

Nathalie Camarena
RE: MALDEF Summer '16 Summer Fellowship
Date: August 31, 2016

This summer I was privileged enough to work with the Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund (MALDEF), the nation's leading non-profit Latino civil rights organization. The firm has three main areas of litigation; employment, education and voting rights. As an intern for the voting right division of the firm most of the tasks I was asked to perform were legal writing and research based. I drafted research memos analyzing the voting behavior of local government boards in counties across California to ensure that they are compliance with the California Voting Rights Act. The research memos that I produced were then handed over to the managing attorney who ultimately decided if there were grounds to pursue with a demand letter.

A governing board should reflect the diversity of the community it serves. California is one of the most diverse states in the nation, yet hardly any of that diversity has manifested itself into our local governing boards. Having a group of elected officials that are an adequate representation of the communities they serve is essential in creating policy that will best serve the interests of that community. Equal representation helps re-balance the scale of justice by allowing every member of society to have a fair opportunity to have a direct impact in local politics by becoming a part of its governing board.

I did not have direct communication with the community members that benefited from the research that I conducted to know that I made a real-world impact. The legal advocacy of voting rights does not have an immediate reward, but instead sets the foundation for a new

generation of leaders from diverse backgrounds to enter into positions of influence that will allow them to make decisions on issues that are directly affecting their communities. Leaders whom may have previously thought a political career was unattainable merely because there was simply no one that looked like them in governing boards.

I am eternally thankful to EJA, its donors, and the organization as a whole for allowing me to partake in this experience. It has equipped me with the knowledge and experience essential to fulfill my dream of legal advocacy.

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