

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I spent the Summer of 2024 working as a Legal Intern at HIAS Pennsylvania (HIAS PA) in Philadelphia. I was assigned to the Crisis and Humanitarian Response Team, which is essentially in charge of processing all of the cases that the other attorneys at the organization do not have capacity to take on. Additionally, the CHR Team hosts frequent clinics at firms in Philadelphia, wherein clients who are seeking various kinds of immigration relief can meet with attorneys who will support them in putting together their applications and will train them to represent themselves in a pro se hearing.

On my second day at HIAS PA, I attended a clinic which served 24 clients from 11 different countries. At the conclusion of the clinic, my supervisor gave me all of the case files and said “these are your clients. Good luck!” For the remainder of the summer, I worked with all 24 of these clients, most of whom were in removal proceedings and were quickly approaching their one-year deadlines. Because the organization did not have the capacity to represent these clients in court, I was tasked with putting together “bare bones” asylum applications with supporting materials in order to give our clients the best chance at success should they not find legal representation. I met with each client, often using translators, crafted declarations outlining their stories, and submitted their asylum applications on their behalf. In this role I synthesized complex legal and factual information and crafted persuasive legal arguments supporting each of their asylum cases. In each case, these applications included comprehensive supporting documents which I prepared under tight deadlines.

Additionally, I worked with 10 Ukrainian clients, most of whom were young families, in putting together their humanitarian parole and work authorization applications. In this work, I had the unique opportunity to learn about multiple forms of immigration relief that clients can seek. Furthermore, working with both Ukrainian clients navigating the parole system while also meeting with Latin American and West African clients applying for asylum provided me a unique lens into the disparities in the American immigration system. Indeed, on the same day, I would often deliver the good news to a Ukrainian client that their work permit application was approved within weeks, and just after that meeting, I would send an email to a Latin American client notifying them that they would not be eligible to work legally for 180 days. These experiences, while challenging, cemented my commitment to working in immigration law, as I saw firsthand the difference it can make in the life of a refugee or immigrant to have support in navigating the complex and overwhelming immigration bureaucracy in the United States.

I am extremely grateful to have been provided the funding necessary in order to live in Philadelphia and provide the competent legal representation that these individuals deserve. The Equal Justice America grant allowed me the flexibility to work the long hours that are necessary to effectively represent and provide free legal services to immigrant communities who are most in need.

Thank you very much for your support.

Sincerely,

Micah Lesch

UC Law San Francisco