



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Disability Rights California

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**Update 1:** I will be periodically posting on my social media with an update about what I am doing at my summer job in the Pathways to Work group at DRC.

It has been wonderful to get to know the Pathways team these last few weeks and learn more about what they do. Through the CAP program, Pathways assists people with difficulties seeking or receiving vocational rehabilitation services from the Department of Rehabilitation, independent living centers or other Rehab Act funded programs. In addition, Pathways assists people with disabilities who receive SSI or SSDI benefits in addressing barriers in work, such as reasonable accommodations and transportation.

So far, I have shadowed my supervisor on calls with individuals in need of legal advice and helped her with follow up research regarding callers' legal issues. I've also been assigned research and writing projects, including updating some publications for DRC's clients.

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**Update 2:** These past few weeks at Disability Rights California have been very busy and very rewarding at once. My most recent project involved helping the DRC team provide comments on the Department of Rehabilitation's update to their regulations, as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act which was passed by Congress in 2014. My work consisted of cross referencing the new regulations proposed by the DOR with the federal regulations that the DOR was supposed to adopt.

Then, I would propose new language based on the language in the federal regulations if necessary. Further, I compiled DRC's comments on the regulations from 2020 and the DOR's replies in 2021, in order to craft a new comment and response to the DOR's concerns. I have never done work involving the process of writing laws or regulations, so this was a very interesting learning experience for me.

I have also continued to shadow my supervising attorney on calls with clients about employment matters. Further, I have amassed a number of new assignments that I am excited to start—next, I will be researching the fair hearing process with the DOR in order to create a simple plain language guide for consumers.

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**Update 3:** After a week away spent doing volunteer work, I am very excited to be back at DRC this week. Recently, I have been doing more work in direct client contact and advocacy. Under the supervision of my boss I gave advice to a client about how to request reasonable accommodations in their workplace at an interactive process meeting. I also drafted a demand letter for a client that detailed how her employer was discriminating against her in the workplace and have been working on some legal research memos that will aid me and my boss in giving advice to other clients.

Another big project that I have been working on is a plain language draft of a new publication for DRC that details the new rules for the Fair Hearing process for Department of Rehabilitation consumers. This week I will be presenting the publication draft to the Pathways to Work Group in order to educate my colleagues about the new process and to get feedback from them about the draft of the publication.

This week I will continue working with my boss to give advice to clients in need of assistance in obtaining reasonable accommodations at work. I look forward to all the new projects coming my way over the next few weeks.

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**Update 4:** As I am nearing the end of my externship, I am incredibly thankful to reflect on all the opportunities for growth and learning that I have had this summer while working for DRC.

Currently, I am continuing my work in collaboration with my supervisor on employment law matters. I am shadowing her on calls with clients and writing memos that detail the relevant law and protections based on client's disabilities and analyzing what we might be able to do to help them in their employment disputes.

My previous project to write a plain language guide for DRC clients who are interested in the Fair Hearings process through the CDSS has been expanded. Not only will I be presenting this publication to the Pathways Group this week (my presentation was pushed back), but I have been asked to help one of my coworkers with updating a longer and more in-depth publication on the Fair Hearings process that will be published in a master list of DRC publications later this year.

This summer I have also enjoyed the opportunity to attend a number of "Green Bag Lunch" presentations for law clerks that detail hot legal topics in the nonprofit and social justice world, as well as DRC's trainings for law clerks that inform us of all the work that the different groups at DRC do. I have also enjoyed getting to know my fellow law clerks in a number of networking meetings.

Ultimately, DRC has been a wonderful place to spend my summer and I am so grateful it was made possible by @equaljusticeam's fellowship funding.

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**Update 5:** I am very thankful for my experience as an Equal Justice America Fellow this past summer. Due to the grant provided by Equal Justice America, I was able to work for Disability Rights California in their Pathways to Work section. I became aware of Disability Rights California while I was still in college and



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applying to law schools. I connected with someone from DRC at that time and stayed in contact for nearly two years before I was finally able to work for them. As someone who has wanted to pursue disability justice law since high school, Disability Rights California was my dream future employer because of their amazing work. Disability Rights California is California's official Protection and Advocacy organization that was founded to protect the interests and rights of people with disabilities in California through advocacy and enforcement of existing laws. As a P&A organization, DRC has more legal tools at its disposal than the average nonprofit, so I was incredibly excited to begin my work there.

The Pathways to Work Program that I worked in this summer assists people with difficulties seeking or receiving vocational rehabilitation services from the Department of Rehabilitation, independent living centers or other Rehab Act funded programs. In addition, Pathways assists people with disabilities who receive SSI or SSDI benefits in addressing barriers in work, such as reasonable accommodations and transportation. To assist in this work I: provided comments on the Department of Rehabilitation's update to their regulations, as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act; drafted and presented a plain language publication for DRC that detailed the new rules for the Fair Hearing process for Department of Rehabilitation consumers; and researched the requirements for Independent Living Centers to serve disabled clients.

In addition, my direct supervisor did some work advising people who were facing or had faced employment discrimination because of their disabilities. I aided in this work by shadowing her on calls, drafting several demand letters for clients, and even providing a client with direct advice regarding how they could move forward with their employer in order to access the reasonable accommodations they needed at work. Further, I reviewed documents for my supervisor and summarized them for her as well as provided her with recommendations on what type of advice I thought would be best in that client's specific situation. I also wrote several memos on different legal topics including:

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Ultimately, I am very thankful for my experience at Disability Rights California this summer. My coworkers were kind, approachable and always willing to answer questions. The work was also incredibly meaningful because I was aiding people with disabilities in securing resources or accommodations for themselves that enabled them to be successful in education and work. I could not have done it without my fellowship from Equal Justice America.