

Karla Manzanares  
American University, Washington College of Law  
EJA Reflection

Through this final reflection, I intend to recap my work and major takeaways with New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)'s Immigrant Protection Unit (IPU) over the summer. I chose to extern with NYLAG because when interviewing for the position I felt very welcome by the supervising staff and felt the work they carry out in NYC is very impactful as well.

Through this externship, I was able to work with several attorneys and work on a variety of cases as well. I particularly liked the experience of working for a larger organization so that I could compare it with the smaller organizations I interned with last summer and during a spring externship. I believe that I might enjoy working for a smaller org as a rookie attorney to obtain the most personal training possible, but a larger organization has many benefits as well. The attorneys ranged from very experienced to newer and ranged in their journey to working in immigration as well. I was glad to hear from the attorneys about their experiences post-grad. The Unit as a whole was very welcoming and put time into educating the interns through legal assignments and professional development. Ultimately, my experience at a smaller non-profit and a larger non-profit has shown me that there are many pros and cons to consider in the future.

I'll next focus on the assignments I worked on throughout the externship. During the 10 weeks, I worked on nine client cases with five attorneys. I worked on two asylum adjustment of status cases, one unlawful presence waiver, one VAWA adjustment of status, one asylum cases, and one SIJS case. Through these cases, I worked on a variety of forms, affidavits, and a motion. Outside of doing substantive work, I was able to observe intake and client meetings as well. I'm glad that I was able to work on some staple skills such as research and writing through the brief and country conditions research but also develop new skills in client interviewing and filling out forms.

The most difficult assignment I worked on was the adjustment of status case for a mother and son. For this case, I worked on several forms (G-28, I-485, I-131, I-765, and I-912) for each client. Thus, I had to work on a total of ten forms and the collection and organization of several supporting documents. I also made the cover letters for both clients. Ultimately, this assignment was a heavy lift and required lots of time filling out forms and calling the client to ask questions. Finally, I reviewed the I-485 and went through the eligibility requirement with the client as well. While this case was tough, I do think it was a realistic look at the work of an immigration attorney. Further, it was an important practice in the art of organization skills since I had to carefully fill out the many forms and keep track of the supporting documents.

My favorite assignment was most likely the affidavit I worked on for an I-601A (Provisional Unlawful Presence Waiver). This assignment was for a woman married to a U.S. LPR that needed to show hardship on her husband if she was to be deported. I enjoyed this assignment mostly because the client was extremely kind, and her story was very nice to deliver through an affidavit. Essentially, she is such a great wife and mother that writing her affidavit was very easy to do. The only difficulty was having to describe and organize the many medical issues that her husband has but ultimately, the main focus was showing how the client contributes to her husband's life and well-being.

Finally, I'll say that I'm happy with my experience this summer. I've learned more about immigration law, working with clients, and about myself as a future attorney. I began the summer wanting to be an immigration attorney and I'm ending it the same way. I also began the summer quite stressed about finding a job/ getting a fellowship and I feel a bit less stressed now. I plan to apply to the Immigrant Justice Corp but if that doesn't work out, I'm hoping that I'll find an immigration position somewhere. Many attorneys encouraged the interns to not stress because a legal career is long so I'd like to remember that through my 3L year.