



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Isabelle Sullivan

Law School: University of Michigan

Organization: Veterans Legal Clinic

Update 1: This summer, I'm working in my first legal role at the Veterans Legal Clinic of Michigan Law School. I'm assisting indigent veterans with civil legal matters ranging from housing and consumer protection to custody disputes. I've drafted and filed court documents, performed oral arguments at court hearings, and advised clients on all aspects of their cases. Without a pro bono organization like the clinic, the vast majority of our clients would not be able to afford attorneys, but their legal needs are urgent.

My work this summer was made possible by my Equal Justice America Fellowship. EJA provides funding to law students and recent graduates all over the US that enables us to deliver civil legal aid pro bono. Unfortunately, the demand for legal aid is far greater than our capacity to provide it; EJA estimates that over 80% of low-income people's civil legal needs are not met.

Update 2: This summer, I'm working in my first legal role at the Veterans Legal Clinic of Michigan Law School, assisting indigent veterans with civil legal matters ranging from housing and consumer protection to custody disputes. In the past week, I have argued in court to prevent a client's eviction and worked with other clients on their family law and consumer protection issues.

The need for civil legal aid is urgent, and there are not nearly enough resources available for those who need it. Equal Justice America estimates that over 80% of low-income people's civil legal needs are not met.

Update 3: It's been a long time since I've posted on Facebook, but I'm back because I have something important to share! I recently finished my first year at Michigan Law School and this summer I'm working as a student-attorney at the school's Veterans Legal Clinic. The clinic provides pro bono civil (that's everything that's not criminal!) legal services to low-income veterans.

Without a pro bono organization like the clinic, the vast majority of our clients would not be able to afford attorneys, but their legal needs are urgent. The cases I'm working on include housing disputes in which I'm fighting to keep our clients in their homes and their homes in safe conditions, divorce for a survivor of domestic abuse, and multiple disputes with large insurers and credit card companies who take advantage of low-income people's lack of access to legal services to unjustly deny coverage. Unequal access to justice puts low-income Americans at high risk of being mistreated and deprived of legal rights by unscrupulous actors.



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Unfortunately, the Veterans Legal Clinic, and all the pro bono legal aid organizations across the country, do not have nearly the capacity to aid everyone who needs our services. Equal Justice America estimates that 80% of low-income people's civil legal needs are not met.

Update 4: I'm in my last week wrapping up an incredible summer at the Veterans Legal Clinic of Michigan Law School! It's been an honor to assist indigent veterans with a range of civil legal matters, from housing disputes to family law cases. Over the past weeks, I've had the privilege of advocating for clients facing evictions, working on divorce cases for survivors of abuse, and fighting against unfair practices by insurers and credit card companies.

The urgency of civil legal aid is crystal clear. Many low-income individuals lack access to legal representation, leaving them vulnerable to injustice. Organizations like Equal Justice America provide crucial funding to law students and recent graduates, enabling us to provide pro bono legal aid. However, the demand still outstrips our capacity, with an estimated 80% of low-income people's civil legal needs unmet.

Update 5: Last week marked the end of my summer working at the Veterans Legal Clinic at Michigan Law School. This work has been one of the most important and rewarding experiences I have ever had, and it has been the honor of a lifetime.

When I was applying for first year summer positions only a few months ago, I wanted a challenge, a position that would give me a true feeling for what it means to be in the legal profession. I have received all that, and more. In just ten weeks:

I have defended indigent veterans from evictions and predatory behavior by insurance, real estate, and credit card companies.

I helped a survivor of domestic abuse get a divorce.

I worked on getting another client parenting time with a child she hasn't seen in over a year.

The Veterans Legal Clinic provides their services completely free of charge to the clients, representing people without financial or logistical means to access other legal representation. This is important work. Everyone needs a lawyer!

My work at the VLC this summer was made possible by my Equal Justice America fellowship. Equal Justice America provides funding for law students and new attorneys to provide civil legal aid pro bono. This funding is crucial – without this fellowship, I would not have been able to dedicate myself to the VLC full time.

Unfortunately, the best efforts of Equal Justice America, the VLC, and other pro bono organizations are able to provide only a small portion of the civil legal services that people need. Equal Justice America estimates that 80% of low-income people's civil legal needs are not met. This gap in legal services enables bad actors to take advantage of low-income people and deprive them of their money, property, and rights, secure in the knowledge that they will likely be unable to fight back in court. Lack of equal access to justice deepens other inequalities.

Help other law students and new lawyers make a difference by donating to Equal Justice America.