

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
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Dear Executive Director,

I am writing to you today to provide you with an update on my experience this past summer serving as an EJA Fellow. Over the summer months I served as a law clerk for Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's immigration team in Austin, TX. More specifically, I worked with the Immigration and trafficking team, which primarily works with survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. My duties primarily revolved around client work, namely meeting one on one with clients, conducting interviews, retrieving necessary information and documentation, preparing USCIS applications, and conducting client intake.

While I worked in the Austin office, the clients that I had the opportunity to assist were from all over the state of Texas and from other countries such as México. Many of the clients were from the South Texas border region where I am from. I greatly appreciated being able to provide services in their native Spanish language. It seemed to me that the clients I worked with were grateful for the opportunity to work with someone who was fluent in their language. This is particularly true given the sensitive nature of the work. Many of our clients were women or children who had suffered domestic violence. VAWA applications require survivors of domestic abuse to recount their abuse in excruciating detail. Having these conversations with clients was probably the most difficult part of my clerkship. More than anything, I wanted to avoid making clients feel like they were reliving their trauma by having to speak on it further. What helped me navigate these conversations was placing the client's needs over anything else. Before we began speaking about their trauma, I would emphasize that we would be going at whatever pace felt most comfortable to them, and that if they felt they could no longer continue we could always stop and reschedule for a future time. This clerkship really opened my eyes to how dehumanizing the U.S. immigration system is and how it forces immigrants to prove their "worthiness" even if that comes at the expense of their mental health.

Another major realization I had while clerking at TRLA this summer was the severity of the need for immigration-related legal aid. It was rather heartbreaking to encounter so many people who were in need of assistance and whose cases had merit but were ultimately turned away due to a lack of capacity and resources. My work at TRLA meant a lot to me not only because of the positive impact I had on clients' lives through my work but also because of the fact that law clerks make a big difference at organizations like TRLA that have limited capacity and an abundance of potential clients. I'm grateful for EJA's support of my summer clerkship. As a first-generation law student from a low-income background, taking on unpaid work would not be possible without your support.

Thank you,  
Yuri Barragán  
The University of Texas School of Law