



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Nicole Vinoya Gasmen

**Law School:** American University Washington College of Law

**Organization:** Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

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### Update 1:

I believe that everyone, regardless of circumstances, deserves due process and access to justice. After my experiences on the ABA's Hotline for ICE Detainees and what I've learned thus far in law school, I decided I wanted my legal career to support causes and organizations that provide free or low-cost legal services to economically and socially marginalized people.

I've just completed my first few days of interning with the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)! This summer, I'll be continuing my service to asylum-seekers, refugees, and immigrants by preparing applications for relief and client benefits; providing legal services to people facing significant economic and social barriers. I am excited to work with such an effective organization and am looking forward to the legal accompaniment aspect of providing services to people in need.

I'm able to do this essential work with the assistance of a grant from Equal Justice America. EJA has an incredible history of awarding grants to students who want to expand access to justice for all.

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### Update 2:

I'm having an amazing time interning for HIAS this summer. Thus far, I've participated in trainings on different types of immigration relief such as asylum, VAWA, and U-Visas. These trainings emphasized a trauma-informed method that centers the ultimate goal of client empowerment.

I've had the opportunity to interview clients from Cameroon and Honduras to prepare their applications for relief. I have been inspired by our clients' resiliency and determination to make a better life for themselves in the United States.

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## **Update 3:**

This summer interning for HIAS is really flying by. It is time for my third #EJAFellowUpdate! I've been working my legal research and writing muscles a lot these days, developing a 25-page brief in support of one of our clients who is seeking asylum due to persecution in Cameroon. In addition, I've been writing a declaration on behalf of our client who is applying for VAWA after being abused by his wife. It's been great to connect with clients in person, especially in light of working remote for so long. It's also been an honor to figure out this unique style of writing that is new to me and so important to my future career as an immigration attorney -- simultaneously capturing a client's story in his own voice, while presenting as a persuasive legal argument.

Thank you once again to Equal Justice America for funding my summer experience with HIAS. I'm grateful for the opportunity to provide legal aid to asylum-seekers and immigrants here in the DMV area.

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## **Update 4:**

Wow, this is already my second-to-last EJA Fellow Update. I cannot believe I am approaching the end of my internship with HIAS. I have been so grateful for all the opportunities I've received to put my legal skills into practice here.

I've come to realize that as much as I have really grown to enjoy legal research and writing, nothing quite beats the feeling you get when you are face-to-face with the client whose case you're working so hard on. I had scheduled an interview with a client who has gone through a painful experience, and his little daughter insisted on joining on the call. All the careful formatting, pouring over country conditions research, and meticulous Bluebook-editing of footnotes falls away - like coming up for air, or shaking free from tunnel vision. His sincerity and his child's laughs make it all so worth it. It was a great reminder that the accompaniment part of law and social justice is what had inspired me from the start to apply to law school.

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## **Update 5:**

My summer with HIAS as an Equal Justice America fellow has finally come to an end. I am so thankful for the experience I have had at HIAS. I've gotten to put the skills in legal research and writing into practice by writing asylum briefs, VAWA declarations, and compiling country conditions. I've been able to make connections with clients and by helping them share their stories and guide them on their legal journey. I have such a clearer vision now for my future as an immigration attorney.

I am eternally grateful to Equal Justice America for funding this incredible experience. If you also believe that everyone, regardless of circumstances, deserves access to justice - please consider donating to Equal Justice America to help other future lawyers like me who want to pursue public interest work.