

Dan Ruben
Equal Justice America
Building II, Suite 204
13540 East Boundary Road
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Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity that the Equal Justice America fellowship afforded me this year. This summer was my second internship at Catholic Charities of Dallas, Immigration and Legal Services. Catholic Charities offers low-cost immigration services such as family petitions, asylum and refugee adjustments, representation in removal proceedings, and petitions for visas for victims of certain crimes. Last summer, as a first-time intern, I was broadly introduced to the services we offered and given the opportunity to meet with clients and advise them as to their potential immigration benefits. During my second summer with Catholic Charities, I did much of the same, but my focus also narrowed as I began to specialize in cases for crime victims. Both the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) cases and a fairly new nonimmigrant visa called the U-Visa offer a path to residency for undocumented persons who are, respectively, domestic violence victims and victims of violent crime who cooperate with law enforcement officials. The regulations for the U-Visa were released in 2007 though applications had been pouring in for years under the interim rules, and only this year did the government begin to issue the visas under a 10,000-per-year quota.

I started my second internship right as my program director had decided to call in our numerous U-visa applicants to finish processing their application before the 10,000 visas were issued. Many of the clients required a waiver for their illegal entries. For the waivers, which are at the government's discretion to grant, we had to demonstrate that the clients had good moral character, community ties, and hardship if required to return to their home countries. We set up daily afternoon workshops to help our clients put together waiver applications that advocated for them to be able to stay. As I poured over client files, reading their testimonies, I was touched by their bravery in reporting crimes although it meant handing themselves over to authorities without legal status. Many of our clients had suffered immensely, whether from assault, rape, child molestation, or drunk drivers. Many victims or parents of minors who were victims went to report these crimes to the police even though they thought it meant they would be deported. It was a beautiful irony, in a way, that time after time, as the waivers were granted, it was the very crime that shattered someone's life- a stabbing, a sexually abused stepchild, an assaulted wife- that finally gave our clients an opportunity to be here legally.

I am now working full-time at Catholic Charities of Dallas on the crime victims team. I handle not only the waivers for U-visas but also the original U-visa applications themselves. Today, I accompanied a potential U-visa client to her appointment at Immigration and Customs Enforcement where she was due to report under an Order of Supervision with a passport to leave the country. Armed with a certification form from her local police department indicating that she had aided in their investigation of her

domestic violence claim against her husband, I asked him to grant her more time so that we could try filing a U-Visa. He allowed her three months to turn in the application, and she and her daughter were saved from being shipped back to El Salvador, where they no longer have any family. I also work on VAWA applications, asking the government to allow undocumented spouses of citizens and legal residents a way out of abusive relationships; without the VAWA relief, many women would otherwise remain battered, dependent on their documented spouses, and feeling as though they have no recourse.

I want to thank you sincerely for granting me this fellowship. Without support for those interested in public interest, law students such as myself would have a much harder time using their gift of education to assist those in need. On behalf of the victimized clients whose approvals to remain in the country have started to come into our office, thank you.

Sincerely,

Meghan Abigail
University of Texas