

Adia A. Mercado-Montero

August 31, 2016

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you very much for the funding Equal Justice America gave me this summer. I had a rich experience at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA), and I will share with you some of the work I performed. While I worked on sensitive legal issues that I cannot discuss here, I will share with you information about the population I served and exclude details on the causes of action I analyzed.

My work at TRLA surrounded serving residents of the *colonias* in southern Texas. The colonias are communities that developed over the last 60 or so years as a response to the absence of affordable housing and opportunities to own a home without an ample income. Many colonias residents built their homes with their own hands out of spare building materials. Historically the colonias lacked basic infrastructural services such as electricity, running water, plumbing, and garbage collection. Today, many colonias comprise brick homes with electricity and plumbing as well as some basic infrastructure. However, many colonias continue to suffer from seasonal flooding that causes infectious illness, rodent infestations, and insanitary conditions. The work I performed resulted in a 60-page memo and illustrated a legal framework for seeking solutions to the colonias' flooding problems.

It meant a lot to me to work on a project of such importance. Not only is this a human rights issue and an affordable housing issue, it also poses an environmental justice concern. I appreciated the opportunity to use my privilege as a law student to create a template for advocating for the needs of a community that has been ignored and neglected for most of its existence. Thank you very much for the opportunity to serve this community and to receive financial support in the process.

Sincerely,

Adia Mercado-Montero
University of Texas School of Law, May 2017