

Director Ruben,

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve as an EJA Fellow this summer. I was honored to represent the fellowship program at HIAS Pennsylvania, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit serving immigrants in Pennsylvania. At HIAS, I worked as a member of the Asylee Outreach Program team, which supports asylees and refugees who have just been granted their asylee or refugee status. Although this was not the team I expected to be assigned to, it turned out to be the perfect fit for me.

In terms of the work I was doing, I felt lucky that I was able to rely on my previous job experience in knowing how to best serve my clients. A large portion of my work consisted of green card applications, which was also true of my work as a paralegal. This meant that I had the background knowledge to help far more clients in a few months than I would have otherwise, and I had the privilege of fully completing and submitting several green card applications to USCIS before my internship was complete. It was also a good learning experience, however, because as a paralegal I primarily worked with people applying for green card based on marriage, while in this role the applications were based on asylee status, refugee status, or Cuban/Haitian parolee status - a very different process. I was also able to gain experience working on other types of cases like applications for citizenship, work permits, or travel authorization.

In addition to supporting clients in their immigration benefit applications and learning more about immigration law, I also had ample opportunity to develop my skills working directly with clients. I spent several hours every week on intake calls, helping HIAS more efficiently process potential clients and pass on referrals to those we could not help directly. I also conducted interviews with clients in support of their applications and spent countless minutes on calls explaining the immigration process, providing case updates, and working through issues with clients' applications.

Through HIAS Pennsylvania's connections with other local immigration nonprofits, I also had the benefit of attending weekly training sessions with staff and interns from a variety of Philadelphia-area immigration organizations. These sessions gave me fantastic insight into what the practice of various types of public interest law looks like, both from a legal perspective and from a practical perspective. As somebody who is looking to go into public interest immigration law long-term, I felt like this was such a valuable opportunity to network with people doing the work I want to continue engaging in and to further explore the direction I want to take my career.

In terms of practical experience, my time as a fellow at HIAS Pennsylvania was not limited just to preparing forms. I also had the opportunity to go to court with one of the attorneys who supervised me, which gave me a much better sense of what to expect when I am in a courtroom someday. On a different note, I also found that the experience working with other HIAS employees, and particularly the experience working with my fellow members of the Asylee Outreach Project, was very rewarding. I worked alongside both attorneys and social workers, carefully coordinating to make sure we were addressing not only clients' legal needs but their

material needs as well. Ultimately, being a part of a team doing such important work supporting asylees and refugees was an incredibly rewarding experience, and I am extremely grateful to EJA for helping to make that experience possible.

Best,
Carolyn Messer