

August 30, 2018

Dear Mr. Ruben,

I am writing to express my sincerest gratitude for granting me an Equal Justice America Fellowship. This summer I was a law clerk with the Dilley Pro Bono Project under Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid. This nonprofit provides legal services to mothers and their children who are seeking asylum in the United States, all from within a family detention center. This summer was the most impactful experience I have ever had.

I learned an immense amount about asylum law, and by the end of my externship I was advising volunteer immigration lawyers on the client's cases that they were preparing. In just the first week in Dilley, TX I interviewed and prepared 31 women for their credible fear interviews with asylum officers. I wrote a comparative memo comparing the old and new credible fear lesson plans that asylum officers follow, as well as comparing the credible fear and reasonable fear lesson plans, which an attorney used in court. I was also able to accompany women to their credible fear interviews, where I was able to suggest lines of questioning to the asylum officer and make a closing statement on the woman's behalf. After the first couple of weeks I felt like I was starting to master asylum law, which is when Jeff Sessions came down with *Matter of AB*, changing what it meant to have a successful asylum case.

Following *Matter of AB*, it became more difficult to prepare women for their interviews because the asylum office interpreted *Matter of AB* as stating that domestic violence and gang violence/threats are no longer acceptable basis for asylum. With this decision, we saw an increase in the number of negatives women received after their credible fear interviews. When a woman receives a negative, she can appeal it first with an immigration judge and if that fails, she can submit a Request for Reconsideration (RFR) to the asylum office. To help with this process, I wrote declarations for the women and prepared them to speak in court with the immigration officer. Additionally, I helped prepare briefs by gathering case law and country conditions for the legal arguments the attorneys would put forth. I also attended the court proceedings, which usually ended with an affirmation of the previous decision, meaning we

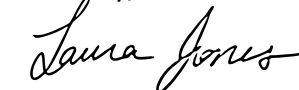
would then submit an RFR on the woman's behalf. After writing the declaration, collecting country conditions and case law to support the legal theory of why they should remain in the United States, I wrote RFRs for the women, which were submitted to the asylum office.

In addition to this work, I also worked with moms and kids while they were separated and after they were reunified. In one case, a woman and her children, who entered through a port of entry (meaning legal entry), had already received positive decisions for their credible fear interviews, when they were forcibly separated. The mother was sent to a detention center in a different part of Texas and the kids were put in ORR custody on the east coast. I was able to provide some legal services to the mom by writing declarations for her, and I spoke with the kids via whatsapp to answer questions they had and assure them that there were people fighting to get them back into their mother's custody. After the ACLU's mandate of family reunification came down, the family detention center in Dilley, TX received over 90 different reunified moms and kids. Many of the women had been forced to do their credible fear interview while they were separated from their children, and without access to legal services, so unsurprisingly many of them received negatives. I worked with the women to again prepare them for court, write declarations about both their cases and about the trauma they experienced while separated.

Throughout this summer I learned of the strength and resilience of mothers and children, while also realizing the depths that an administration will go in dehumanizing populations of people. This summer helped me to realize that I want to continue working in direct-services and to never lose hope, because people's strength will prevail.

I am so appreciative of the generosity of Equal Justice America, without this fellowship I would not have been able to dedicate my summer to this important work, it has truly impacted me and contributed to my legal education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Jones

UCLA School of Law, Class of 2020