



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Boston University

Organization: Greater Boston Legal Services

Update 1: A few weeks ago, after completing my first year at Boston University School of Law, I was generously selected as one of this summer's Equal Justice America Fellows, and I am now beginning my fourth week as a legal intern at Cambridge & Somerville Legal Services ("CASLS"), a unit of Greater Boston Legal Services.

Over the past three weeks, I have had the opportunity to interact with a number of clients on issues such as alleged housing discrimination and special education services. Further, I've had the pleasure of attending numerous coalition meetings with my supervisor, which have opened my eyes to statewide issues regarding school discipline and the school-to-prison pipeline, healthcare access for older adults, and trauma-informed representation of youth. Witnessing the dedication of legal services attorneys and learning from their expertise has been a highlight of my time at CASLS so far, and I am looking forward to continuing to serve people in the greater Boston community and to learn from their stories as well.

Update 2: The past few weeks at Greater Boston Legal Services have had their ups and downs, as I have taken on a number of new housing cases assisting elders with mental health struggles. I am honored that I am able to support them to help secure their housing and avoid homelessness, but the fact is, GBLS still has to turn away 3 out of every 5 people who come to them for assistance, and many more are going through the eviction process without the support of an attorney. Considering the affordable housing crisis gripping our nation, we need, more than ever, stronger protections for tenants. The attorneys in my office were circulating John Oliver's recent piece on rent, and I am including it here for anyone who would like to learn more about the rent crisis in America.

I am also grateful for the assistance of non-profit partners in the Cambridge and Somerville communities, like On The Rise, who have supported some of my clients to help them stay in their housing. Building and maintaining coalitions has continued to be an important aspect of my internship.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Update 3: I am finishing my 8th week at Greater Boston Legal Services with a number of new experiences under my belt. In the past 2 weeks, I attended an informal conference with a client and the housing authority to create a repayment plan to address rental arrears and attended a recertification meeting with another client with a language barrier that had prevented her from completing her recertification earlier. In each of these meetings, I was able to support my clients, advocate for their needs, and ensure they were treated fairly.

I've again had the pleasure of working with wonderful people at local organizations such as the Somerville Office of Housing Stability and Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services to connect clients to additional services and funding assistance. It is great to be in a state and locality where there are networks of resources to help people with lower income, but it also raises concerns for me about the people left behind in more rural areas and red states. I hope that we as a society continue to develop our consciousness and recognize that housing and healthcare are human rights that should be available to all, regardless of money.

Update 4: This is my last week at Greater Boston Legal Services and I am so grateful to Equal Justice America and Boston University School of Law for providing me with funding so that I could afford to spend this summer providing civil legal aid to people in poverty. I've been so fortunate to work with incredible attorneys who work day in and day out to provide low-income members of our community with outstanding legal services at no cost.

I've also been fortunate to work with non-profit and governmental partners who provide housing stability, mental health and protective services, and other supports to those same community members. I've witnessed neighbors and friends helping each other and working together, and I have a greater appreciation for the importance of community. I have learned a lot about the affordable housing crisis in greater Boston, special education law in Massachusetts, and how to communicate in different ways in different contexts - whether it's explaining a legal process to a client unfamiliar with the system, negotiating with a landlord's attorney, or just listening to a client who needs someone to talk to. I am grateful for all I've learned this summer and look forward to putting it into practice in both my future legal work and my day-to-day life.

Update 5: I am now three weeks out from the end of my internship with Greater Boston Legal Services. Over the course of those ten weeks, I was a case handler for a number of clients, dealing with poverty law and special education/disability rights issues, and supported my supervisor on more complex cases.

Within my housing cases, which took up most of my time, the topics I researched and handled included Sec. 8 tenancy rights, language access requirements, eviction defense, discrimination, and reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities. Most of the housing clients that I worked with were elders, and many were dealing with physical and mental disabilities that further impacted their ability to navigate our legal system. For these cases, I performed intake interviews, provided advice on how to approach or respond to landlords and property managers, directly communicated with those same personnel when direct client efforts were unsuccessful,



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negotiated with opposing counsel, attended informal conferences as an advocate, and also just listened to and empathized with my clients and their stories. At times, I felt the best thing I was³ doing for some of my clients was giving them space to talk and share their story, because they didn't feel like anyone else was listening to them.

My other major case this summer involved a special education matter in which the parent claimed his child had not received sufficient services over six years. For this matter, I did significant legal research on the requirements of transition services for students with disabilities. Unlike the topics in my 1L Lawyering Skills class, this topic had limited secondary sources for me to turn to, and I appreciated learning that some of the legal issues I may come across in my career may not have been analyzed on a broader scale and may require more detailed review of individual cases. I also reviewed and summarized the student's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), assessments/evaluations, and progress reports, and made phone calls to the parent to continue to get his input. I drafted memos regarding the insufficiencies of the IEPs based on the BSEA decisions I had read as well as the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's guidance on the topic.

I am walking away with a deeper understanding of the issues facing low-income members of my community, a greater appreciation for the importance of community support and coalitions with different organizations, and a strong gratitude for the attorneys who workday in and day out to ensure the members of our community have their basic needs met, even without the money to pay for an attorney. Thank you to Boston University School of Law for helping prepare me for this experience, and to EJA for awarding me a fellowship to allow me to take on this work. You can help law students contribute to nonprofit work by donating to Equal Justice America.