

July 6, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My internship at MALDEF is almost at its end, and I can say that it has been one of the best experiences of my life. As you may know, MALDEF is a legal organization that focuses on serving the Latino community in the areas of education, immigration, voting rights, and employment. During my time here, I was able to work on many of the ongoing cases in most of those areas.

Before I discuss those cases, I would like to explain one of my answers on the questionnaire regarding the number of clients I served during the course of the fellowship. It is difficult to gauge the number of clients I served because MALDEF does not always represent individual plaintiffs on its cases. For example, one of our cases involved the parents of children (as well as the children themselves) suing a state for its abysmal education system in regards to certain groups of children. Another group of plaintiffs had also joined the lawsuit through consolidation, but were represented by a different organization. Even though I assisted with the lawsuit as a whole, I did not necessarily serve those other plaintiffs.

On the other hand, in another case with a similar subject – suing a different state for its poor education system for certain types of children – MALDEF was working on certifying a class for all similarly situated children in the state as plaintiffs. In this case, I may have served many thousands of “clients.” Similarly, the three immigration cases I worked on all involved a few individual plaintiffs, but the lawsuits were brought for the purpose of serving all of the people affected by the immigration-related laws of those states.

Certainly, these cases are a direct reflection of MALDEF’s goal – to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. During my time at the San Antonio office, we have had about 14 ongoing cases, one of which was actually resolved while I have been here. This number of cases is probably significantly less than the number that the average law office would have at any given time. But all of the cases at MALDEF have huge significance, in that they can affect a large amount of people whatever the results might be. It is inspiring to know that the many hours of research I put in on all of these cases could help change the country as a whole for the better.

Yet, despite the grand goals of these education cases, the most interesting ones I worked on were the smaller cases, brought by one or two “complainants.” The people who brought these cases to MALDEF’s attention were not necessarily plaintiffs, because the lawsuits in these cases were brought by MALDEF as the plaintiff.

One of the cases involved a woman whose husband died, who was denied his burial in the cemetery near her town because of his race. The woman herself could not be a plaintiff in the lawsuit, but eventually MALDEF assisted another organization to bring the lawsuit on behalf of military veterans because it was discovered that a still-living veteran of that race had been denied burial there once he died as well. I found it very important that we were able to bring the lawsuit and try to right the wrong that had been done to the original complainant, and to prevent it from happening again to others, even if she could not be a part of it.

All in all, this internship was very educational – I researched case law on more highly nuanced topics than I can count, I learned how to write several different types of motions, I learned how to review discovery and determine what is useful and what is not, and I attended a very enlightening deposition. Along with all of these things, though, the internship was particularly outstanding because of the wonderful attorneys, staff and other interns here. My supervising attorney, Jack Salmon, is one of the smartest and most patient people I have met. He helped me vastly improve my research and writing skills. The other attorneys and staff were also always there to answer any questions I had. My fellow interns were also great people, and I know that as our careers progress I will hear their names again.

Truly, an internship at MALDEF is a life-changing experience, and I would recommend it to any law student whether they want to pursue a public interest law career or not (because they might change their mind if not!). I am grateful to have been a part of MALDEF this summer, and additionally grateful for the support provided by Equal Justice America in making this internship possible. Thank you!

Smaranda Draghia
Thurgood Marshall School of Law
Class of 2017