

August 22, 2016

Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 E. Boundary Road  
Building II, Suite 204  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

This past summer, as an Equal Justice America Summer Fellow, I worked as a legal intern for the HIV Law Project in Brooklyn, New York. I mainly worked with the senior immigration attorney on immigration and asylum cases, along with some Social Security appeals cases.

At the HIV Law Project, I worked clients with HIV/AIDS residing in New York City. Most of my clients came from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, each one from a different walk of life. Under the guidance of my supervisor, I worked with clients to flesh out their narratives for their pending cases. Our clients experienced profound trauma and pain, but as their advocates, we had to understand this pain and fear of persecution in order to successfully move forward with their cases. I was moved that our clients were willing to open up to me, a stranger, and I am thankful for my supervisor's training. I learned the specifics of each client's story, but I also realized that each client's struggle represented a microcosm of all the barriers faced by people of color, immigrants and the LGBTQ community: lack of access to education, poverty, unemployment, public health, sex education, religion, discrimination, housing, along with much more.

On my first day, I was assigned to a young asylum client from the Caribbean. Our client wanted to live safely as an openly gay man and he knew that if he had to return to his country of birth, he would have to hide his true identity. He would not be able to hold his lover's hand in public without constant fear. I interviewed this client several times to produce his affidavit. I worked hard to have his voice and pain heard in this document. I also researched his country conditions and illustrated its attitude towards people in his recognized community. For his upcoming immigration court hearing, my supervisor and I prepared his brief and exhibits. In the end, our client was granted asylum under a final order. When I saw our client's reaction, I was so happy for him and that he has an opportunity to securely begin his life in the United States. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work on his case this summer and participate in his immigration case. Through the HIV Law Project's legal advocacy, his life has now changed for the better.

Thank you for selecting me as an Equal Justice America Summer Fellow. I am grateful for EJA's financial support to help me pursue this meaningful experience at the HIV Law Project this summer. My interaction with our clients and my experiences with the attorneys at the HIV Law Project further motivate me to pursue my future career in public interest.

Sincerely,

Melanie Morales  
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2018  
Rutgers University School of  
Law - Newark Campus