

October 6, 2017

Dan Ruben, Executive Director, Equal Justice America  
3540 East Boundary Road, Building II - Suite 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This past summer I had the opportunity to intern with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) in Edinburg, TX. TRLA provides a wide range of legal services throughout Texas, including to some of the least-served parts of the state. The Edinburg office is one of a handful of TRLA offices in the Lower Rio Grande Valley—a region with a population of about 1.5 million people in the southernmost tip of Texas.

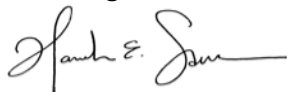
As TRLA provides such a wide range of services, I was able to spend my summer as a “generalist,” assisting on cases from various units from immigration to housing, environmental justice to employment. Much of the work involved legal research, such as untangling immigration procedure or getting creative with eviction defense. Other parts of my summer involved more client interaction, especially when working on immigration cases. Under guidance from TRLA’s immigration unit, I assisted with both deportation defense and affirmative visa applications.

The Valley is a hard place to describe. In some cities the population is 95-100% latinx, and the Valley’s counties have the highest poverty rates in Texas. Yet, development is abundant and, especially coming from the San Francisco Bay Area, housing prices read as affordable. While much of the landscape is dry, browns and yellows, as you near the birding paradises along the river, you first see expansive cotton fields, and then find yourself among tall, green trees.

You may have heard people say, “We didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.” In the Valley, that is true in the most literal sense. But this was not a discrete act that occurred following the cession to Texas in 1836, nor with the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Instead, each new immigration policy mandate or amendment to the Immigration and Naturalization Act re-crosses the people living in the Valley—including those who have a right to U.S. citizenship. I worked with multiple clients who were born with the right to U.S. citizenship, but because of the realities of life on the border, were struggling to assert their claim to that right. Their stories involved U.S. citizen mothers who could not afford to give birth in a hospital in Brownsville, so they either crossed into Matamoros, Mexico, or used a *partera*, a midwife, for a home birth. These births either went unregistered, or were registered in Mexico by the hospital. Years later, when needing to prove up their citizenship to the U.S. government in the face of removal proceedings, or, for others, so that they may go to college or get a job, these individuals have little documentation of the details necessary to do so. The U.S. government may very well deny these individuals their right to citizenship and deport them to a country in which they know no one and to which they have never been.

I am exceedingly grateful for my summer at TRLA in the Rio Grande Valley. I learned a lot about various parts of the law and I expanded my legal skills and I got to work with bold, intelligent, and kick-ass attorneys. But, more importantly, I was introduced to a place I knew almost nothing about, and learned so much about the people for whom it is home. Thank you for helping to make that possible.

Warm regards,



Hannah Samson