

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you so much for the Equal Justice America scholarship. It helped me pay for room and board during my summer with the Michigan Law Human Trafficking Clinic. At the Clinic this summer I was able to directly represent victims of both sex and labor trafficking in a variety of issues including social services and benefits, family law, immigration law, and criminal law. I also conducted outreach to governmental and international organizations in an effort to effectuate coordination on issues of Human Trafficking. The practical, in-depth legal work that I was able to accomplish during my time at the Clinic will greatly influence and shape my future law practice and involvement in pro bono work.

One of my favorite parts of the Clinic was the vast amount of responsibility that was awarded to each of us. Right before the 4th of July weekend, I received a new client who had a court date that next week regarding child support payments. I learned the client's entire history, viewed her file at the courthouse, and corresponded with her regularly until her court date. On her court date, my supervisor let me take the lead, and I prevented the client from receiving time in prison. I argued that she had recently gotten her life together, that she was not at fault for delinquent payments, and that she would start paying regularly.

Although the client had come to us because she was a victim of sex trafficking, I was able to help her with a variety of disparate legal issues. After spending so much time with the client and her case file, it was rewarding to know a case fully and become the expert. Not to mention, the preparation and experience at the courthouse was something that most law students don't get after only one year of law school.

I was also able to represent victims of labor trafficking. A group of girls and young women from western Africa were trafficked to the United States and forced to work by adults from that same country. After many years of forced servitude, the police arrested and prosecuted the traffickers. Several of the victims are clients of the Clinic, and I was tasked with helping them receive Permanent Resident Status (Green Cards) and passports. In order to travel outside of the United States with a Green Card, you must also have a passport from your native country. The difficulty was that the traffickers brought the women to the United States with fraudulent passports, and the African country would not acknowledge that these women were citizens.

So I pursued every possible avenue, from talking to almost every member of the embassy, to corresponding with Congressional offices, to helping the client and her family travel to Washington, D.C. to apply in person. Finally, the first of the women received her passport,

enabling her to study abroad in college. This left a positive precedent for the other trafficking victims to get their passports. These cases were indicative of where human trafficking policy is in our current global landscape, and I felt as if I actually did my small part in influencing the way others outside of the Clinic thought about human trafficking after solving the passport issue and talking to many different people and offices.

My experience at the Human Trafficking Clinic this summer was not only rewarding, it was also a lot of fun. I was able to meet many interesting people with enthralling and sad life stories. I was able to hone my legal Spanish skills because many of my clients only spoke Spanish – it was a welcome challenge to comprehend their stories and help them understand the U.S. legal system. And I was able to work with three of the most knowledgeable attorneys on the subject of human trafficking, who struck a perfect balance between instructing and letting me figure things out for myself. It was a great summer, and I just hope that I contributed as much as I feel like I learned at the Human Trafficking Clinic.

Sincerely,

Amy Bergstraesser
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