

August 30, 2011

Mr. Dan Ruben
Executive Director, Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

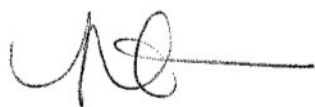
This summer I had the honor to work with Bay Area Legal Aid helping undocumented victims of domestic violence and sexual assault obtain immigration relief. Working with BayLegal's regional immigration coordinator, Catherine Ward-Seitz, I met with clients and their families, solicited relevant documentation and drafted final applications for "U Visas" under the Violence Against Women Act of 2000 (VAWA). This congressional act created the U Visa, which provides working papers and a path to citizenship for victims of certain crimes, including domestic violence and sexual assault, who have cooperated with police or prosecutors in the investigation or prosecution of the crimes against them.

I was lucky to meet many of these women and learn not only of the suffering they had endured, but also about the ways in which they had become empowered and changed their lives. Taking a woman out of the shadows created by her undocumented status, removing the associated fear and barriers, is in many ways the ultimate emancipation for a survivor of abuse. For these women, their abusers often controlled every aspect of their lives: whom they saw and talked to; where they went; what they wore; if they were allowed to work; and their finances. Obtaining physical liberty is the first step; obtaining *independence* is the goal.

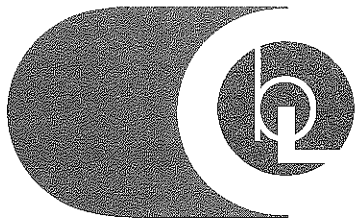
One woman in particular whom I worked with had a deep impact on me. She was very quiet and timid upon our first meeting. She actually seemed scared, and I made a serious effort to make her feel comfortable despite the circumstances: our task at that meeting was to draft a declaration, or written account for immigration authorities, of the 15 years of abuse she had suffered at the hands (and fists and boots) of her husband. Over time, she began to open up to me and explain not only the depth of degradation she had endured, but also the path she had slowly embarked upon over the years to finally separate from her abuser. Her personal experience of learning and growing—of realizing that her violent relationship was not what "love" meant—was inspiring. Indeed, her difficult past had given her hope: she was seeking the U Visa to work and support her children, and even hoped to attend school, since she'd only gotten through the fourth grade in Mexico. She beamed with pride at the fact that her youngest son was about to start college this fall. That smile has stayed with me, and provides me strength when faced with challenges in my work.

I embarked upon this fellowship committed to public service, and I finish this summer even more excited. Thank you to Equal Justice America and The William and Inez Mabie Family Foundation for strengthening my conviction to spend a lifetime working to help others.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Nina Maria Catalano', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Nina Maria Catalano
Harvard Law School
JD Candidate, 2012



BAY AREA LEGAL AID

WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE

September 30, 2011

Katie Toman
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
Midlothian, VA 23112

RE: CATALANO, Nina
EVALUATION OF SUMMER LAW CLERK POSITION

Dear Ms. Toman:

I am writing to let you know that Nina Catalano's 2011 summer law clerkship with Bay Area Legal Aid went wonderfully. Nina worked under my supervision in our Central Support Office in Oakland. My caseload consists of immigration cases for domestic violence and sexual assault survivors. I directly represent some clients and prepare other cases for placement through our Pro Bono program. Nina was very helpful in both categories.

The vast majority of my cases are applications for U Nonimmigrant Status (also known as U Visas). This is a form of immigration relief for victims of certain qualifying crimes who can show that they were helpful in the investigation and/or prosecution and that they suffered substantial abuse as a result of the criminal activity. The first step in assessing these cases is to request a certification from law enforcement confirming the client's cooperation. This involves obtaining and evaluating any police reports and then filling out and submitting the certification to the appropriate law enforcement official for review and signature. Nina was extremely efficient in preparing these requests. I started out the summer with a significant backlog of requests to prepare and Nina had me caught up by the time she left.

Once we have the law enforcement certification, I either keep the case and prepare it for submission to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS) or I give it to our Pro Bono Director for placement with a pro bono attorney. With Nina's help, I was able to keep more U Visa cases this summer and submit them myself. This was particularly helpful given the fact that she had been so efficient at obtaining the certifications because now we have more clients ready for placement than we have available pro bono attorneys. So, with Nina's help in meeting with clients and preparing their declarations and application forms and then putting the packet together with a cover letter, we were able to serve more clients more quickly.

Thank you so much for funding her clerkship with us this summer. She was a wonderful and invaluable help to me, Bay Area Legal Aid, and our clients. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Catherine Ward-Seitz,
Regional Immigration Coordinator
(510) 250-5234
CWard-Seitz@BayLegal.org

Central Support Office
1735 Telegraph Avenue
Oakland, CA 94612

Phone: 510.663.4755
CRS/TTY: 711

Fax: 510.663.4711 (Administration)

Fax: 510.663.4710 (Finance)

www.baylegal.org