



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Tyler Winterich

**Law School:** Boston University School of Law

**Organization:** Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

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### Week of June 15th

In my first few weeks at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland (LASC), I have already been exposed to a variety of areas of law. I have been primarily performing legal research for cases involving consumer transactions and individual bankruptcy. Reading the associated case law and case documents demonstrated the precarious financial circumstances almost all of LASC's clients encounter. This precariousness has been most evident in student loan bankruptcy discharge cases where debtors have their financial circumstances and choices analyzed in excruciating detail.

Given how economically disruptive COVID-19 has been and with moratoriums expiring, many fear an influx of foreclosures, evictions, and a resumption of debt collection. Further, as organizations continue to reopen and many workers feel uncomfortable returning, state and federal unemployment support will continue to be tested. During these uncertain times, providing low-income individuals with legal advice to protect and promote their economic well-being is more important now than ever.

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### Week of July 6th

During the past few weeks, I have transitioned to focusing on tax as well as public benefit and utility matters. Researching these topics has broadened my perspective of the relationship between a government and its citizens. Many government assistance programs provide much needed support for individuals who are often teetering near the poverty line. However, individuals involved with these programs often encounter complicated and technical systems that can be challenging to navigate. This is especially true for low income individuals who often face accessibility issues resulting from lack of adequate technology. Legal aid serves a critical role in helping vulnerable individuals interact with and receive needed benefits from government agencies.



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## LEGAL SERVICES FELLOWSHIPS

As we celebrated our nation's independence this weekend, we must all remember that it is an ongoing effort to achieve a more perfect union. My experience so far has demonstrated that the worthy ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution remain elusive for many. I am fortunate to make a small contribution to these efforts in my home community at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. My Equal Justice fellowship and support from Boston University School of Law have enabled me to do this important work.

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### **Week of July 27th**

Utility disconnections present many challenges which are only heightened during a pandemic when we are mostly confined to our homes and many face unemployment. Electricity and water are particularly essential to maintaining good health for individuals and families.

The Ohio EPA prohibited water disconnections for non-payment until July 10, 2020. Fortunately, many Northeast Ohio communities have extended that prohibition and some community organizations are helping individuals struggling to pay for utilities. I am inspired by the communities that have committed to support each other during this unstable period.

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### **Week of August 10th**

My summer internship with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland ("LASC") has ended. I had a remarkably rewarding experience. LASC provided me with opportunities to draft motions, write research memos, attend a deposition, and participate in various internal and statewide meetings. LASC attorneys, within the Economic Justice group in particular, also provided me with valuable guidance and feedback along the way.

Beyond the beneficial learning opportunities, my summer experience has enhanced my perspective as well. Client backgrounds and case law demonstrated the myriad of challenges low-income individuals face that relentlessly threaten their economic well-being. Overwhelming debt, repossession, unemployment, and eviction are a few of the many challenges low-income individuals must continuously combat. These challenges persist throughout LASC's five county area and affect many in the communities we live in. In partnership with their clients, LASC attorneys play a vital role in achieving more equitable and fair outcomes.

I'm glad my first legal experience was at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. I'm also incredibly grateful for my Equal Justice fellowship and support from Boston University School of Law which made my experience possible.