



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Meredith Luneack

Law School: Texas Law

Fellowship: Detroit Justice Center

Entry 1:

I've been staying super busy at the Detroit Justice Center! I and my fellow interns have had our hands in the many different types of legal and community support provided by DJC, all of which seeks to perpetuate the building of a more just, equitable, and accessible Detroit. Detroit is a city that has struggled for decades with issues of redlining, police brutality, formal economic exclusion of Detroiters of color, among many others. However, with this adversity comes a shared ethos of grit and community loyalty. It is this unique energy and spirit that informs the work of the DJC.

From driver license reclamation, to preparing accessible legal materials for incarcerated and returning citizens, to pro bono family law assistance, to helping bail folks out, to research on litigation combating unconstitutional water shut offs, to preparing white papers, DJC is working on every level to support Detroiters. Currently, I am working with a couple of clients to help them clear their many thousands of dollars of fees related to civil traffic infractions. Despite the lack of severity of the incidents with which these costs are often associated, the fines that get attached to single traffic stops often hamstring Detroiters financially. These unpaid tickets turn into warrants, and eventually, jail time, all because someone was initially pulled over for something as simple as a nonfunctional headlight. We shouldn't criminalize folks for experiencing poverty, and nonpayment of civil fines should not lead to jail time.

None of the work that I have the opportunity to do with the DJC would be possible without the support of Equal Justice America, and this is true for many public interest law students across the country working in a wide variety of legal aid outlets. DJC utilizes their resources for promoting legal access and community betterment, which means summer interns like me turn to organizations like Equal Justice America for funding.



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Entry 2:

Detroit Justice Center staff attorneys are keeping me busy! Last week, I helped a client get an old misdemeanor charge dismissed, and I'm currently working on a couple of motions, including a child support modification and a motion for relief from judgment based on notice and due process concerns. Outside of direct client work, I have been helping to finish up a comprehensive family law handbook for incarcerated Michiganders to help empower folks facing the termination of their parental rights or denials of visitation time due to incarceration.

DJC has been a particularly illuminating place to work. As an organization, it is involved in, or spearheading, efforts to create a more equitable and just Detroit at all levels – from assisting individual Detroiters, to empowering neighborhoods to nurture and create small community businesses and sharing economies, to helping shape statewide solutions on reducing the use of jails and prisons. As such, working at DJC has helped to sharpen my vision of my own future as an advocate; my experience has helped me better understand what type of work I'd like to do simply as a product of being able to do so many types of work this summer.

None of the work that I have the opportunity to do with DJC would be possible without funding provided by Equal Justice America, and this is true for many public interest-minded law students like myself. DJC utilizes their resources for promoting legal access and community betterment, which means summer interns like me turn to organizations like Equal Justice America for support. For this reason, I hope you'll consider contributing to Equal Justice America – I wouldn't be here without them!

Entry 3:

I'm getting close to the end here at the Detroit Justice Center! I am going to miss having such a smorgasbord of advocacy opportunities at my fingertips.

The last couple weeks have been full of cool things!



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Yesterday, I had the chance to represent a few DJC clients at their arraignments and managed to get few cases dismissed and warrants set aside (see: smiling Mere in red suit below). This work is so crucial in this city, as Detroit has one of the most challenging landscapes in the country when it comes legal issues related to traffic offenses. Despite its large population and sprawling geography, Detroit has some of the worst public transportation in the country. There have been calls throughout the city's history for expanded and usable bus lines, subways, trains, and streetcars, but implementation of such measures never gained political traction with white Detroiters, as public transit would have been an effective vehicle (pun intended) for racial integration in the highly segregated city. As the Detroit economy declined in the late twentieth century, public transit remained effectively nonexistent, and car ownership and use became more and more expensive and necessary, as businesses within walking distance left the city for the suburbs. Detroiters who couldn't afford the move out of the city were forced into the use of automobiles, and driving-related infractions exploded in cost and criminality.

Today, meaningful public transportation is still markedly absent, and Detroiters are often forced to drive miles and miles to work, school, grocery stores, and to find childcare. The combination of soaring poverty rates and prohibitively high costs of auto insurance and registration means many are forced to drive without proper documentation. One traffic stop for a broken taillight (\$200), an improperly displayed or dirty license plate (\$145), or "one-armed driving" (a real infraction on the books in Detroit) (\$105) can lead to many tickets for driving on a suspended license (\$500 for the first offense), no registration (\$105) or no auto insurance (\$195). This means one traffic stop can lead to thousands of dollars in fines and fees. The inability to pay these fines leads to ramped up late fees, suspended licenses, court hearings, warrants, and eventually, jail time.

DJC, both through calls for system and policy changes and through direct client representation, is tackling this issue on all levels. Detroiters should not be left lingering on the edge of incarceration, unable to drive legally, because they don't have the funds to pay for inflated and over-enforced traffic fines.

Enter: Equal Justice America! I would not have the opportunity to learn about these challenges, and the best ways to confront them, without funding from EJA. Because DJC devotes its resources to hiring some of the best attorneys in the business to strive for a just and equitable Detroit, summer interns like myself rely on EJA's generous funding to have access to these opportunities. Because of this, I hope you'll consider contributing to Equal Justice America.





I've just completed my final reflection on my experience with the Detroit Justice Center, and I thought I'd share a takeaway with y'all:

Without Equal Justice America's help, I would not have had the opportunities I did at DJC, and I wouldn't have had the chance to meet such bad ass people doing such bad ass work. I hope you'll consider funding future summers like mine by contributing to Equal Justice America.

