

November 7, 2018

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

During the summer of 2018, I interned at Legal Assistance Foundation (LAF) in Chicago and worked on U-visa petitions. I assisted victims of domestic violence or other crimes who sought to adjust their immigration status. I am pleased to report that these projects exposed me to working with USCIS and made me a stronger advocate on behalf of individuals and families.

My internship at LAF allowed me to explore various areas of law related to immigration and worker's rights. Initially, I sat in on client interviews, court appearances, and general case conferences. Quickly, my responsibilities evolved to responding to client inquiries, researching legal issues, and advising clients while under supervision. In the end, I worked on over 110 different assignments.

Some of the most impactful assignments involved actual clients whose lives depended on our ardent advocacy. For example, LAF maintains monthly community legal clinics, and there I advised clients on issues related to housing, contracts, benefits, employment, and child custody. I participated in these clinics twice each summer month and because of my bilingual ability (English/Spanish), I assisted mainly Spanish-speaking clients. On one occasion, a client sought our assistance to obtain full custody of her son. As soon as the client realized that I spoke Spanish, she shared with me her story. This gave me an intimate look at her concerns, much of which related to safety and finances. This also allowed me to explain to her how the law in Illinois addresses the issue of parental responsibility. It was apparent to me that our connection allowed her to trust me to provide her answers that considered her cultural and language needs. This experience showed me too that lawyering is beyond mechanical knowledge, and instead, requires understanding and comprehension of cultural and language barriers, and ultimately it is about trust.

Similarly, I also worked with two victims of domestic abuse and drafted their USCIS U-visa applications. There too, I realized just how important it was for clients to trust lawyers so to build the best case for them. One of my main responsibility with these clients involved crafting their personal statements. Due to the nature of these cases, this was a difficult task for clients because it required them to access traumatic memories. Yet, guided by my supervisors, the clients and I successfully explored their experiences and we drafted statements that spoke to the heart and purpose of the law: to protect victims of domestic abuse perpetrated by American citizens.

The other victim also posed unique challenges to our advocacy due to both her personal medical issues, as well as the circumstances related to her ability to cooperate. During our first discussion over the phone, I notice her hesitancy over providing us with information. Her case was at this point on appeal and this was our last hope to save her from deportation, yet, the client dismissed the seriousness of her case and time and time again, she regularly responded with, “I don’t know” to requests. I suggested to my supervisor to invite the client for an in-person meet and discuss her situation. It was at this meeting when I realized that her deep traumatic experience was the root of her hesitancy. She felt like no one understood her or care at all to fight for her. Because I met with the client alone, I shared with my supervisor that her case required unconventional thinking. As a result, I wrote letters to her family, doctors, and others who could vouch for her traumatic experience. We all knew that our strategy was a long shot. But a month after we submitted our petition to USCIS, our strategy worked, and the client was granted her U-visa status.

At the start of the summer, I felt unprepared to delve deeply in such impactful cases. However, the feeling quickly dissipated because I realized that these were precisely the reasons why I decided to go to law school. Too many families are hurting, and I just can’t sit on the sideline and allow numerous injustices to go unchallenged. This past summer reinvigorated in me my purpose and I am ready to meet this challenge.

I sincerely appreciate your continued support!

Best regards,

Salomon De Los Angeles
DePaul University College of Law
Expected Graduation Date: 2019.