

**TAARIKA CHAITRA SRIDHAR**  
Northeastern University School of Law, Boston, MA

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Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing this letter to tell you a little bit about my experience at the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic (the Immigration Unit) at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). First, I would like to thank you and Equal Justice America for granting me funds. They went a long way in supporting my unpaid public interest internship this summer.

Over the 10 weeks at the Immigration Unit at GBLS, I had the opportunity to work on a variety of cases but primarily focused on asylum and refugee cases. I worked on a combination of asylum interviews and asylum hearings, which gave me incredible exposure to how the United States Immigration and Citizenship Services (USCIS) and Federal Immigration Court systems worked. Some examples of the day to day work product I produced include affidavits of clients, which were essentially a more formal representation of their story that would go to support their claim for asylum; motions to reopen cases; pre-trial summaries of cases; and extensive document packages that would accompany filings and demonstrate broader research on the particular country or issue that was relevant to the asylum seeker's claim.

Perhaps the most rewarding, and simultaneously, the most challenging, part of my job was working with high-risk clients. I primarily worked with clients from Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador). One memorable case involved a woman from El Salvador who fled her country after suffering years of extremely violent domestic abuse. She failed to receive adequate protection from state authorities in El Salvador, and could not find a safe space in her country where her husband and abuser would not find her. A particularly violent incident forced her to make the decision to leave her family behind and travel across Guatemala and Mexico – by no means an easy or safe journey – along with her then seven-year old daughter. I met with this client several times and created a close bond with her and her daughter, who was a derivative applicant to her mother's claim for asylum. Along with my supervising attorney and mentor, John Willshire Carrera, I worked closely with this client in preparing her for her immigration hearing. This process included spending days and weekends going over numerous questions, helping the client be clear and detailed in her responses, and ensuring that her story was well supported by evidence and affidavits from family members in El Salvador and a psychiatric evaluation by a renowned local psychiatrist. I also had the opportunity to conduct the direct examination at court and write a closing argument for this client's case. Standing up in court in front of a judge to argue for a woman and her daughter's need to be

protected in the U.S. was incredibly powerful and moving, and definitely not an experience I thought I would have as a student just out of her first year at law school.

Other clients that left an impression on me included a woman who came here over a decade ago and was seeking to reopen her case for asylum based on the changed conditions in her home country that would make her return there perilous. Another case involved a young indigenous Mayan man who fled persecution in the early 2000s and has since earned his GED and risen up the ranks at a small company he works in. The perseverance of clients like these who endured severe hardship in their countries and on their journeys here was humbling to a young lawyer like me, and I am so happy to have had the opportunity to have worked with such individuals.

My experience at GBLS was only enhanced by the people I worked with. The supervising attorneys at the Immigration Unit were incredible role models. They have immense energy and dedication to their clients, and these qualities were apparent from day 1. My own supervisor, John Willshire Carrera, was generous with his time, patient with answering questions and concerns, and captured every opportunity to teach my peers and I about immigration law. I would say the same for all the other supervising attorneys at the firm that I did not work directly with but observed or interacted with. The Immigration Unit at GBLS is certainly not the most organized, but the chaos in the office is reflective of the abundant number of cases and people the attorneys there try to help on any given day. Finally, the law students, college interns, and freelance interpreters I shared office space with were a passionate and talented group, and I am so glad to have made new friends and connections.

Overall, my experience this summer was a positive one. I learned a lot, did substantial amounts of work, contributed to real case work, and gained a new appreciation for the work public interest attorneys do. I would definitely recommend other law students seeking work experience and wanting to get involved in public interest law to apply to the Immigration Unit. Ultimately, the experience was one that mirrored what I might do as a public interest lawyer following law school, and I am grateful to everyone I worked with and to the EJA for making this summer possible.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Taarika C. Sridhar  
Northeastern University School of Law  
Class of 2019