

Dear Mr. Ruben,

In early fall 2010, I stood in front of an EOIR Immigration Judge as the legal representative of a person in removal proceedings. This hearing was the conclusion to my summer as a law clerk in the immigration practice of Centro Legal de la Raza, a community-based nonprofit in the Fruitvale district of Oakland, California. I had worked on this case throughout the summer, written the client's declaration, prepared his applications, and developed questions for the direct examination. I was ready.

Yet nothing could have prepared me for the moment when the Immigration Judge read his order in my favor. I felt real joy in having done good work, made careful and reasonable arguments, and successfully persuaded the judge that my position was the right one. As I walked back from the bench holding the judge's order, I felt like an attorney for the first time.

At Centro, I familiarized myself with both affirmative and defensive federal immigration law. I completed EOIR 42A applications for cancellation of removal of lawful permanent residents, USCIS I-589 political asylum petitions, U-visas for victims of trafficking and violence, and deportation defense research. I interviewed dozens of clients and represented several at administrative hearings. For example, I successfully represented clients at a bond hearing and cancellation of removal hearing, and I argued a successful motion at an unaccompanied minor asylum case.

I also spend many late nights working at Centro's evening clinics in housing, employment, and immigration law. At the clinics, I conducted intakes, mostly with Spanish-speaking Latino immigrant clients. After identifying statutes and cases relevant to the client's particular issues, I would summarize the client's legal options for a supervising attorney. I truly enjoyed meeting with clients and offering them legal support. After a grueling week of work, the clinics never failed to remind me that my difficulties pale in comparison to my clients' realities, and that my hard work in law school and at a summer internship can result in a rewarding job in the future.

I am incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for awarding me this fellowship, thanks to which my living expenses posed a lesser burden during my unpaid internship. I was able to concentrate on the job at hand, and it led to an experience that has shaped my legal career. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Martin
Boalt Hall