

Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

August 24, 2014

Dear Equal Justice America Team,

During the summer of 2014, I was lucky enough to work with the Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) in Charlottesville, Virginia. As a member of the Immigrant Advocacy Program, I worked on a wide range of projects to serve both our clients and our community. I want to tell you about four of the aspects that made my clerkship such a valuable experience:

1. My work this summer was fascinating, and intellectually challenging. Before I even completed my training in May, I was assigned to a human trafficking case and began working on a memo for my supervising attorneys regarding the applicability of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) to our clients' situation. This was not the only case in which I had to delve into large and complex federal statutes. However, immigration law is unique insofar as it encompasses civil and criminal law, and a constantly shifting mix of state and federal law. Some of the still-evolving areas that I tracked were ICE detainers and the availability of in-state tuition for the "Dreamer" students who are using the DACA program to pursue higher education.
2. My work this summer has helped me prepare to practice law in the future. I drafted and edited pleadings, discovery requests, and petitions to the Department of Homeland Security. I explained retainer agreements to incarcerated youth and recent immigrants who have little familiarity with the US legal system. I sorted and indexed a FOIA response, and sat in on strategy sessions between LAJC and the Southern Poverty Law Center. I processed hundreds of pages of deposition testimony on an Eighth Amendment case, assisting the LAJC attorneys who going to trial against the Virginia Department of Corrections on behalf of a class of women prisoners who have suffered grossly inadequate medical care. This is the sort of preparation for a legal career that cannot be imparted in a lecture--you just have to start getting your feet wet.
3. My work this summer also gave me the opportunity to meet and assist people from many different cultures and backgrounds, with many different concerns and perspectives. This certainly occurred when I worked at LAJC's front desk, as the first point of contact for people with every problem imaginable. In particular, I was able to use my Spanish language skills to help connect our clients with legal services. I interpreted client-attorney meetings, and translated materials including settlement agreements, foreign government documents, affidavits, and letters to clients. I also participated on a migrant farmworker outreach trip, where I was able to discuss labor issues with Spanish-speaking migrant workers in over a dozen work camps on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

4. Last, and most importantly, my work this summer allowed me to help change people's lives in dramatic and positive ways. Although the cases in which I was most heavily involved are still awaiting a final resolution, I am confident that federal immigration officials will agree that these clients are eligible for an adjustment of their immigration status. It is hard for me to think of a more impactful resolution for these clients—an adjustment of status means that people can remain in their homes, and with their families. More than that, it means freedom to study, to work, and to fully participate in the life of one's community—and the political discourse within our country. In many ways, accessing immigration benefits through legal aid will simply make my clients more equal in ways that they richly deserve.

My work this summer has let me take one more step towards being an excellent public interest attorney. The lessons that I learned with LAJC will transfer into my practice, and the mentors that I found will be an invaluable source of advice and guidance. Equal Justice America's generous funding helped to make all of this possible for me. I am sincerely grateful to all of you.

Best regards,

Kate Perino
UVA Law Class of 2016