

Dear Dan Ruben,

My time with Workers' Rights Department at LRCL involved much more than I thought it would. I spent more time with clients, performed a wider array of work, and was able to make bigger contributions to cases and clients than I had hoped for in the short time that I was there.

Most of the clients that LRCL serves are undocumented individuals from Latin America. I am sure that this is common knowledge, but it is a rough time to be an undocumented person from Latin America. In addition to the wage theft and violations of labor laws that La Raza Cento Legal has been dealing with for years, there has been an uptick in the use of immigration-related threats in coercing workers not to pursue their rights. This was heartbreaking to see. These events, however, gave us the chance to test some more recent laws. For example, there is a law in California that makes it illegal for employers to take any employment action regarding an employee on the basis of having checked that employee's legal status except at given times. There is a penalty for doing so specified in the law, but it is not specified in the law whether the penalty goes to the enforcement agency or to the individual. We were able to try these and other cases with such penalties to learn how the state will handle them. Even though we were not able to convince the court to give the fee as an award to the injured in every case, we succeeded in some. We were able to find out which the laws the court would construe this way and we are now better positioned to represent clients in similar positions going forward.

My work at La Raza Centro Legal started when clients walked in the door and went through the time when they left with their checks. I conducted intake interviews, wrote memos outlining the details of their cases, pitched cases to the managing attorney, did research and built claims for clients we represented, reached out to employers for settlement before filing a claim, filed claims, and pursued claims through hearings.

Even in the early steps of my work, conducting the intake interviews, I found that I could provide real value to my clients. In some cases I was able to connect them with the exact resources they needed to solve their problems, and in other cases I was able to provide some background and perspective on a foreign legal system and put their minds at ease. In one instance I was able to get a client on the line with EDD so that he could start getting his unemployment benefits. In another case I was able to put a woman who had been sexually assaulted at work in contact with an organization that supports immigrant women who are victims of crime and get her started on the path to getting a U-visa. Another man I was able to direct to small claims court, and another I was able to advise on how to proceed with HR without filing a claim and jeopardizing his employment. I heard from numerous clients after the intake interview that simply getting to talk to someone and get some brief advice on how to proceed was immensely helpful.

In my work at La Raza I got to stand up for people who were treated very poorly and were unable to take any action on their own behalf. One of our clients was an undocumented immigrant who did not know how to read. His employer had been forging his name on documents and systematically underpaying him, and he had never been able to tell because he

could not read the documents himself. Being able to take up his case and vindicate his rights made me realize the power of my education, my voice, and my work in my community and in the world. I can make a difference, and can help to make the world the better place that my clients deserve.

I am very grateful for Equal Justice America's help in being able to do this work in the community. The experience allowed me to grow as a student of law and allowed free-of-cost legal services to reach many more individuals than would otherwise have been possible.

Sincerely,
Travis Smith
UC Hastings, Class of 2019