

**HELEN I. MARTINEZ**

August 30, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would first like to thank you for your dedication to the advancement of law students invested in working with indigent communities and the opportunity to be an Equal Justice America Fellow for the Summer of 2015. The Equal Justice America Fellowship allowed me to co-op at LatinoJustice PRLDEF in New York to work with indigent clients from across the country.

I hit the ground running the first week of my internship. Along with some of the attorneys and my fellow interns, I traveled to a small town to do intakes from a large group of employees who were laid-off from their jobs without notice. Many of the employees were non-citizens and they experienced a series of physical injuries and discrimination throughout their tenure. I interviewed about twelve employees in Spanish. I inquired about their paid and unpaid wages, injuries, sexual harassment, and immigration concerns. Most of the employees were women, single parents, and low-income people trying to make ends meet.

Despite that I was unfamiliar with a lot of the issues involved, such as employment and immigration law, I was cautious with probing and indicated on my notes potential issues. One of the most valuable lessons from this experience was that advocates must question deeper to identify legal issues. Clients will sometimes assume that one of their horrid experiences cannot be redressed. Equally important is building confidence and trust within the first few moments of communicating with clients. My approach was to clarify that I was not an attorney and that I would like to listen to their story before they speak with an attorney.

In addition to the intakes, I compiled some of the intake interviews into charts detailing the discrimination and injuries the employees experienced—these charts would later be used to draft complaints if the organization decided to litigate the case. I also drafted a memo on potential sexual harassment complaints and I am still working on it to turn into a writing sample.

The second person I worked with closely was a woman who called LatinoJustice PRLDEF because she was concerned about a potential abuse of authority by an immigration officer. I was responsible for conducting the intake over the phone in Spanish. I asked her to first tell her story as I typed the notes for the attorney. She told me her niece was interrogated and humiliated by an immigration officer for over five hours at an international airport in the U.S. Despite that that she had legal documentation to enter the U.S., she was not allowed to enter officially and was sent back to her native country.

After the interview, I drafted further questions, which I e-mailed to the aunt. I drafted a complaint letter on the niece's behalf to the Office of Civil rights and Liberties and affidavits with their sworn statements.

This experience reiterated the importance of maintaining a prospective client informed about the progress of their issue, especially for prospective clients who I never meet in person. Clients should never feel like they have been forgotten or that their concern is not important, and I did my best for this client to feel that I valued her seeking us out. This was also a unique experience because although the prospective client was the niece, I also treated the aunt as a prospective client because she was seeking our services of behalf of her niece.

Overall, my experience at LatinoJustice PRLDEF was excellent. I was given the opportunity to work on array of different issues that affect indigent clients, regarding immigration, employment, and discrimination. I thank you for the opportunity to work on issues of dire need of attention, and issues that are important to me.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Helen Martinez  
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Class of 2016