

August 30, 2013

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This summer, I was fortunate to have been given the opportunity to intern at HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA. HIAS Pennsylvania is a non-profit organization that offers legal services to low-income and at-risk clients in southeastern Pennsylvania in areas ranging from asylum, citizenship, deportation defense, family unity, and assistance to immigrant victims of abuse and other violent crimes. Founded in 1882 to provide services to Jewish immigrants and refugees fleeing persecution and seeking opportunity by migrating to America, HIAS Pennsylvania today continues to work to create a welcoming and secure environment for immigrants and refugees and their families from all ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds. Based on the Jewish value of “welcoming the stranger”, the organization maintains a tradition of special concern for women and children who have escaped family violence or repressive governments that condone discrimination.

I worked mainly in the Victims of Violence Project, providing services to low-income Latina women who qualify for immigration benefits under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) because they have been abused by a U.S. citizen or permanent resident spouse and those qualify for U visas because they have been a victim of a crime and are willing to assist law enforcement in the investigation of that crime. I conducted in-depth interviews of clients with complex histories of trauma, collected supporting documentation, drafted client story affidavits, translated documents, and completed USCIS forms.

By far the most rewarding aspect of the position was the chance to empower survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in such a real, direct way. Through my Equal Justice America fellowship, I met incredible people in unbelievable circumstances who made me reevaluate my life's troubles. One of my most cherished experiences was being able to assist an undocumented El Salvadorian client named Bianca\*, whom I met with eight times over the course of my ten week internship. Having experienced gang violence and multiple rapes (one of which resulted in the birth of a child) in her home country during her adolescence, this courageous young woman decided to flee to the United States in hopes of pursuing better opportunities for the upliftment of herself and her family and to escape further victimization. Unfortunately, her suffering did not stay on the other side of the border, as last year, she was sexually assaulted during a meeting

with a prospective employer. Throughout the summer, I prepared her U visa application, conducting multiple interviews with her about the physical and psychological effects of the sexual assault. I collected supporting documents from her friends, employers, and therapist to build a strong case for her application, which is currently pending. At our last meeting, Bianca gave me a bouquet of flowers as a gesture of appreciation for my work. The flowers have since withered, however the impact that Bianca has had on me remains, and her story continues to inspire me as I continue my work in public service. Although I was not there for her entire journey, I was touched to be part of her path to obtain citizenship.

Thank you again for providing me a wonderful learning experience this summer. I would not have been able to accept an unpaid internship without funding from Equal Justice America. My invaluable experience serving indigent clients with multiple barriers to accessing legal services has absolutely solidified my commitment to pursuing public interest law. Coming from an immigrant family that has worked hard to climb the stairs of society, I hope to be able to help others on the same path.

Sincerely,  
Renu Urvashi Sagreiya  
Boston College Law School, Class of 2015

\*Name changed to protect identity