

August 30, 2016

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My summer 2016 fellowship opportunity through Equal Justice America taught me so much about serving the indigent immigrant population of Los Angeles and the importance of providing legal services to those who cannot afford to represent themselves. For my fellowship, I worked with the Immigration Center for Women and Children in downtown Los Angeles on a specific type of immigration case called *Franco* cases. Through these cases, I worked with detained immigrants that were determined to have a mental disability or disorder by providing them with representation throughout their immigration proceedings. The *Franco* settlement makes sure that these detained immigrants receive representation throughout their cases since their mental disability or disorder prevents them from understanding what is happening and the legal consequences of their actions.

Throughout the summer, I was able to work with clients from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Jamaica, and Cambodia in different stages of their immigration proceedings. A lot of the work I did involved researching and preparing country condition documentation to supplement these clients' claims for asylum, withholding of removal, or relief under the Convention Against Torture. These assignments allowed me to learn about the terrible situations these clients would face if forced to return to their home country and grasp the gravity of the abuse they would experience or may have already experienced at their government's acquiescence. Though mental health and disability has become less stigmatized in recent years, many countries still treat those with mental impairments as less than human, seeking no other

avenues for effective treatment and instead locking up these people in facilities for their whole lives. They often use long-term restraints and the conditions in the facilities are inhumane in many different ways. In reading the reports on these realities, I always took my assignments very seriously, understanding that these clients' lives were in my hands. In the research I found and presented, I had to help support my supervising attorneys' arguments by showing the terrible conditions that no one should be forced to endure; conditions that would become a reality for our clients if denied immigration relief.

In representing these clients, we were also about to connect them with a variety of social services and get them the medical care they needed to remain stable. For instance, I was able to find one client a temporary facility that would provide him with the counseling and housing he needed to stay up to date with his treatment plan while he was going to immigration court in Los Angeles. It was rewarding helping these clients stay on track or get the help they needed to work on their mental health. As such, I am truly grateful for the time I was able to spending learning from my supervising attorneys at the Immigration Center for Women and Children and the clients we represented, and am thankful for the opportunity Equal Justice America's funding provided me by allowing me to work with this vulnerable population.

Sincerely,

Megan Venanzi
Loyola Law School
Class of 2017



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August 29, 2016

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Mayra Gamez. I am an attorney at the Immigration Center for Women and Children where I work on *Franco* cases, which provides legal representation to detained non-citizens who are facing deportation and have been found incompetent to represent themselves in immigration proceedings because of serious mental health issues. I and another *Franco* attorney, Evelyn Martinez, supervised Megan Venanzi this summer during her Equal Justice America fellowship working as a *Franco* intern.

During her internship, Megan helped us with various aspects of our cases. Most of our clients seek immigration relief through asylum, withholding of removal, or the Convention Against Torture. Much of Megan's work consisted of researching and annotating country conditions that detailed the treatment our mentally disabled clients would face if they were forced to return to their country of origin. These assignments taught Megan about how various parts of the world view mental illness and the persecution our clients would be subjected to in their home countries. Furthermore, Megan researched complications in our clients' cases as a result of their criminal history when Evelyn and I were preparing motions to terminate or other motions for our clients. She created charts outlining the client's criminal history to present to the judge and researched how any convictions complicated our clients' cases. Finally, Megan observed some of our hearings in immigration court so that she could experience hearings and understand how immigration court works.



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Throughout her time at the Immigration Center for Women and Children, Megan worked diligently to help us with our clients' cases and to understand the idiosyncrasies of each of their immigration proceedings. We hope this internship provided her with a deeper appreciation and understanding of the representation of indigent populations that the Equal Justice America fellowship seeks to support.

Sincerely,

Mayra Gamrez, Esq.
Staff Attorney