

Friday, August 16, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Americans for Immigrant Justice (“AI Justice”) is a non-profit immigration law firm that provides free, direct legal services to low-income immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, and crime victims in the Greater Miami Area. I spent my summer internship with AI Justice working with the Detention Prevention Program headed by my supervisor, Attorney Franco Torres. The Detention Prevention Program conducts Know-Your-Rights presentations and offers limited legal services to the detainees at two large immigration detention centers in the South Florida area, Krome Service Processing Center (“Krome”) and Broward Transitional Center (“BTC”). We are one of only two organizations that conduct these programs, and with over 700 detainees at BTC alone, we provide services to a drastically under-served population.

As an intern working in the Detention Prevention Program, I was tasked with interviewing male detainees at both Krome and BTC and determining their eligibility for different forms of immigration benefits. After completing an intake survey with each detainee, I would first analyze whether he was eligible for conditional release from immigration detention. For those low-income immigrants detained at BTC, it is incredibly difficult to receive adequate health care, to communicate with family and other loved ones, to receive the services of a licensed attorney, and to participate in any meaningful way in their immigration proceedings. On behalf of those immigrant detainees who were eligible for potential release from immigration custody, I worked together with BTC personnel and the individual’s family members and friends to submit an official request for release from immigration detention to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Mid-way through my ten-week internship with AI Justice, I met with “JV” at Broward Transitional Center. JV is a 39-year-old man from Colombia. After serving his obligatory service in the Colombian military, JV, his wife, and his two young daughters began receiving death threats from armed guerrilla groups he once fought against during his service. JV told me how he fled to the United States because he was scared for his life and the lives of his family. When he recounted how his wife and two daughters were in hiding in Colombia, he almost broke down crying. Because it is impossible to make long-distance calls from immigration detention, JV had no way of knowing if they were still alive. In detention, JV suffered from insomnia, headaches, and extreme pain resulting from a broken tooth, an injury would occurred after his arrival at BTC and for which JV had repeatedly been denied any meaningful medical treatment. JV was too poor to go through the difficult process of finding a private immigration attorney in South Florida and had no means of searching for a pro bono attorney within the

confines of BTC. In short, JV would be forced to pursue his asylum claim on his own—an extraordinarily daunting task for an individual suffering from psychological distress who speaks no English. I worked with ICE personnel and secured JV's release from immigration custody so that he could live at the South Florida home of his cousin, a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident. After his release, I also provided JV with information about the asylum application process and helped him search for a pro bono attorney to help him pursue his asylum claim in immigration court. Now that JV is living with his cousin, he can communicate with his family in Colombia, more easily search for a pro bono attorney, and get much-needed psychological and medical care.

About a week after JV was released from immigration detention, I met with another individual at BTC named "FO." FO is a 25 year-old man from a country with a notorious history of violent intolerance to homosexuality. During our interview at BTC, FO told me that he had fled to the United States after his life was threatened in his home country by members of his community and even his own family because of his sexuality. FO was scared and confused during our entire interview, and he told me that he had no understanding of why he was being held in immigration custody or how he could apply for asylum. FO came to the United States with no money and had no friends or family in Florida that could help him search for or pay for an attorney to represent him in immigration court. I worked with community organizers and ICE personnel to get FO released from immigration custody and relocated to New York City so that he could live with his family friend and look for a pro bono immigration attorney to help him file for asylum. After getting released from BTC, I called FO several times to check in on his well-being. I simply could not believe the change in his voice and personality—FO was now happy, talkative, and optimistic about applying for asylum in immigration court. "Thank you, Miss Katie," he repeated each time we spoke on the phone.

The feelings of joy and fulfillment I experienced when I received the calls that JV and FO had been released from immigration detention were indescribable. "If I could make this much of a difference in the lives of my clients as a law clerk, imagine what I could do as a licensed attorney," I thought to myself. When I first met with JV and FO, they were lonely, confused, and hopeless. They were locked in a system that made it nearly impossible for them to make any legally-meaningful claim for asylum or to find an attorney that would help them do so. After securing their release from immigration detention, providing them with information on asylum, and assisting in their search for pro bono attorneys, JV and FO have immeasurably increased their likelihood of receiving asylum. They are now able to receive psychological and financial support from family and loved ones, and will have access to infinitely more resources as they apply for asylum in immigration court. I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to help them, and look forward to helping others in similar situations. In short, my internship with AI Justice reaffirmed something I already knew: I came to law school so that I could help individuals less fortunate than myself. I felt personally and professionally fulfilled by the services I was able to provide JV and FO, and I look forward to pursuing a long and happy career helping others like them.

Thank you again for your support and for helping me to pursue a career in public interest law. My summer spent interning at Americans for Immigrant Justice was truly an exhilarating, eye-opening experience. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am that Equal Justice America made it possible for me to dedicate my time and energy to such an amazing organization.

Sincerely,

Katie Mullins
University of Michigan Law School
Juris Doctor Candidate, May 2015
katiemu@umich.edu



Americans for Immigrant Justice

Formerly Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center (FIAC)

Letter of Evaluation for AIJ Student Internship

August 19, 2013

Equal Justice America fellowship
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, Virginia 23112

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Franco Torres and I am an attorney for Americans for Immigrants Justice (“AI Justice”). This letter is to confirm that, Katie Mullins, a Juris Doctor candidate from Michigan University School of Law served as a Law Clerk Intern this summer at AI Justice, in Miami, Florida, from May 20, 2013 to August 7, 2013. Katie worked on eight different cases; she drafted and revised three successful release requests for individuals held in immigration detention. Katie also communicated and negotiated with U.S. government officials for the release of individuals. Katie prepared an application for Legal Permanent Residency based on a petition from a US citizen family member. In addition, she researched various legal issues with regard to detainee or client cases. Katie drafted a memorandum to determine whether a client was eligible to apply for asylum. Moreover, Katie drafted and revised cover letters explaining utility of accompanying legal information mailed to detainees. She revised case summaries to be sent out for pro bono referrals, and translated documents from English to Spanish and vice versa.

These tasks, in particular, required a high degree of time management skills, organization, and diligence. She has strong legal research and writing skill. Katie is diligent and thorough in her work. I really appreciated Katie’s work ethic and people skills she demonstrated great commitment to the work I assigned to her. I was very pleased with the work Katie produced in her internship with AI Justice. She demonstrated good working knowledge of civil rights and the law, a sense of purpose and professionalism and solid decision-making skills. It was a pleasure to

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work with Katie and thanks to work here, we were able to reach and help out more individuals as a result of her efforts.

If I can provide you with any additional information, or if you have any questions regarding Katie's work with AI Justice, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Franco Torres, Esq.
Detention Program Attorney
Americans for Immigrant Justice
3000 Biscayne Blvd Suite 400 Miami FL 33137
Tel: 305-573-1106 Ext. 1360

A non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the basic human rights of immigrants

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