

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

November 1, 2019

Dear Mr. Ruben:

From late August through mid-October, I worked at the Community Activism Law Alliance (CALA, which in recent weeks was renamed Beyond Legal Aid) as a summer law intern with the support of Equal Justice America. CALA is a small organization dedicated to providing not only legal aid services to poor and working-class Chicagoans, but also support and solidarity to community and activist organizations throughout the city. While many of these organizations are focused on issues related to immigrant communities—like many of CALA’s attorneys, I worked primarily on immigration cases—through its community partners CALA also works in housing, civil rights, family law, and other practice areas.

I was paired primarily with CALA’s senior immigration attorney Bindhu Vijayan, who was a fantastic source of knowledge of the many complexities of immigration law. From August through October, I assisted Bindhu in running CALA’s legal clinic at a partner organization in Round Lake, Illinois, the Mano a Mano Family Resource Center. There, we helped mostly Latin American immigrants in suburban Lake County with a full range of immigration issues. During these clinics, I conducted intakes, helped clients go over immigration forms, and assisted with Spanish-to-English interpretation. While we provided advice on naturalization, family petitions, and maintaining legal permanent resident status, however, our main priority was preparing complex removal defense cases, which few other organizations in the area take on. Many of the clients we saw at Mano a Mano were therefore people whose asylum or U Visa cases I also worked to prepare over many weeks while working at CALA, preparing briefs, cover letters, forms, and other legal documents, while also compiling evidence. On a few occasions, I also accompanied Bindhu and our clients to immigration court hearings in Chicago.

In addition to running the Mano a Mano clinic, I also worked on a number of other immigration cases with Bindhu, including that of a French-speaking asylum applicant from Burundi seeking to have his case heard earlier after waiting years under the current administration’s policies. With my French- and Spanish-language skills, I would often help communicate with clients from Francophone Africa, and also conduct screenings via CALA’s immigration helpline.

Finally, in keeping with CALA’s mission of providing holistic support to its activist partners, I participated on several occasions in demonstrations along with the rest of the organization’s staff. For example, we staged a press conference and protest outside of the Chicago ICE office where a client had been detained, and held a public meeting at city hall with the support of Chicago aldermen to support a bill of rights for senior citizens.

Overall, my time at CALA provided invaluable experience, both in the practice of immigration law and in community lawyering. I am grateful to EJA for its support for my work.

Sincerely,

Jacob Hamburger
University of Chicago Law School