



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: May 23, 2022, marked my first day working at PLSE! I am excited to get to know more about the world of expungements and pardons. Thus far, I have been working on drafting petitions for expungements. It has been a learning curve getting to know the ins and outs of expungements (i.e., a withdrawal may qualify, but a guilty conviction does not). Prior to working at PLSE, I had very limited knowledge of what an expungement was or how it worked. Now I see the value in shortening one's record for crimes that they have not been convicted of; expungements open the doors for many individuals whether it be in the workforce or housing opportunities.

I had the opportunity to complete my first research assignment at PLSE! I learned more about expungements through the Clean Slate Project. Based on the conviction, individuals may have the chance for their records to be automatically sealed using an automated system. This is an incredible advancement to the world of expungements, protecting individuals in their everyday lives and employment. It was lovely getting to know my fellow co-workers and to start familiarizing myself with PLSE's work. Finally, on Wednesday I attended an expungement court session where I had the opportunity to see this step of the process firsthand.

Update 2: It has been such an incredible learning experience these past few weeks attending court, watching how other lawyers litigate, and understanding this crucial step in the expungement process. While I continue to learn the ins and outs of expungement drafting, my responsibilities continue to grow at PLSE! In addition to wrapping up my report on the Clean Slate Project, I have also been working on updating a petition to waive (mostly court) fees. In doing so, barriers are broken down for clients who are looking to get pardons where economic status had previously been a barrier.

Additionally, I have been assigned a research project with my lovely fellow interns! In response to "ban the box," which prevents employers from checking criminal records, discrimination is often an unfortunate result. Some states have immunity for employers whose employees commit crimes while under their employment (as an incentive to hire returning citizens). The research we are conducting is to determine which immunity laws



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are in place and how we can expand these laws. Finally, I have my very own pardon client! After working on his petition, I am looking forward to working directly with a PLSE client. Over the next few weeks, we will be corresponding about the petition to ensure its success. Stay tuned for more on my summer experience at PLSE!

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Update 4: As the summer progresses, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working at Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity. In terms of Pardons, I had the privilege of attending a Pardon Board meeting where the Pardon applicants are carefully voted on by a series of elected officials. Additionally, I have been continuously working with my Pardon client to ensure their application’s success. Not only do we recount the convictions, but we also focus on how the client has changed over time to better their community. They are eager to earn a pardon and are very patient as the process takes time, energy, and dedication.

In attending court on a weekly basis, I understand the process by which expungements are passed. It is an absolute pleasure to see the work PLSE does with expungement petitions get put into action. I have noticed an improvement in my expungement petitions as my time in PLSE continues, fixing mistakes and editing the process in which I complete petitions. Further, I excitedly take on additional responsibilities beyond expungements. For instance, I am currently in the research stages of a memo regarding the retro-active application of various Pennsylvania statutes, as applied to our clients.

Stay tuned for more on my summer experience at PLSE!

Update 5: I am absolutely thrilled to be gaining interpersonal skills in my time at PLSE! I have been in consistent communication with my Pardon Client, who is eagerly compiling the necessary information for the application. Many potential PLSE clients, including my Pardon Client, are looking for a listening ear to tell



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their stories and experiences to. PLSE has helped cultivate a safe space to hear the clients out to the best of my abilities and making sure they truly feel heard. It is my goal to have a complete Pardon Application by the end of my time at PLSE, which is nearing! To achieve this goal, I intend on continuing to regularly communicate with my Pardon Client, edit their materials in a timely manner, and ensure that they are on the right track with their efforts.

Additionally, my time in court has been incredibly helpful. It is a privilege that I do not take lightly and value each day that I am able to attend court. Whether it be motions itself, the inner workings of the courtroom, or the various attorney's decorum, there are constantly lessons to be learned. Stay tuned for more on my summer experience at PLSE!

Update 6: Over the past couple of months, I have been a legal intern at Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity. It was lovely to work in an organization with such a great office staff and culture. My co-workers and co-interns were always courteous, considerate, and open to any questions I had (a no stupid questions mentality!) This has created a safe space to learn and test out my legal skills thus far. I feel blessed to have further stepped into the non-profit world and look forward to my public interest legal work to come!

In PLSE, my responsibilities have included but not been limited to, drafting expungement petitions, completing pardon applications, as well as legal research and writing. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at PLSE and feel that I have learned a great deal on the legal process. More specifically, I feel like an expungement queen having specialized in this area for a majority of my internship. In terms of my Pardon Client, we have made great strides in their application. It has been a pleasure working on their application, getting to see the client's candor throughout the process has been a particularly interesting experience. The next step for them would be to have their application go forth to the Board of Pardons. Hopefully, they make the majority vote leading to a successful pardon!

Thank you for following my EJA Fellow Update(s) throughout the summer!