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RE: Equal Justice America Fellowship Update

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I interned with the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG), a non-profit immigrant advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C. NIPNLG is full of kind-hearted and passionate people who want to advocate for immigrants through a combination of direct representation, litigation, policy work, technical assistance, and community-building, and I was fortunate to dip my toes in all of these areas of NIPNLG's work throughout the summer.

In my previous updates, I discussed my projects drafting a request for a detained client's release due to their heightened risk of contracting COVID-19; reviewing data collected from a Freedom of Information Act request related to stateless asylum claims; and editing a practice advisory on prosecutorial discretion requests. In addition to these projects, I was assigned early on in the summer to another project in which I researched the treatment of Muslim immigrants in detention, then shared my findings alongside my supervising attorney at NIPNLG's convening of Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) community groups. It was very fulfilling being able to do direct services work, community-building, advocacy work hand-in-hand – I could triage ongoing cases affected by harmful immigration policies, while also pursuing action against the policies themselves.

On the litigation side, I prepared research on the immigration habeas landscape in the Fifth Circuit in preparation for a future lawsuit. It was exciting and illuminating to prepare a legal memorandum outside of the classroom environment on a discrete immigration-based issue. Not only did I learn what resources were best for researching immigration issues (e.g., law review articles; Board of Immigration Appeals decisions) for my future reference, but I also was able to dig deep into the larger issue of habeas relief for immigrants, which I would like to work on in my career.

During my internship, I also worked on a very thorough prosecutorial discretion request to the Office of Chief Counsel for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for one of our clients. I had worked on prosecutorial discretion requests before, writing short 2-3 page arguments in favor of clients, but not to this level of detail and attention of care. In this case, I essentially wrote a 40-page brief, making our client's case for stipulation to asylum, or in the alternative, a joint motion to reopen. The immigration judge had already denied asylum in our client's case before, but the hearing was extremely unfair and unjust. The immigration judge, among other things, misstated our client's testimony, failed to remain a neutral arbiter, and failed to properly develop the record. His disregard to due process resulted in a miscarriage of justice for our client, and I was determined to put out the best work product that I could in support of our client's case.

After preparing this prosecutorial discretion request, I worked with my supervising attorney to turn it into a sample request for NIPNLG's network of attorneys to access, which was posted shortly after my internship ended. It's exciting to know that my sample request can serve as a template for so many attorneys as we try to navigate the complicated process of obtaining prosecutorial discretion, given ongoing litigation.

Additionally, I attended a NIPNLG-hosted series of talks with attorneys who are currently working in different areas of immigration law, such as crimmigration. I was not aware that so many options existed for work in the field of immigration law! While I am committed to doing legal aid/non-profit advocacy work like NIPNLG does, it was helpful to learn where I could turn to for help on particular areas of immigration law, as well as bring this information back to other students at UVA Law who are interested in a career in this field.

Ultimately, because I was able to step in and provide assistance where NIPNLG needed this summer, we were able to help a lot of clients and advocates in their pursuit of justice before the immigration legal system. I am very grateful to Equal Justice America for their assistance in being able to pursue this opportunity with NIPNLG without any financial barriers because I know that I was able to make a difference in so many lives as a result.

Sincerely,  
Jordan Woodlief  
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