



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Greater Boston Legal Services

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### Update 1:

I recently concluded my third week working for Greater Boston Legal Services in the Elder, Health and Disability Unit. My main responsibilities involve assisting clients with their SSDI applications, appeals, and waivers. It has been an incredibly rewarding experience working directly with four clients in my first couple of weeks. I am extremely grateful to have support from Equal Justice America to make my summer legal internship possible.

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### Update 2:

Time is flying, and I'm halfway through my internship at Greater Boston Legal Services. Every day is different at GBLS, and I'm grateful for all the training opportunities the staff has provided. These past few weeks, I have been able to attend trainings about MassHealth, the Children's Disability Project, best practices for client interviewing, and many others!

Interning in the Elder, Health, and Disability Unit has allowed me to work with incredible attorneys and paralegals. Every attorney specializes in a different area of the law, providing a rich learning experience. The Unit has experts on MassHealth, elder housing, special education law for students with disabilities, SSDI/SSI experts, and health disparities advocates. All of the attorneys in the Unit are incredible women with inspirational careers. I am very grateful for the mentorship and guidance they have provided me during these past five weeks!

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### Update 3:

Time for another #ejafellowupdate. I have been interning with GBLS for seven weeks now. Although a majority of my time is spent working on SSDI and SNAP benefit appeals, I have had the opportunity recently to learn more about the advocacy work that GBLS does. The attorneys at GBLS provide direct legal representation to more than 10,000 low-income families each year and help solve their civil (non-criminal) legal problems. However, with the high demand and lack of staffing resources, GBLS still has to turn away every three out of five clients daily. Therefore, GBLS also does impact advocacy work which allows the organization to have a broader impact beyond its direct clients and helps GBLS tackle systemic issues with our legal and government systems.

Impact advocacy includes class action litigation, advocacy for legislation, and advocacy with government agencies concerning rules and procedures. I have been fortunate to work alongside two attorneys on impact



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advocacy regarding MassHealth rules and procedures. I have engaged in legal research and brainstorming sessions to help streamline the MassHealth SACA-2 form, which is the application for health coverage for seniors and people needing long-term care services. The current form is over 42 pages long and very difficult to complete. Hopefully, our work will help reduce the number of people being denied these services because of incomplete forms or errors on this confusing application!

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## **Update 4:**

This is the beginning of my 10th and final week interning at Greater Boston Legal Services. Over the past ten weeks I have had the opportunity to work directly with multiple clients on Social Security Overpayment Waivers, SNAP Benefit issues, SSDI and SSI applications and appeals. I have had the opportunity to work with one client directly since my first week. I have worked closely with her to prepare all the necessary legal memos and medical record evidence for an upcoming hearing she has before an Administrative Law Judge in August. While I unfortunately won't be able to represent her at a hearing since I will already have resumed classes, it's a great feeling knowing that I have been able to make some major contributions to her case. Being trusted to work directly with clients has been one of my favorite aspects of my internship at GBLS. I have learned so much more about the legal system by being able to gain experience beyond the classroom and gain hands on experiences.

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## **Update 5:**

My ten weeks interning at Greater Boston Legal Services flew by! I will reflect on my internship for my final Equal Justice America Fellow update. I began my internship at the end of May, still tired from final exams and in the middle of BC Law's write-on competition. Nevertheless, I dove into the Health, Elder, and Disability Unit's work – getting four clients assigned to me on day one. Over the ten weeks, I got to know each client and their families well. I knew it was essential to establish a relationship of trust and understanding early on with each client. My role at GBLS required me to interview clients' family members and medical providers and review medical records. I then had to present the strongest case possible to the Social Security Administration about why every single one of my clients did qualify for benefits they had been previously denied. Although my role was one of advising my clients, as I reflect on the summer, I can't help but realize how much my clients taught me.

Disability intake interviews are long (3-5 hours) and tiring. Having someone walk you through how their disability impacts their everyday functioning takes compassion and patience. I learned early on how important it was simply to listen. I'd often begin my client meetings with one goal in mind, only to walk away, having learned more than I knew to ask about at the beginning. To be an effective advocate and attorney, you must know the law well for your clients. But I realized early on that's only a part of the job. You must also be a listener, an advisor, and a support system. 99% of the time, you don't need a lawyer when things are going well in life. Instead, Greater Boston Legal Services clients seek legal representation at incredibly difficult moments in their lives. I am leaving my internship with a much better understanding of SSI, SSDI, SNAP, and other welfare benefits and a clearer understanding of what it truly means to be an effective advocate. I remain very grateful to have been awarded an Equal Justice America Fellowship, which made my summer internship possible.