

Dear Dan Ruben,

My summer at the National Center for Lesbian Rights was wonderful! I enjoyed my work, my coworkers, and the organization as a whole. NCLR does amazing work to protect the human rights of some of the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ community, particularly immigrants, low-income people, and people of color. My work at NCLR primarily focused on immigrants. Broadly, my clients could be divided into (1) refugees fleeing persecution, (2) couples facing separation and deportation because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and (3) DREAMers who are undocumented and have been in the U.S. since they were children.

Some of the refugees who contacted me were already in the U.S. while others were still living in their home countries. They included a lesbian from Pakistan, a trans man from Vietnam, and a gay man from Lebanon. All of them have either experienced persecution or live in fear of the consequences of being outed in their home countries.

For my immigrant clients who are in families, homophobic and transphobic immigration laws threaten them with either being deported and ripped away from their spouses or having their spouses forced into exile so that they can be together. The clients that sought my assistance in such situations include a straight trans woman and her husband, a lesbian trans woman and her wife, cisgender¹ lesbian couples, and cisgender gay men couples.

Finally, I assisted LGBTQ clients who were brought to the U.S. as young children and now face potential deportation to countries that they do not know and where they fear living authentically as themselves. In a particularly sad situation, one trans woman was internationally adopted by U.S. citizens as a young child many decades ago. At this time, adopted children did not automatically receive immigration, and my client never realized that she was not a citizen. It was only recently that my client even learned that she was adopted. Now, she is in a situation where she fears applying for a replacement green card because her past interactions with the criminal system threatens her with deportation to a country she does not remember if she comes to the immigration authorities' attention. Because of my

¹ Non transgender.

thorough legal research into her case, I was able to clearly explain to her all of her options to help her understand her situation. I also offered her a sympathetic ear and validated her feelings about the unfairness of the system. She told me at the end that she was glad that trans women had an ally like me. I explained to her that my partner is a trans woman, so I am more than just an ally but am fighting to protect my family. Her face lit up and she gave me a huge hug and afterward the Immigration Project Director sent me an emailing saying that the client “admired your knowledge, enthusiasm and the fact that you are part of a bigger movement of young people changing the world.”

In addition to providing direct services to individual clients, I did some immigration-related policy work. I helped craft NCLR’s official responses to the awful version of the Violence Against Women Act passed by the House which would have harmed LGBTQ victims of crime and to President Obama’s announcement regarding deferred action for DREAMers. I wrote an article for the official NCLR blog about the latter. I also attended a meeting of Bay Area LGBTQ immigration providers put on by a local refugee resettlement agency, which won a grant to provide assistance to LGBTQ refugees and asylees.

In addition to my primary focus on immigration work, I also assisted with running NCLR’s general helpline and with research projects for other attorneys involving a variety of fields of law. I received enormous training, both formally and through just doing my work, in areas of family law, employment law, prison law, first amendment law, and others that can be used to protect those whose human rights are violated because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Partially as a result of my summer at NCLR, I will now be applying for post-graduate fellowships to begin an Immigration Detention Project at NCLR’s sister organization the Transgender Law Center. My time at NCLR has solidified my commitment and passion for social justice work, and I look forward to a career serving low-income LGBTQ immigrants. I am incredibly grateful that Equal Justice America has allowed me to be having this amazing and invigorating experience.

Olga Tomchin

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Dan Ruben
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RE: Evaluation of Olga Tomchin's Summer Internship at NCLR

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I was Olga Tomchin's direct supervising attorney at the National Center for Lesbian Rights this Summer. We were very happy to have Olga join us, and have been impressed by the quality of her work and her passion for defending the civil rights of the LGBT community. She was also a wonderful person to work with, and contributed greatly to a congenial atmosphere in our office. I've written about just a few of the projects Olga was involved with this summer below, to give a sense of the breadth of work she was able to take on.

We especially appreciated Olga's researching and keeping up on litigation happening in multiple states on the Defense of Marriage Act. Olga kept updated information available to attorneys in a convenient table. This was vital to NCLR's ongoing work on the issue of marriage recognition for same-sex couples, and the many areas of law this affects. Olga demonstrated a keen eye for detail and was very diligent at staying on top of this ongoing project.

In addition, Olga showed her resourcefulness in researching an issue relating to an administrative law issue in California, finding a procedure on exactly how to appeal an official's decision, and assisting in drafting a letter appeal.

Olga also showed her grasp of and ability to adapt to the multi-faceted nature of advocacy, providing extensive assistance in researching the legal issues at stake as well as the press coverage of the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, and assisting our Deputy Director in writing an op-ed on this topic.

I was absolutely delighted to have a chance to work with Olga this summer.

Sincerely,

/s/ Shin-Ming Wong

Shin-Ming Wong