

Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America

August 29, 2016

**RE: Equal Justice America Fellowship**

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thanks to the Equal Justice America Fellowship, I was able to spend my summer working with the Immigrant and Workers' Rights (IWR) Practice Group at LAF (f/k/a Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago). LAF provides free legal services to people living in poverty in Cook County, Illinois, including eligible immigrants who are victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. My work this summer focused on this population and I spent the majority of my internship assisting clients with U-visa and T-visa applications, which provide a much-needed form of immigration relief to survivors of certain qualifying crimes and human trafficking. Although I knew before coming to LAF that I wanted to pursue a career in immigration law, my fellowship experience has solidified my commitment to working in the public interest, specifically with low-income immigrants who need legal aid.

As part of my internship, I was tasked with preparing clients' statements in support of their U and T-visa applications. In every case, these individuals had suffered physical, emotional, and/or verbal abuse at the hands of a domestic partner, spouse, or employer, and were now cooperating or willing to cooperate with law enforcement authorities to help seek justice against the perpetrator. Their stories were heartbreaking to read and even harder to hear in person. For many of these clients, a U or T-visa is the only option for obtaining legal status in the United States after having endured serious harm while in this country. However, getting one of these visas is a challenging and laborious process filled with legal and administrative obstacles. Being represented by an attorney makes a huge difference, particularly for clients who are unfamiliar with the U.S. immigration system and who do not speak English as their native language. All of the individuals I worked with this summer fell into this category.

One of the most memorable experiences I had was while assisting a client who was a victim of human trafficking in the Chicago area. For nearly a year, she endured emotional and verbal abuse from her trafficker, a family acquaintance she had looked to for help after being left alone in the U.S. by her former husband. She eventually left the trafficker's home, and was now seeking to build a stable and independent life on her own. After interviewing her, I presented her case to a supervisory attorney who requested additional information needed to determine whether the client had a sufficiently strong case to apply for a T-visa. I conducted a follow-up interview with her to get the remaining details of her story. This was clearly a difficult experience for her, as she had to re-tell and therefore re-live the suffering she had dealt with on a daily basis. At the end of our meeting, I had to advise her that we still did not know whether we would be able to take her case, but that I was optimistic and would present the new information at our practice group's next case acceptance meeting. Fortunately, I was able to call her the following week and inform her that we would be accepting her T-visa case at no cost to her. The joy in her voice and the gratitude she expressed when I told her the good news will stay with me for a long time. On the most challenging of workdays, it is this kind of client interaction that makes it all worthwhile to me.

In addition to conducting client interviews, I also completed visa application forms, drafted visa cover letters, and prepared memos on legal issues relevant to survivors of domestic violence and U-visa applicants. This work helped to broaden my knowledge in this area of immigration law and also raised my awareness of the many issues that surround domestic violence victims, apart from their visa applications. For instance, one case required me to look into the possibility of an identity change for a client. I knew nothing about name and Social Security number changes, but quickly learned that this can be a very important measure for individuals seeking to escape their abusers and to fully remove themselves from a domestic violence situation. As part of my research for this case, I encountered a significant amount of proverbial red tape when trying to get my questions answered and came across much conflicting information. For a law student intern with the time, resources, and energy needed to do tedious research, this was challenging. It is hard to imagine how difficult, frustrating, and potentially impossible this could be for a person with limited resources who is trying to free herself from a domestic abuser. However, with LAF's help, this client will be able to make an informed decision whether to pursue an identity change and will know what implications this may have for her life.

When it comes to immigration cases, an attorney can mean the difference between a client obtaining legal status to stay in the U.S. with his or her family and being returned to a potentially life-threatening situation in his or her home country. It can mean the difference between seeking justice against one's abuser and being sent home where the U.S. legal system is no longer accessible and the abuser enjoys impunity. My internship with LAF has further reinforced my desire to work with underprivileged immigrant populations and provide legal assistance in an area of law that can be confusing, intimidating, and indecipherable for those who are unfamiliar with it.

I am very grateful to EJA for helping make my internship this summer possible and for its commitment to delivering legal services to those who need them most. My experience with LAF was both rewarding and intellectually challenging, and I look forward to continuing in this field of law after graduation.

Sincerely,

Martha Muldowney  
University of Washington School of Law  
J.D. Candidate 2017



Equal justice starts here.

September 21, 2016

Mr. Dan Ruben  
Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Rd.  
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I am a staff attorney with LAF's Immigrants and Workers' Rights Practice Group. Equal Justice America Fellow Martha Muldowney interned with our office from June – August 2016. Martha was a pleasure to work with and a great asset to our practice group.

While at LAF, Martha primarily worked on immigration cases for clients applying for the T and/or U visa. She worked on all aspects of the visa application, including but not limited to client interviews, taking affidavits, prepping clients for interviews with the FBI and U.S. Department of Labor, requesting U visa certifications, completing T and U visa paperwork, and researching country conditions. Martha completed well-written, thorough drafts of two T visa applications, including cover letters, affidavits, forms, and all accompanying documents. She presented cases at the weekly case acceptances meetings in a clear and cogent manner and always asked thoughtful follow-up questions. She also communicated regularly with the USCIS Vermont Service Center regarding pending applications.

In addition to her work on visa applications, Martha researched and wrote memos on a variety of topics throughout the summer. One of the memos involved researching the nuances of U visa eligibility for parents of minors who are victims of a U visa qualifying crime. This memo was very well written and useful in our work.

Martha also took advantage of opportunities to observe immigration court proceedings and client interviews with various federal agencies. In July, she participated in a two-day outreach trip to downstate, IL. She distributed know-your-rights materials and conducted outreach with agricultural workers seeking assistance with legal issues.

Martha is very hard-working, professional, and diligent in her work. We greatly appreciated her eagerness to learn and willingness to take on a variety of tasks. Martha is passionate about immigrants' rights and will thrive as an attorney in this area.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (312) 229-6073 if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

Amy Martin  
Staff Attorney  
LAF