

Dear Mr. Ruben:

This summer I had the privilege of interning for the Sex Workers Project at the Urban Justice Center in New York, New York. My summer experience was uniquely exciting not only because it exposed me to the legal, social, and economic issues faced by an incredibly marginalized population- sex workers and victims of sex trafficking, but also because I gained insight into the workings of the harm-reduction model of advocacy. Although my client interaction was limited, I spent a sizeable portion of my time researching and writing memoranda to analyze legal issues that affected our indigent clients on a direct, systemic, or legislative level.

In particular, I was assigned to three different cases: first, through my research, I worked to help a client, an exotic dancer, who was unlawfully fired for “whistle-blowing” on the employer’s discriminatory payment scheme; second, I assisted with a police brutality litigation, regarding an improper and invasive search of a transgender arrestee; and third, I wrote part of the brief for an asylum applicant who was subjected to a lifetime of abuse at the hands of her mother, father, former spouse and boyfriend. With regards to the police brutality litigation, I researched potential Daubert challenges to expert reports, abstracted depositions, attended a deposition, and researched other relevant legal issues.

On a systemic level, I attended meetings by advocates of trafficked victims to discuss the ways to minimize the harmful effects of trafficking raids. Further, I attended roundtable discussions with other advocates of sex workers to discuss ways to safeguard against the health, legal, and social risks involved in sex work. Lastly, I attended know-your-rights trainings for Hispanic transgender individuals, who are often targeted by the police with violence and verbal assaults.

On a legislative level, I did extensive research on the implications of the New York Rape Shield Law exception, which admits evidence of prior prostitution convictions for the purpose of discrediting claims of rape. My research was used to educate legislators and other members of the community of the futility of the exception and its negative impact on victims of rape. My research shed a lot of light on how extremely vulnerable individuals are, who are or once were involved in sex work. As a law student determined to pursue a career in public interest, that assignment was an invaluable reminder that every client is human and deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

In short, my summer internship experience was very rewarding and eye-opening. This experience will prove very useful to me in the future, not only because of the legal skills I acquired, but also because I was able to help a deserving population that is often overlooked. Thank you for sponsoring my summer internship. I truly appreciate your commitment to helping students pursue their interest in public interest.

Sincerely,

Rita Kapadia

University of Miami School of Law