

August 30, 2015

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

Dear Mr. Dan Ruben,

I want to thank this committee for providing the necessary financial resources for me to pursue my interest in non-profit legal services without having to experience an economic hardship. This summer, I worked with the African Advocacy Network (AAN). During the eleven weeks, I learned a great deal about immigration law and policy, myself, and the legal profession. Moreover, this financial blessing allowed me to apprentice with a talent team of dedicated immigration practitioners where giving your utmost to a client is a standard office practice.

The AAN is the only community-based organization dedicated to providing direct services to the growing African and Afro Caribbean Diaspora in the United States. This San Francisco and Greater Bay Area community-based organization provides legal services for Affirmative asylum applications, Adjustment of Status, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Naturalization, VAWA, DACA, Family based petitions, consular process, working authorization applications, Extension of stay, Non immigrant visa applications, and other immigration services.

To this end, I assisted the AAN team on a wide spectrum of their immigration practice. I had the opportunity to ensure that multiple clients' TPS petitions were extended. I also gained significant exposure to the logistics of a U Visa application and VAWA petitions. To me, this work and having had the opportunity to work closely with the governor's inner cabinet members regarding economic and legal issues facing the African and Afro Caribbean Diaspora in California, was extremely rewarding. Additionally, this work validated my interest not only to return to indigent legal work next summer, but allowed me to realize that this is the area of law that I would like to specialize in.

There were two particular cases that made me appreciate the magnitude and scope of my work. I had been working at the AAN for nearly two weeks, when I conducted an intake of a Ghanaian man. This client came to our organization because his siblings had threatened his life, his wife, and his two young boys. This client took the death threats seriously because his family had already killed his older brother, and my client's house had recently been firebombed. My client grew up in a traditional African Muslim family that refused to accept his conversion to Christianity and his marriage to a Christian woman. According to my client, his family with the help of a few villagers, killed his older brother because his brother converted to Christianity and married a Christian woman. My client informed me that after his house was firebombed he asked his church for assistance to flee his native homeland. For nearly seven months, my client has not seen his wife and children who were in hiding in the Ivory Coast. I realized that this

client had suffered a significant amount of mental and physical trauma. Thus, I enrolled him in an indigent medical services program. I also found him a weekly local food bank. My client accepted the fact that he could not return to Ghana or relocate in West Africa. To help this client legally, I researched Islamic law, Ghanaian criminal law, and learned about rural religious life in West Africa in general and Ghana in particular. I even interviewed a local university professor on West African Islamic practices. All the knowledge I acquired helped me develop this client's asylum declaration. The client and I collaborated in a meaningful way to get documents from Ghana, such as the property deed and pictures from the police department. We also worked with the Ghanaian Judicial Service for the authentication of a death certificate. We completed and filed my client's asylum declaration on my last day at the AAN. My client taught me that in Ghanaian culture to respect an elder means that you refer to the person as an "uncle" or "aunt." I learned to call my client uncle, and I realized I could not fail my uncle.

I also worked on a case that likely will be argued before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. My client was a lesbian from the Congo. In the Congo, this single mother was an underground LGBT political activist. She came to the Bay Area because she wanted to pursue her undergraduate education and live in community that respected the civil rights of LGBT people. Due to economic reasons, this client was unable to complete her undergraduate studies, which jeopardized her student visa status. While this client sought legal assistance to adjust her visa status she fell victim to inadequate representation. To make matters worse, this client appeared *pro se* before the Board of Immigration Appeals Court and was denied. Thus, when the client came to me she was facing a deportation order. As time and financial resources were scarce I had to draft two motions. First, the client needed to file a motion with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for a request for indigent appellate representation. This motion would support a motion for a stay on the deportation order. The client was awarded a stay on the deportation, while her case is being considered for pro bono representation. When I accompanied the client to deliver the motion to Court of Appeals, she told me that I had restored her hope after all she had been through.

This experience affected me in a profound way. I thank this committee for this invaluable experience. Moreover, without the generosity of your grant I would have never had this opportunity. Arguably, life at a legal aid clinic puts one in the fast lane of legal experience. This committee can rest assured that I am committed to the practice of indigent legal services. I believe my quote sums up my wonderful summer, *"It is an awesome feeling when a client comes to you, words almost cannot describe it. Something has happened in their past, which created the present problem, and the client trusts you to construct their future. You realize you cannot fail this person, because this client has placed his/her entire trust solely in you."*

Sincerely,

Whalen Peete  
University of California, Hastings College of the Law  
Class of 2017 – 2L



**African Advocacy Network**  
*Program of Dolores Street Community Services*  
938 Valencia St  
San Francisco, CA 94110

August 28, 2015

Dan Ruben

Equal Justice America

13540 East Boundary Road

Building II, Suite 204

Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, Whalen Peete worked under our supervision at the African Advocacy Network (AAN). The AAN is a community-based organization dedicated to providing direct services to the growing African and Afro Caribbean Diaspora in the San Francisco and Greater Bay Area. AAN's legal services include Affirmative asylum applications, Adjustment of Status, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Naturalization, VAWA, DACA, Family based petitions, consular process, working authorization applications, Extension of stay, Non immigrant visa applications, and other immigration services.

To this end, AAN is also committed to the basic belief that every immigrant has the right to dignity and protection under law. Whalen's contribution to this organization exemplified this belief. During his eleven-week tenure we can attest that Whalen grew into the ideal intern. Initially, I gave Whalen some light responsibilities to see how he could handle the rigors of our non-profit. With that said, Whalen began by researching applicable case law, client scheduling and intakes, and attending meetings with donors and the public. However, Whalen is the type of intern that realizes that more needs to be done immediately because our client's have complex legal needs. Thus, Whalen was assigned to a team to work on an asylum petition. On the team, Whalen researched and drafted the supporting country reports and assisted with the declaration letter. By the end of the summer, Whalen was independently overseeing three asylum petitions. Moreover, Whalen helped research, draft, and file a client's deportation appeal to the ninth circuit. He also assisted three clients on a U-Visa, and helped file countless adjustment of status applications.

Arguably, your generous gift to Whalen allowed him to appreciate, struggle with, and develop strategies for the complexities of immigration law. As Whalen learned to apply the law to a multitude of immigration matters, Whalen also learned a great deal about non-profit financial management. To this end, Whalen participated in meetings with our donors and several cabinet members of governor of California's office. These meetings allowed Whalen to conceptualize the demands of non-profit work, donor financial accountability, and community interest all play a significant part in the scope of services our organization may offer. This is an invaluable piece of non-profit financial survival, and he participated in this first-hand. Also, Whalen has strong public speaking skills, which our organization utilized at several community outreach events. Moreover, Whalen has a gift of having a calm and soothing approach in his client intakes.

This organization, our clients, and the city of San Francisco benefited from the work Whalen did this summer. Honestly, he became such an invaluable teammate that we hope he will join us not only next summer, but after law school permanently. Regardless, of where he goes in life, he will make an impact in the field of immigration law.

Equal Justice America, thank you for the resources you provided Whalen. Because of Equal Justice American, Whalen and countless other law students like Whalen, could to contribute to the legal field and help change the lives of people for the better. The AAN is highly appreciative for your assistance and cannot thank you enough for what you and Whalen did for us this summer. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Charles Jackson

BIA Accredited Representative

African Advocacy Network

A Program of Dolores Street Community Services

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