

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road
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Midlothian, VA 23112

October 10, 2017

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you so much for your support of my work this summer.

When I accepted a summer internship on the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) at the Legal Aid Society (LAS) in New York, I knew the work was important. LAS is one of three organizations in New York City who have contracts to provide universal representation to detained immigrants in deportation proceedings. I spent my summer writing affidavits, researching country conditions, writing briefs on the criminal-immigration law nexus, and observing court hearings. But it was not until I came back to California, and saw what deportation proceedings are like for immigrants without attorneys, that I fully grasped the importance of what LAS does.

Since I left New York, I've returned to California and begun volunteer work at the Adelanto ICE Detention Facility, about two hours outside of Los Angeles. The differences for immigrants detained in New York and in California could not be more stark. In Adelanto, detained immigrants in deportation proceedings must either pay exorbitant sums for a private attorney or attempt to navigate the impossibly complex system on their own. The only free representation offered is to those who suffer from such severe mental illness as to be unable to answer simple questions (referred to as *Franco* cases, for the federal court case that granted this right). The result is that many people who have legitimate fears of returning to their country, or who may otherwise qualify for legal status in the United States, may still be deported simply because they do not know how to assert their claim.

In New York, each detained immigrant is given an attorney free of charge that visits them in detention, contacts family members, prepares legal arguments in order to fight their case. I saw first hand the difference it makes. One client, a Dominican green-card holder with a US citizen child, was picked up by ICE for a 10-year-old conviction. Using legal precedent from a federal district court case that LAS itself had won just a few months before, we successfully defended him from deportation. A complex case like his would be nearly prohibitively expensive for your average person; we were able to secure a win, and thus keep a family in tact, at no cost to him.

We were not without losses. One client was denied voluntary departure (and the chance to one day return to his children) and deported, despite our hours spent writing affidavits, rallying family members to his hearings, and collecting letters in

his support. Others remained in detention for six months or more while judges decided their likely unwinnable cases. I greatly appreciated the candor with which the attorneys at LAS spoke of the emotional and physical toll that doing detention work had on them.

My experience in New York and my work since have committed me anew to the fight to defend the most vulnerable classes of immigrants from deportation. It is not easy, but it is right. I greatly appreciate Equal Justice America's support in making this summer possible.

Sincerely,

Kate Lewis
UCLA, Class of 2019