

August 30, 2013

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I write to you today to express my gratitude for receiving an EJA fellowship this summer. With the help of your organization, I was able to work at one of Chicago's largest non-profit legal services providers, the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. My experience was both satisfying and deeply humbling, and solidified my desire to pursue a career in public interest upon graduation. Moreover, I was fortunate enough to secure placement in LAF's Immigrant and Worker Rights (IWR) practice group, which allowed me to gain invaluable experience and supervision in the area I wish to practice: immigration advocacy.

Prior to joining LAF I was exposed to immigration legal work in the form of clinics offered by my law school, yet this summer was my first chance to work within a non-profit legal aid organization. Unlike DePaul's clinics, in which students are heavily supervised and focus intensely on only one or two cases, LAF offered a more realistic glimpse of real-world practice, namely a much heavier case load. As an intern, I primarily assisted with client intake interviews, which I assessed for available relief and presented at weekly case acceptance meetings. Not only did my confidence build as I interviewed more clients, but I also had the immense privilege of interacting with numerous individuals from diverse immigrant backgrounds. For me, direct client interaction was the most rewarding part of my summer. I have always enjoyed working with people to help them solve their problems, and am continually humbled by the stories our clients share and the relationships of trust that I am able to develop with clients.

One such story that greatly affected me this summer came from a woman named Maria. We met to discuss her eligibility for a U Visa, which is a type of visa granted to immigrant victims of certain violent crimes who aid law enforcement in catching the offender. Maria was a rape survivor who reported her assault to the authorities. Her attacker was later arrested, charged, and convicted after Maria herself bravely testified in court. The assault took place nearly fifteen years ago, yet during our interview it was evident that telling her story was still painful.

Over the course of our two hour conversation, she confided in me that, as a result of her own attack, she fears for her teenage daughter's safety. She also opened up about a history of abuse suffered in her childhood home in Mexico, which was a main reason to prompt her to come to the United States for a new beginning. Even long after I had elicited enough facts to determine her U Visa eligibility, I let her continue speaking because I could tell that it was what she needed most at that moment: somebody who would listen. Although I had never

undergone anything remotely as traumatizing as Maria, I found myself holding back my own tears as she became emotional during the conversation. I was deeply moved by her courage to speak out against her attacker and to confront her family members who had turned their back on her after the abuse took place. Her remarkable strength and positive attitude despite the hardship in her life was inspirational and incredibly moving.

Maria's story is all too common among immigrant women of color who are frequently victimized and exploited because of their undocumented status. Because of the financial support offered by EJA, I was able to use my time at LAF to help tell the stories of clients like Maria, helping her and other immigrant victims of violence turn a negative experience into something positive in the form of an immigration benefit. I am indebted to EJA for supporting my summer placement at LAF; without an EJA fellowship I would not have been able to afford my unpaid internship. The experiences I gained have reinforced my commitment to a career in public interest and helping to break down the barriers to justice that immigrants consistently face.

Many thanks,

Megan Davis
DePaul College of Law, J.D. candidate 2014

August 30, 2013

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director at Equal Justice America

Re: Megan Davis
Summer Internship at LAF

Dear Dan:

I am writing to provide you with a summary and evaluation of Megan Davis' work at LAF this summer. Megan was an exceptional student. She completed a tremendous amount of work during the summer, which included a variety of legal issues and elements of legal practice. Additionally, she worked extremely well both independently and in team settings. She took on additional work willingly and got along with all of our staff.

Specifically, Megan carried out intake with clients at the initial stage of case assessment. This involved scheduling the client for an interview at LAF, interviewing the client in Spanish, and completing an extensive intake form we have developed for our cases. After completing the intake, Megan would confer with staff on any issues involved in the case, and then present it to staff at our weekly Case Acceptance Meetings. Megan presented more than one case during the summer at our CAM. Her work was thorough and she was able to articulate the issues to a large staff at the meetings and answer peppered questions as staff questioned her. She showed maturity and professionalism during this process, which impressed me. I should add that she carried out most interviews in Spanish, and managed clients well. She made clients feel comfortable, but also remained professional and appropriate as she interviewed them.

Megan's client work also included preparing U visa applications with clients whose cases were accepted. This meant scheduling additional, longer interviews, directing the client to gather documents, and finalizing the forms for staff to review. She prepared affidavits and researched legal issues. Megan performed this work independently, but was also able to recognize those moments when she needed supervision.

Megan teamed up with another student to present a tutorial to staff at one of our staff meetings. The topic was complicated: the test for determining a crime of moral turpitude. There has been recent litigation which has amended the traditional test and staff needed to get more insight on these changes. In particular, we were dealing with a conviction for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and needed guidance based on current case law. Megan did an excellent job on this presentation. Staff was very happy with the information and we were able to create an in-house tutorial that would have been difficult for us to create otherwise.

Megan also learned the skills of organizing her file by attending a training session on how to maintain good file notes and well-organized files. She sent e-notes to our web-based file system, and kept the attorneys she was working with abreast of activity in the case.

It was a pleasure having Megan with our Project this summer. I would hire her again if we had additional resources. Please contact me if you have any additional questions at lpal@lafchicago.org.

Sincerely,

s/Lisa J. Palumbo
Supervisory Attorney