

August 30, 2010

Mr. Dan Ruben

Equal Justice America

Executive Director

Building II-Suite 204

13540 East Boundary Road

Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to first off thank you for the assistance that Equal Justice America provided me this summer. That said, I would have gladly continued to work for Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) without financial assistance. The ten weeks I spent working there flew by entirely too fast. I will try to summarize my experience and provide some highlights.

My major assignment throughout the summer was assisting with the management and carrying out of grant activities. TRLA received a grant from the DOJ to educate workers and employers on the anti-discrimination provisions of the INA. I was tasked with preparing, planning, and presenting bi-lingual presentations to the community as well as developing and recording a public service announcement that would air on local radio stations in El Paso. I was able to put on two separate presentations, one at the Farm Workers Center to a large group, and another to a small ESL class. Attendees were genuinely interested in the material and in gaining more knowledge, something that was definitely rewarding!

In between working on the grant, I was able to work directly with several clients. Although all of the clients I worked with were deserving of help, one in particular stood out. Living in the far outskirts of the county, an 80-year-old woman sought our help with a forgery. A close friend of hers suggested she try to get a reverse mortgage so that she could fix her small home that doesn't have air-conditioning or proper doors. Once at the bank, she was told that her home's deed was no longer in her name. It was my belief that her daughter, a notary public living in a different part of the state, forged her mother's signature and asked a

fellow notary to stamp the transfer. Myself and another law clerk drove the 60 miles to the elderly woman's home to speak with her. She spoke of the pain in discovering her daughter's actions, and her initial apprehension to take any action. When we left her home, I was emotional the entire way back to El Paso. Because there are several possible players involved and the possibility of criminal charges, I first had to shop the case out to private attorneys, none of who would take the case. Eventually, an attorney in our office agreed to take it on. Unfortunately, my time at TRLA ended before I could see any progress in the case.

I was also involved in doing a good amount of translation for the non-spanish speaking attorneys in our office. This experience was a great insight into the actual client interaction that a public interest attorney does, furthering my admiration of the public interest path.

All in all, this summer was one of the best I have had my entire life. I was able to help the community in my hometown, a population very deserving of legal aid services. In addition, I was exposed to several practice areas, something which will prove more useful than consulting a legal practice guide.

Thank you again for the opportunity, and the honor of saying that I am an Equal Justice America Fellow.

Sincerely,

Maria Elena Grasheim

George Washington University

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August 31, 2010

Dan Ruben
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Re: *Evaluation of Maria Elena Grasheim*

Dear Mr. Ruben;

When I received Ms. Grasheim's resume this spring, I had already chosen the summer clerkship class at my office. Despite this situation, Ms. Grasheim's resume provoked my interest and I extended an interview. During her interview, Ms. Grasheim greatly impressed me and the rest of my office's clerkship committee with her intelligence, sincere desire to work at a public interest law firm, and her commitment to immerse herself in the internship. Reflecting on her summer at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Ms. Grasheim did everything she promised during her interview and has become the standard by which I will judge future summer legal interns.

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, known as "TRLA," is a nonprofit organization that provides civil legal services to low-income and disadvantaged clients in a 68-county service area that covers the southwestern third of the state of Texas, including the entire Texas-Mexico border region. TRLA clients share two very important characteristics: they are overwhelmingly Latino, and they are oppressively poor. Over 90% of TRLA's clients are of Mexican descent. Upwards of one-half of the clients speak Spanish as their primary language.

During Ms. Grasheim's time as a summer law clerk with TRLA, she proved to be an invaluable asset to our organization as a whole, as well as our local branch office here in El Paso. Ms. Grasheim represented clients in eviction hearings before Justice of the Peace courts, where Texas allows law students to appear before that court. She advocated on behalf of clients in consumer cases, such as negotiating with a shady remodeling contractor and an insurance adjuster to have an elderly client's nonfunctioning bathroom repaired successfully. Ms. Grasheim represented TRLA at a Foster Children's conference, where she provided information on children close to aging out of the state foster care system.

On the first day of her internship, Ms. Grasheim was drafted to co-counsel a deposition that would occur that morning concerning a divorce with serious allegations of


child sexual abuse. That deposition set the tone of her internship. She was motivated, not afraid to take on challenges, and committed to advocating for clients that otherwise would not have a voice. She also researched and composed memorandums and pleadings throughout the summer, which were integral to the success of all cases she was involved in.

Ms. Grasheim is a leader and I expected great things from her; I know that she will. I am proud that she chose to intern with my office.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me anytime. I can be reached at: (915) 585-5100 or amesta@trla.org. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid



Alberto Mesta, Jr.
Managing Attorney-El Paso Office.