

August 30, 2017

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Mr. Ruben:

This summer I interned at the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) in Falls Church, Virginia. This organization specializes in immigration, housing cases, and wage claims. I was able to help on cases from all of these areas of law, through direct client contact, intake interviews, memos and brief writing, legal research, and presentations. Additionally, I was able to better my Spanish language skills, since most of the clients with whom I interacted only spoke Spanish. Therefore, I got to combine the skills I learned at law school with the Spanish language skills I have been learning since elementary school.

An extensive part of my internship at LAJC was interacting with clients. I conducted intake interviews as well as follow-up interviews with people the attorneys decided to represent. I was in charge of organizing and conducting meetings with a specific group of clients, and I presented memos and charts in order to tie all the clients together for the attorneys. It has been extremely rewarding to help clients who have lost wages, or to help someone who is being wrongfully evicted from their apartment. My first “win” was when I wrote a demand letter to a landlord who had removed a tenant from an apartment by threats. We asked the landlord to give her rent money back from the month he kicked her out of the apartment, and he complied. Being able to get the money back for this client meant that she could find another place to live. This experience has stuck with me because I was able to make that much of a difference in this woman’s life. At LAJC, the staff is committed to helping underprivileged people who have been taken advantage of. Through these experiences, I have decided that I would like to work in a one on one setting with clients in the future.

I was fortunate enough to work with people dedicated to making sure that I learned the most that I could during the summer. I received feedback on all of my assignments and never felt uncomfortable asking for help when I needed it. The staff at LAJC cares about its clients and its employees. I truly feel like I belong to a team here.

One of my favorite experiences from my internship at LAJC was our weekly food distribution. Every Thursday morning, LAJC would attend an event in different neighborhoods where food banks would bring food to the residents. We would be there giving free legal advice to the people. I liked this event because of the true community lawyering aspect; we were available for any problem that the residents may have. In these moments, I saw the dedication and commitment LAJC has to betterment of the community and its members. I appreciated that I was able to witness the impact that direct legal representation has on the most vulnerable of our community members.

I would like to send my appreciation to Equal Justice America for my summer stipend. Thank you for giving me the resources I needed to be able to successfully complete this internship. Working at the Legal Aid Justice Center all summer strengthened my resolve to work in public interest. I am now further committed to giving a voice to the voiceless and to helping my community members with legal issues.

Melanie Sandler
George Mason University School of Law, Class of 2019

October 2, 2017

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

Re: Melanie Sandler

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer, Melanie Sandler was a legal intern working under me at the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC). LAJC battles poverty and injustice by solving critical legal problems for individuals and communities. Then we use what we learn from those efforts to identify, investigate, and attack systemic injustices. The Legal Aid Justice Center is committed to providing a full range of services to our clients, including services our federal and state governments choose not to fund. We utilize a mix of zealous individual representation, group and class litigation, community organizing, policy advocacy, and media relations. Legal Aid Justice Center's staff of 40 work from offices in Charlottesville, Falls Church, Petersburg and Richmond.

Our Falls Church office, where Melanie worked this summer, houses our Immigrant Advocacy Program. The Immigrant Advocacy Program represents low-wage immigrants in court and administrative proceedings, counsels them about their rights under federal and state law to be paid for their work, recovers unpaid wages they have earned, and fights workplace discrimination. We also provide legal services in the area of housing, consumer law, education, and in limited areas of immigration. We seek to stop unjust employment practices and assist hard-working immigrants throughout Virginia who face discrimination and exploitation. Since the Immigrant Advocacy Program's creation in 1998, we have helped migrant farmworkers, day laborers and other low-wage immigrant workers win judgments and settlements representing many millions in wages they earned but were never paid. We have prevented clients from being evicted from their housing, and from judgments against them by "zombie debt collectors." In addition, we have helped immigrant children obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, providing them with a path to citizenship.

Melanie worked with us in our Falls Church office this summer and will continue with us for the Fall semester. Melanie was tasked with direct client contact, legal research and writing, and attending events on behalf of our organization. She worked with us from June 5, 2017 until August 11, 2017, a total of 10 weeks. She worked full time, for 40 hours a week.

This summer, I was Melanie's supervisor, and she did work for me and for several of the other attorneys in the office. Specifically, Melanie helped me draft two custody petitions as the first step in securing Special Immigrant Juvenile Status for two clients who have been abandoned by their father. She also was invaluable helping with translating legal documents between English and Spanish for these clients. In addition, Melanie did legal research for a number of

different matters, including employment, housing, and education matters. Melanie also had direct communication with clients, conducting client interviews and coordinating with clients. Melanie drafted legal memos and correspondence for other attorneys in our office as well. She will be continuing to work with clients and conduct research on several employment cases and hopes to have the opportunity to work on more housing cases.

Thanks to Melanie's work for us this summer, we were able to serve more clients. She speaks Spanish and was able to speak to potential clients in order to screen them for services, and she also was able to follow up with existing clients with any questions or issues we needed resolved. She helped us do client intakes, particularly when we were short-staffed. Melanie also had a group of clients with whom she contacted with extensively and built relationships, improving our client contacts and providing clients with committed, attentive services. Thanks to Melanie's research and translation skills, the attorneys had the capacity to take on additional complex cases and provide more thorough legal representation.

Melanie also attended events on behalf of LAJC and built relationships with our community. Every week, LAJC puts on a food distribution in conjunction with a D.C. area food bank. Melanie attended and spoke to potential clients about our organization and about specific legal issues. Maintaining community outreach and a presence in the neighborhood is important for our organization because we want to make sure that people around us are getting the best legal services available. Melanie attended this event every Thursday morning and would work to ensure that LAJC continues to have a trusting relationship with our community. Additionally, the legal interns prepared a Know Your Rights presentation to be given at our local community library. We tasked the interns with these events in order to show them the importance of staying active in and maintaining relationships with the community.

This summer, Melanie strengthened her legal research and writing skills. She has learned how to be more precise in her language and to think in a more intellectual way about the law. Melanie worked diligently for us this summer, and I know she will continue to do so during the fall. Thanks to her work, LAJC was able to further its mission of fighting injustice and poverty through legal representation and community organizing for low-income immigrants in Northern Virginia.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Wolozin, Esq.