rights as human rights in the court system as well as on a policy level. Beyond winning cases, the Equal Justice Center promotes systematic reforms of the judicial system and educates low-wage workers of their employment rights. If not for the unparalleled work of the Equal Justice Center, local low-wage workers would have no means of effective recourse. It was wonderful to a part of such a noble organization this past summer.

Sincerely,

Tara Moriarty  
University of Texas