

August 31, 2014

Dan Ruben  
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Equal Justice America funded my Summer Fellowship at HIAS Pennsylvania, an organization that serves indigent immigrant clients. There are two main forms of immigrant relief that may be available to undocumented individuals who are victims of domestic violence. I worked exclusively with clients who have experienced interpersonal violence to apply for these forms of relief.

I found the work challenging and exceptionally rewarding. Due to the highly confidential nature of our clients' stories, particularly given the very real danger some of them may face if their stories are made public, I cannot share here specific client stories. However, there are themes common in the stories of these clients. Most of them were undocumented. All of them experienced abuse at the hands of a spouse or domestic partner. Sometimes these partners were also immigrants, documented or not, and sometimes they were U.S. citizens. In each case, the abusive partner used the client's immigration status as a tool of power. Abusers would (incorrectly) inform their partners that they could not call the police without being deported. They would remind our clients that they could not work legally, crippling our clients' economic status. I was often amazed at the cruelty of abusive partners. Even more, however, I was amazed at the resilience of our clients, who, despite the extreme difficulty and dangerousness of their situations, demonstrate courage and bravery each day.

The Violence Against Women Act enables many of these clients, who are in an exceptionally vulnerable position, to apply for legal status so that they can work and one day obtain U.S. citizenship. These immigration benefits not only allow our clients to leave the shadows and participate freely in the U.S. economy, but also, in many cases, play a crucial role in allowing clients to leave abusive relationships. Being part of upending the power dynamic in these destructive relationships was an extremely rewarding and humbling experience. In addition, I got to work at a fantastic organization with a fantastic supervisor who gave me a variety of experience and helped me to develop lawyering skills. I came to law school in order to become an advocate for individuals who are marginalized. My Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship enabled me to realize my mission this summer. I have no doubt that my experience will help me to continue to work in this advocate role for the rest of my career.

Sincerely,

Andrea Saylor  
Temple University Beasley School of Law  
J.D. Anticipated May 2015