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September 7, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

The work experience I have had this summer at the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) has been even better and more rewarding than I expected. Not only have I been able to learn about asylum law and immigration law in general, but I have also had the chance to have a lot of client contact and work with people from an array of backgrounds. I have been amazed at how people from around the world come to Seattle and find NWIRP to assist them with their immigration cases. My summer at NWIRP has reinforced how important it is to provide vital legal services to those who need them the most, in this case low-income immigrants. It has also reinforced my dedication to public interest work.

At the beginning of the summer my supervisor Chris Strawn assigned a couple of asylum cases to me to work on. One of the clients I was assigned to fled her country with her family just over seven years ago after the government suspected them of supporting an opposition group. They imprisoned her mother, father, and sister and then threatened to kill them. She and her family packed what they could and then crossed the border at night. It took a couple of years in a third country to finally get refugee status.

Over the past few months I have met with her often to develop her case, and I have been continually amazed at her strength and ability to make a new life in this country. We worked on her declaration together, and through that I learned how much she and her family went through before they fled their home country. I also learned how much time she and her family waited in a third country to qualify as refugees to be able to come to the United States. She and her family traveled a great distance and waited a long time to find better lives for themselves. I keep thinking that the least I can do is help my client stay here so that she can live that life.

In addition to being responsible for managing a couple of my own asylum cases, I also have assisted with asylum intakes. For the intakes, I interview clients to assess whether they have a solid asylum case or not. Through these interviews I have heard the stories of clients' lives and how they decided to come to the United States. I am often amazed at the roads people have taken to get here. One of the intakes I did in the middle of the summer was for a family that had not appeared in immigration court for their individual hearing and had been ordered removed. During the interview I saw how desperate this family was for NWIRP's assistance. Later the attorney decided to assist with their case, and every time they came into the office, the mother of

the family was very emotional and distraught. She had been imprisoned and tortured in her home country, and it was so clear to me how afraid she was of having to return there. At the end of our meeting with her and her family, they all gave me hugs and thanked me for helping them. I could not help but think that I had done so little. I realized though that to them any assistance with their immigration case was the difference between life and death.

These intakes have also made me realize the absurdities of asylum law, because the worse their situation was in their home country, the more likely they are to get asylum. It is crazy to me that if a person has not been tortured or physically abused but simply threatened or harassed that they might not have a strong enough case for asylum. One client in our initial interview did not tell me that she had been sexually assaulted, because she had put that experience in the past. She explained that she did not want to think about the horrible things that had happened to her in her home country. I think it is normal that people would want to put such awful things behind them, but asylum law makes applicants dredge up those awful memories and stake their ability to stay in the United States on them.

In addition to working directly with clients, I have also had a chance to do a lot of legal and country conditions research. I assisted my supervisor with a motion to reopen to immigration court and I also helped him draft a reply for a Ninth Circuit Brief. This variety of legal tasks that I performed throughout the summer opened another window to the world of being a lawyer. I realized the complexity of the procedural aspects of immigration law and saw how important it is to have a thorough understanding of those things. I was able to learn about how to make winning legal arguments or frame a case in a certain way to make the client more sympathetic. I saw the great amount of discretion that immigration judges have. I was constantly impressed by how much my supervisor knows about the area of the law. I hope one day that I can know that much and have the expertise he has.

Everything that I did this summer reaffirmed my dedication to providing legal services to those who need them the most. The low income immigrants that we serve at NWIRP desperately need our help, and if they did not have that resource many of them would be lost. I hope to continue to work in an organization that provides such vital legal services, that actually uses the law to help people live better lives. I only hope that I can continue to do such valuable work.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Beckner  
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Class of 2009