

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

Throughout my first year of law school, I felt out of place amongst classmates who seek only high-paying jobs in the private sector. Growing up in an economically disadvantaged family made me realize that life is about more than money. Fortunately, working at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) helped me realize that I am not the oddity I thought I was. I was able to work with wonderful individuals and met attorneys from other nonprofits who help underserved communities.

While I worked on different assignments, there are two that will definitely stay with me throughout my legal career. I helped translate and interpret for two mothers who were brave enough to stand up to their husbands and leave them after years of abuse. Despite the fact that their husbands were the main breadwinners, and despite the fact that these women were undocumented, they still had the strength to leave their domineering husbands.

What I most enjoyed about working with these two women was informing them of their rights, and our ability to work with them to protect them and their children. Whether I was interpreting

or filling out discovery documents, I knew that I was actually making a difference in their lives. Furthermore, the spirit and determination that these mothers had to protect their children was so inspiring that I began believing again in what I thought was a cliché – the power of the human spirit.

Working at TRLA was not just about the money, it was about improving the quality of life of the innocent. However, with today's economy, the award I received from Equal Justice America helped me, a student from humble origins, help my own community. It afforded me the satisfaction of empowering those who felt they were the weakest, yet had the strength in them all along. Thank you for affording me this wonderful experience.

Sincerely,

Linda J. Pena

University of Texas School of Law

J.D. Expected 2013



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VIA E-MAIL & REGULAR MAIL

Dan Ruben  
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**Re: Linda Pena**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

It is with pleasure that I write to you regarding Linda Pena's clerkship with Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid this summer. Linda is an exceptional advocate who will be an excellent lawyer. We greatly appreciate the funding that Equal Justice America provided to Linda, making it possible for us to assist us with our work.

Linda worked on a variety of cases this summer, primarily in the areas of employment and family law. Each of the three attorneys that she worked with judged her work as well exceeding expectations. Linda quickly grasps concepts, has strong analytical skills, and has a good work ethic. Her research skills are above average for a law student, as are her writing skills. All of her work was very thorough.

Linda's commitment to public service is genuine and sophisticated. She is sensitive to the reality of poverty issues and how they affect our client community and how they may effect the lawyering process. She is wise beyond her years.

Professionalism is not always easy to come by amongst students who have completed but one year of law school. During Linda's tenure with TRLA, she always exhibited complete professionalism – with out staff, our clients, and other attorneys.

In closing, I am only able to report that Linda made a valuable contribution to our office this summer. We all hope to have the opportunity to work with her again in the future.

Sincerely,

Marinda van Dalen  
Attorney at Law