

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

August 7, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben:

My fellowship at Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach (APILO) has been nothing short of amazing. As a law clerk, I was able to help our clients fight evictions through the housing project and gain status in the United States through the immigration project. I also worked on family law and domestic violence cases in order to learn more about different areas of law.

With regard to the housing project, I primarily helped low-income tenants fight unlawful detainers, i.e. evictions, in housing court. I met with and interviewed clients in order to gain a better understanding of their problem and construct defenses they could use in court. I found this initial step to be the most vital because it allowed me to learn their story and thus, become a better advocate for their needs. For example, by listening to one of our client's concerns, I helped my supervisor secure a settlement deal for a client who had cancer and endured domestic violence from her landlord. In addition, we encouraged a landlord attorney to give one of our clients a behavioral stipulation rather than a move-out order. I will never forget his gratitude towards us after the settlement deal. He thanked us repeatedly, was almost in tears, and told us that we were the reason he was not going to sleep on the streets tonight. The housing project was particularly important to me because I knew we were going to help clients with the most basic necessity, housing.

In the immigration project, I worked on asylum law, naturalization, and violence against women applications. The asylum applications I worked on were extremely challenging because of the horrific violence and persecution that our clients faced in their home country. Our office was able to help numerous women who endured years of the worst type of violence obtain status in the United States. I remember during only my third day of work, I met with two sisters who faced threats of rape by gang members. For two hours, I had to ask them to relive their experiences so I could write their declarations for their asylum applications. These young girls had not even reached the age of 18 and yet have already seen the most dreadful acts of humankind. During my meetings with these sisters, I saw firsthand how much our clients relied on their attorneys for their livelihood. I learned how vital our role was in their lives because of the harm they could experience if they were forced to return to their country. I felt a tremendous amount of pressure, but also felt that I had an obligation to use the law to ensure that their story is heard.

In all, my fellowship at APILO prepared me extremely well by equipping me with the skills I need to be a compassionate and service-orientated attorney. I learned the value in having culturally competent attorneys for our clients in order to serve them more effectively. This

fellowship further validated my desire to serve my community and ensure that everyone, regardless of their socio-economic background, gets their day in court.

Sincerely,

Kristine Avena
UC Hastings, 2019

ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER LEGAL OUTREACH
(Formerly NIHONMACHI LEGAL OUTREACH)

August 21, 2017

Dear Dan Ruben:

We are writing this letter on behalf of Kristine Avena, a participant of the Equal Justice America Fellowship program for the summer of 2017. Ms. Avena was a law clerk with the housing project and the immigration project at API Legal Outreach (“APILO”) for the summer term, and based upon her work with both teams, we are pleased to offer the Equal Justice America Fellowship program with a positive evaluation.

In her time with us, Ms. Avena proved to be extremely interested in and dedicated to providing holistic legal services to low income minority clients. She is a diligent worker, is quick to learn, and has a genuine desire to learn the ins and outs of the law – in order to provide the best services possible. This is particularly clear to us after watching her interact with our clients, many of whom are in traumatic and terrifying situations. As a direct services program, our staff are often the first people that our clients speak to about their past experiences and current legal situations. We often tend to be their only source of accurate legal information; considering we are often the only resource for monolingual individuals.

In observing Ms. Avena’s work over the summer, the housing team noted that she was quick to accurately evaluate the legal and social service needs of our clients undergoing an eviction, and then take appropriate follow up action. She showed initiative in her work and took on a great deal of responsibility within the housing project (including client interviews, writing correspondence to opposing counsel, help in drafting motions such as a motion for summary judge, and prepping discovery). She worked very well with team members and was a joy to have as a colleague – which is a valuable quality on a small and hard pressed staff that struggles with many demands and little time.

While addressing clients’ direct legal issues is the core of APILO’s work, a successful advocate will go above and beyond the legal issues at hand, providing “holistic” legal services that advocates for the client more comprehensively than simply dealing with the legal problem that is presented. Much of this is due to the fact that most of the clients who find their way to our office do not have a comprehensive understanding of their legal situation beyond a very rudimentary level of understanding. In addressing this particular problem, Ms. Avena clearly showed the proper initiative in serving clients as people as opposed to simply solving legal puzzles presented by whoever happened to find his/her way to our office. On several occasions, Ms. Avena not only identified issues that the client had not realized at the time, but then also worked with the client to address these hidden issues that the client had not considered before meeting with us. Her ability to analyze complex legal issues with the proper nuance and detail was far beyond our

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baseline, but it is Ms. Avena's ability to empathize with and advocate for our clients as people beyond the legal issues that they present that will ultimately allow her to be very effective in her legal career going forward.

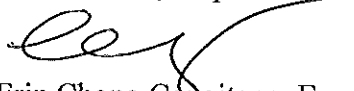
As part of the immigration team, Ms. Avena assisted in completing and submitting applications with the USCIS under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Ms. Avena showed commitment to our community by assisting our team during drop-in clinics and conducting intakes throughout the summer and presented individual intakes during our legal staff meeting. She also took on legal research assignment and provided our team with comprehensive legal memorandum. Needless to say, Ms. Avena will be greatly missed by our staff.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and should you have any questions about Ms. Avena's work with APILO, please do not hesitate to contact us: Hannah Kim at Hkim@apilegaloutreach.org ; Erin Chong Gangitano at Ecgangitano@apilegaoutreach.org; or Jason Truong at Jtruong@apilegaloutreach.org or by calling (415) 567-6255.

Sincerely,



Hannah Kim, Esq



Erin Chong Gangitano, Esq.



Jason Truong, Esq.