



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1:

This summer, I'm working for Legal Aid Chicago at the Juvenile Expungement Help Desk at the Cook County Juvenile Courthouse, and my position is funded in part by Equal Justice America. In this role, I am going to have face-to-face interactions with clients by conducting intakes, then conduct research into their cases, prepare their expungement petitions, and even help represent them in court in front of a judge at their expungement hearings, since I have a 711 license that allows law students to provide these types of legal services.

I have been in this role for only about two weeks, but I have learned a lot already about how the expungement process works and how important it is. While I knew that people could face obstacles like getting jobs because of their records, it still is jarring to hear about, and it makes the work feel even more meaningful when I see clients in person and hear their stories firsthand. I have also already seen some more extreme examples of people having issues based on a record of something that happened thirty years ago or a single arrest that never resulted in any finding of guilt. I am excited to dig more into the work as the summer continues and get this type of unique practical experience and face-to-face interaction with clients! #EJAFellowUpdate <https://lnkd.in/grc2J4Gh>

Update 2:

Time for a second EJA Fellow Update about my Legal Aid Chicago internship!

I have gained a ton of new experiences in the two weeks since the last update. I have conducted intake interviews with dozens of clients, hearing about their juvenile records and their goals for legal representation and gathering information to use to prepare their case. Besides just learning about how to do this type of legal work, I have loved getting to interact with clients in person and put faces to the names on the computer.



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In addition to the intake interviews, I have done a lot of new case work. For each client, I have completed a case chart, including researching everything on their juvenile record and what the associated dispositions and sentences were. I have also worked on preparing the expungement petitions to submit to the court and observed many expungement court calls. Finally, I have conducted mitigation interviews with clients, gathering information about their lives and their juvenile cases to provide context to the court and, where applicable, use to argue that their cases should be expunged. I am excited to have had so many different experiences in such a short period of time, and I am excited for what the next six weeks will hold.

Update 3:

Time for EJA Fellow Update 3 of 5 about my juvenile record expungement work at Legal Aid Chicago this summer!

In Illinois, there are some juvenile records that need to be expunged automatically if a petition is filed, and there are others which are only expunged subject to a judge's discretion. When expungement is up to the judge's discretion, we often have to present arguments about why the record should be expunged.

Today, I appeared in court and gave these types of arguments for the first time. This involved presenting information about the clients' lives currently (that I gathered from previous interviews with them) as well as arguing specifics about their cases and why they should be expunged. For example, some arguments for clients talk about how they have not had interactions with the criminal legal system for 20 years or how they are being barred from employment opportunities because of a completely unrelated minor offense.

I presented these types of arguments to the court today for three cases and won expungements for all three! It was definitely exciting to get this kind of firsthand experience in court through my internship, but even more exciting to have these barriers removed and opportunities opened up for my clients. I am looking forward to doing it all again in court next week!

Update 4:

Here's a 4th EJA Fellow Update about my juvenile record expungement internship at Legal Aid Chicago for the summer!

Time is flying by and there are only two weeks left of my internship now. In the last couple of weeks especially, I have gotten into the groove of all the different tasks for this role and have almost started to feel like an actual lawyer - it will be weird to go back to just being a student in September! In the past few weeks, I have conducted lots of research for different clients' cases, prepared documents, conducted client interviews, and argued (and won!) even more cases for juvenile expungement in court.



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I have also started learning more about the institutions at play and the system of juvenile record expungement as a whole. With this in mind, I've started to think about how the work could be expanded or built upon, and what it would look like to work in this kind of role or to develop a fellowship project in this kind of area after graduation. I'm excited about the possibilities and grateful for such a positive internship experience that has made me consider going into this type of law as a career!

Update 5:

Time for a fifth and final EJA Fellow Update!

I finished up at my Legal Aid Chicago internship a couple weeks ago. In my last two weeks of work, I continued working on clients' juvenile expungement cases and arguing in court. I got to work on many more clients' cases - I think I clocked in at around 170 clients represented over the course of the summer! – and had some big successes and new experiences.

For example, I got to volunteer at an Austin neighborhood legal clinic, where interns and licensed attorneys took walk-in appointments and gave Austin residents brief legal advice on a wide variety of legal issues. It was so fulfilling to get to meet more clients face-to-face and to talk about topics outside my area of expertise. I ended up having to talk to many clients about estate planning and other information I learned in Trust and Estates class, for example, and was surprised how much I remembered about issues like tenancy in common versus joint tenancy with right of survivorship. This experience definitely made me think differently about how helpful classes outside of my chosen interest area could nonetheless be helpful in the future.

In my final two weeks, I also had some first tastes of “failure” in my representation of clients, when I had a couple clients' expungement cases continued to much later dates instead of granted. While these cases were not outright denied and Legal Aid Chicago will still be able to fight for these cases to be granted on the later date, these experiences taught me a lot about having tough conversations with clients, learning to tailor messaging to specific judges and clients, and being creative with new approaches when necessary. Though I was not able to represent these clients at their new court dates since they were after the end of my internship, I got to start working on compiling new arguments for their new court dates. Dealing with the bad, as well as the good, was another key lesson learned through this internship.

Besides these lessons from my last two weeks, my main takeaways from the internship are that there is room for endless work within the criminal legal system, and that I could definitely see myself working in that area after graduation. I also learned a lot about the specifics of criminal record expungement, and confirmed that I value direct client interaction in a future career. All in all, it was an enlightening and informative internship experience.