

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

October 4, 2019

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I interned at HIAS Pennsylvania, an immigration legal services nonprofit serving the Greater Philadelphia region. I had the privilege of getting to know our clients well, as I took on several U-visa and initial asylum cases from intake to filing. I really enjoyed speaking to the clients and learning their life stories, and eventually translating those stories to the page of their status applications. Since immigration matters tend to involve the whole family of a client, I also treasured the opportunity to meet clients' loved ones and talk about what the case would mean to them as well. This really drove home the impact of losing (or gaining) immigration status on a person's life, and the ripple effects it has on the people and community surrounding them. Talking to potential new clients on the open intake lines was also unexpectedly one of my favorite tasks, and made me realize just how much I value working directly with individual clients.

I also gained in-depth writing experience, as I wrote a brief to the Board of Immigration Appeals challenging a client's denial of asylum and final order of deportation. This was a challenging but edifying task, and one that occupied much of the last weeks of my internship. I felt like I learned the relevant asylum law inside and out for the brief, and the act of writing was very helpful in retaining that knowledge beyond just the life of the assignment itself.

While I greatly enjoyed serving our clients, the experience also was helpful in confirming that pure immigration representation is probably not the career that I want to pursue going forward. As someone who previously worked in direct services in the criminal context, I realize now that I prefer criminal defense to the work that I did this summer. Immigration defense is more oriented towards forms and small tasks, and litigation on the merits of the issues seems to be few and far between. I loved the narrative aspect of the work, and the intimacy of working

closely with clients, but the everyday tasks of the attorneys I worked with weren't what I envisioned myself doing long-term. However, HIAS was an incredibly warm and welcoming office, and I never regretted my choice to work there this summer. If anything, I found it more helpful to eliminate a potential career path than if I walked away with yet another possibility to consider. I appreciate EJA's help enormously in making that possible, and I thank the organization for its generosity.

Sincerely,

John Santoro

University of Pennsylvania