

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

I first want to thank you for the generous donation that allowed me to perform critical work at Colorado Legal Services this summer. The fellowship ensured that I could further my long-term goal of serving the public through law.

For the entire summer, I worked with the ID Project in the Denver office of Colorado Legal Services. The ID Project was formed after the passage of the Real ID Act and a similar Colorado state law that requires a showing of “lawful presence”—birth certificate, citizenship certificate, green card, etc.—in order to receive a Colorado state ID or state-funded public benefits (one effect of which is that lawful presence is effectively required to receive public housing anywhere in Colorado). The staff for the project consists of three attorneys (including my supervisor, Bonnie Sarkar) and a paralegal, who serve the entire state. Much of the project’s advocacy is informal—we are doing our job most effectively when our clients do not have to go to court.

Because of the primarily informal nature of the work, I was able to manage a caseload with little direct supervision. After intake at the beginning of the week we would divide up the clients and I would immediately look through the file to ascertain what records the client had, and what we might be able to get. The basic problem the project faces, and is designed to address, is that poor Coloradans who are legally present in the country (and in many cases, were born here) do not have the means or the access to the legal system to show documentation to prove their lawful presence.

In simple cases, this might mean just ordering a birth certificate. However, cases were often complicated when the client’s history was incomplete. Many clients grew up in difficult circumstances, and may have gone through multiple adoptions, or immigrated as a child and their parents never ensured they had the proper documentation. Every case posed unique and unforeseeable challenges. In addition to my caseload, I also had the opportunity to write memoranda on complicated questions of immigration law that affected our clients.

The most memorable case from the summer involved a client, whose name I will keep confidential, who had come to us more than a year earlier, looking for a state ID. When he was born, his mother used a different last name on his birth certificate to protect his biological father, who was married to a different woman. Yet at no point in the client’s life did he ever go by the last name on his birth certificate. To compound the problem, about 20 years ago, the client was released from prison with a Department of Corrections ID that misstated the year he was born (by nine years). By the time I arrived, we had secured a legal name change in Colorado for the client, but the state of Montana (where he was born) would not release his original birth certificate.

The client lived about two hours from Denver, so I never met him in person, but I spoke with him on the phone on a weekly basis. Besides obtaining the birth certificate from Montana, we had to obtain proof of his correct date of birth to get a Social Security card (which was required along with the birth certificate to obtain the ID). Unfortunately I had to leave about a week before we would have everything together.

Throughout, I was struck by our client's perseverance and sense of humor. With him, and almost all of our clients, they were in situations where they could not obtain an ID, a basic requirement of modern life, for reasons that are no fault of their own. Because they were poor, they were the collateral damage of laws meant to target national security threats. The experience made me think more deeply about how economic inequality affects the poor in so many subtle and unexpected ways. And in the process, it strengthened my resolve to focus on using my degree to advocate for the most downtrodden and underserved in our society. And your assistance made this possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Clayton Pasley".

Clayton "Tex" Pasley
University of Virginia