

August 19, 2009

Equal Justice America
Dan Ruben, Executive Director
Legal Services Fellowships, Bldg II – Ste 204
13640 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

At Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN) I was given the opportunity to take on a variety of important tasks. RMIAN strives to provide legal services to the most vulnerable immigrant populations in Colorado: men and women in immigration detention in Aurora, CO, and abandoned or abused children throughout the state. In addition to providing daily know-your-rights presentations to men and women held in the federal immigration detention facility in Aurora, Colorado, RMIAN refers detention cases to pro bono attorneys who have received specialized removal defense training from RMIAN. RMIAN's Children's Project directly represents children who have survived neglect, abandonment, abuse, or persecution and trains professionals and educators throughout the state who work with immigrant children.

A typical day for me as a legal intern started with listening to the messages on the detention hotline. The messages were often frantic pleas for help to find a loved one or for information about how to get a family member out of detention. After reviewing the messages with a RMIAN staff attorney, I responded to the messages, relaying information about bonds, immigration holds, and civil rights. Then I spent the rest of my morning doing legal research on a specific case or issue. From my research, I produced referral memorandums for volunteer attorneys taking on one of our client's cases or memorandums for RMIAN staff attorneys for direct representation. The documents that I prepared for RMIAN's volunteer attorneys had to be detailed in terms of the basics of immigration law, analysis of complicated issues of individual clients, and administrative steps to take. Most afternoons were spent at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in Aurora. I presented legal rights orientations in Spanish for 10-25 detainees per visit. After the rights presentations, I helped conduct intakes with individual detainees.

The best aspect of my internship was the practicality. This is an on-the-ground, face-to-face client-based internship. For me, that is the optimal way to learn about the law. The direct interaction that I had with clients was immensely valuable. I enjoyed doing interviews and discussing the law and possible relief the person could obtain for their situation. In addition, RMIAN's staff attorneys took time to give me constructive criticism about my work on a regular basis. Each of the four attorneys made sure that I received constant support, explaining client's cases and immigration law policies and regulations in a way that brought the subject to life. I would absolutely recommend this externship to other students who are dedicated, want freedom to dive in, and have a strong, self-motivated work ethic.

The most difficult aspect of the externship was seeing the conditions that our clients faced in the detention center and the frustrations of immigration law. It was difficult to see that there were just not good solutions for some of our clients. Families are separated and countless individuals are suffering as a result of policies that do not seem to take reality into account. With the crackdown on illegal immigrants in recent months, we were seeing more women and men who were detained for minor traffic violations and some who were even taken from their own living rooms. The contradictions and arbitrary application of the law were mindboggling.

My summer internship at Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network was an amazing experience. I was given the enormous responsibility of developing and arguing real cases. Consequently, it was an incredibly rewarding summer. I thank Equal Justice America for your generous support which made it possible for me to dedicate my summer to this important work.

All the Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Abbie L. Johnson". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Abbie L. Johnson
Univ. of Colo. Law School, Class of 2010