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HIAS PA Reflection – Marutani Fellowship

This summer, I had the privilege of interning with HIAS Pennsylvania, a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing legal and social services to immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. As a legal intern on the Removal Defense Team, I worked closely with both attorneys and clients. This allowed me to engage in nearly every stage of the immigration process, including drafting affidavits, preparing pre-hearing statements and briefs, conducting country conditions research, and assisting with client interviews and intakes.

One of my primary responsibilities was drafting client declarations for asylum and related forms of relief. This required building rapport with clients who had experienced severe trauma or persecution, listening to their stories with empathy, and organizing their narratives into clear, legally persuasive statements. Through this process, I developed stronger interviewing techniques, cultural humility, and the ability to translate complex and emotional experiences into compelling legal arguments.

In addition, I observed individual hearings and master calendar hearings at the Philadelphia Immigration Court, which helped me understand procedural nuances and the realities of courtroom advocacy and, since many respondents lacked representation, was fully able to see the profound difference competent counsel can make in someone's life. I am fortunate now to have worked to bring an Immigration Court observation project to Villanova, as a pro bono opportunity with HIAS PA, so students at Villanova are now able to participate in this important work and report on their findings.

The impact of HIAS PA's work is tangible and deeply meaningful, and I am grateful to have been able to contribute to the continuous impact the organization has. Each affidavit, brief, or client call was not an exercise but a piece of someone's path toward safety and stability.

Whether helping an asylum applicant articulate the persecution they fled or gathering evidence to support a client's claim, I could see how the details of my work might directly affect an outcome in court.

This internship confirmed my desire to pursue a career in immigration law, particularly in removal defense and humanitarian relief. Working alongside experienced advocates at HIAS PA strengthened my dedication to continue developing the skills necessary to become a zealous and compassionate attorney for immigrant communities. Despite the current political landscape, this work remains important, and clients deserve to know that they matter, their stories matter, and their cases matter. I am extremely grateful to the Marutani Fellowship Committee, the Asian Pacific American Bar Association of Pennsylvania, and the Philadelphia Bar Foundation for their support this summer. It has meant more than words can truly describe.