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Congressional Staffer

United States Congressman José E. Serrano, 15th District

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Over the summer I spent my time interning with Rep. José E. Serrano in the 15th district of the Bronx, my home district. I was truly excited to work in the office because the congressman has a decades-long legacy of working diligently to improve his part of the Bronx, a part of New York City that is often forgotten or derided for circumstances that are beyond the control of its denizens. I had heard of his work on restoring the Bronx River, which had been the dumping grounds of so many pollutants that residents of the district could not safely use the water, so I was excited for the potential environmental and community work that I would be able to perform as one of his staffers.

The timing was another benefit of working for the congressman, as he was entering his final term. I had not originally foreseen what this would mean. Even if I had been allowed to campaign for him, it wouldn't have been needed, and instead, my time in his office would be fully devoted to working with the community. From day one of working at the district office, I was fully integrated into the daily proceedings. For example, I was given the chance to work with the immigration caseworkers to meet with constituents who wanted our office to intercede on their behalf. We would contact the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services office to help expedite the arduous citizenship process and to keep our constituents from being removed from the country. It was doing this work that made me realize how difficult the path to

citizenship is in the U.S., how it brims with esoteric minutiae, and how daunting such a process would be for immigrants for whom English is not their first language.

Fortunately, I wasn't only doing paperwork over the summer. I was also involved in planning outreach events that the office had for our constituents. One such event was jointly planned by the congressman's office and NASA. We invited schoolchildren to meet Joe Acaba, the first Puerto Rican American astronaut in space, and they were given demonstrations of the technology that NASA uses in its missions, as well as some great swag to take home! I'm a firm believer in the importance that representation can play in shaping what careers a young person might aspire to. Thus, to be able to show kids in a predominantly Hispanic and African American district that the sky literally wasn't the limit was very rewarding for me, especially since my younger brothers were able to attend the event. This was just one of the many projects that I enjoyed working on as part of the congressman's team, and I'm truly grateful that having the Wellman Hill grant allowed me to give back to the community in which I was born and raised.