

# EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS®

Helping Lawyers Help Community



**Olivia Mathias**

**Catholic Charities  
Cabrini Center  
Houston, TX**

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## SIX-MONTH FELLOWSHIP UPDATE

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Olivia provides holistic legal representation to victims of human trafficking in Houston and creates a framework through which non-profits and pro bono attorneys can meet clients' wide-ranging legal needs.

### NEED ADDRESSED BY PROJECT

Human trafficking is the second largest and fastest growing illegal activity in the world. Houston is a major hub for human trafficking because of its proximity to the border and seaports. Our city houses the I-10 corridor, which the Department of Justice (DOJ) designated the number one route for human trafficking in the country. Many victims of human trafficking in the Greater Houston area lack holistic legal representation to meet their wide-ranging needs that extend beyond immigration relief. For example, many victims have criminal backgrounds related to their victimization, including charges for failure to identify or prostitution. These charges make it difficult for victims to find a job even after they secure a work permit and further help is needed with expungement or non-disclosure orders. Other victims have legal needs that include filing civil suits against the perpetrator, or family law concerns such as securing child custody or guardianship.

### HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE

In the first six months, Olivia has:

- Represented eleven clients in their T visa proceedings
- Assisted in the reunification of the families of two victims through consular processing
- Hosted two pro bono workshops for 30 private attorneys
- Assigned 13 U/T visa cases to pro bono attorneys and mentored them through the process
- Provided two Houston police trainings and six community outreaches on human trafficking and the legal rights and remedies available to victims

### WHAT'S NEXT

In the next six months, Olivia plans to:

- Place eight cases with private attorneys who can assist human trafficking victims with their family law needs
- Place five cases with private attorneys who can represent human trafficking victims in civil suits against their traffickers
- Continue to develop a pro bono framework through which victims wide-ranging legal needs can be met
- Continue to host quarterly meetings for the Houston Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance Pro Bono Legal Group to foster a sense of partnership and community among victims service providers
- Continue to identify the legal needs of human trafficking victims
- Build a robust database of pro bono contacts across various areas of the law who can assist human trafficking victims in their wide-ranging legal needs