

August 31, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I would like to thank you for the Legal Services Fellowship grant that Equal Justice America (EJA) generously awarded me for my summer work at the Central American Resource Center in Los Angeles. The grant helped significantly in offsetting my expenses in order to provide legal services for indigent refugee children, and alleviate the overwhelming need for counsel for this particular demographic in Los Angeles. Had it not been for EJA's assistance, engaging in the critical and meaningful work I did this summer with the same level of dedication would not have been possible.

The Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) is a grassroots, community-based organization that caters to the Central American diaspora living in the United States. Aside from providing other resources such as citizenship classes and community organizing leadership and space, CARECEN helps migrants from Central America and other regions in a wide array of immigration matters, including family-based and humanitarian petitions. I worked in the Unaccompanied Children Representation project under the principal supervision of Eryk Escobar, the former supervising director of the project. I assisted all of the attorneys who worked in this project, and each took a role in directly supervising my work.

As a law clerk at CARECEN, I had the opportunity to assist approximately twenty-one individuals with a myriad of aspects of their immigration matters. Because of the demographic the project I worked under aimed to serve, most of the cases I worked on related to Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) petitions, as well as petitions for asylum. All of my clients were from either Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, or El Salvador, which means that I gained skills and knowledge in constructing arguments based on the diverse but similar conditions in each of these countries.

Even though I have done humanitarian immigration work for years, this was the first time I learned how to work on special immigrant juvenile cases. In particular, I helped work on a handful of SIJS cases with distinct legal theories and at different stages of the process. I drafted declarations, filled out State Court forms related to custody orders and SIJS findings, filled USCIS forms, and researched and drafted memoranda on points and authorities arguing in favor of SIJS findings and custody orders. The most memorable of these cases is that of a female child whose father had died and for whose case we were arguing that he had constructively abandoned her upon his death. This argument was for a memorandum for State Court, and the new experience highlighted for me the important intersection between family and immigration law in many, if not the majority, of the immigration cases pursued by the influx of unaccompanied

minors we continue to see today. Since these bureaucratic processes can be quite lengthy, I was not able to see the end product of my labor in these SIJS cases.

Perhaps the most exhilarating aspect of my fellowship, both because of the substance and because I was able to see the end result, was the opportunity to work on asylum briefs and submissions. I worked on asylum cases with diverse legal theories, including gang persecution cases with a new theory that I had not argued before in my previous asylum work. This new theory came up in two of my asylum brief assignments for young men from El Salvador and Honduras who had been targeted by gangs. Immigration Judges and asylum officers have routinely rejected cases with gang-related persecution claims, which has forced advocates to be creative in their arguments. As country conditions research becomes updated, it can benefit asylum legal theories that have been rejected in the past, which from my perspective is what was beginning to happen here, as light has been shed on the ties between gangs and political parties in Central America. Even though these cases did not win on that argument, it was a polished argument that is stronger than ever and ready for more refining. Ultimately, those cases were both approved on other bases, and I was very happy to learn they were approved since had worked with the clients personally and it was evident that they truly feared losing their lives upon returning to their home countries.

My summer experience at CARECEN Los Angeles not only impacted my clients, but it also contributed to my growth as a future lawyer. In addition to becoming familiar with the Los Angeles courts and engaging in creative lawyering, I also have a better sense of the largest gaps in representation of refugees and immigrants, which has helped me brainstorm ideas on how to overcome those gaps in future projects.

These are all but a few examples of the remarkable work the EJA fellowship made possible, but they are powerful anecdotes that exemplify the enriching experience I had at CARECEN. The benefits that the clients and I have reaped are all thanks to you and the EJA fellowship. Thank you very much for your support.

Sincerely,

Héctor Ruiz  
UC Hastings, Class of 2017