



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Deeraiya Islam

Law School: Columbia Law School

Organization: New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Update 1: I am excited to share my first EJA Fellow Update as an Equal Justice America Fellow. Upon finishing my 1L year at Columbia Law School, I began an internship with New York Legal Assistance Group's Domestic Violence Law Unit. Though I have only been interning at NYLAG for three weeks, I have already been able to witness firsthand the important work that the DVLU does to help those who are in harmful and potentially dangerous situations. Most of what I have observed so far includes work regarding both contested and uncontested divorces, child custody agreements, orders of protection, and safety planning. Though it is sometimes stressful and upsetting to wrap my head around the problems that our clients are facing, it is simultaneously rewarding to know that we are working towards a solution that will leave them in a healthier and safer environment. I am grateful to be spending my 1L summer doing such impactful work.

Update 2: This week marks a full month at my internship with New York Legal Assistance Group's Domestic Violence Law Unit, so I have been reflecting more on my experience in preparation for my second EJA Fellow Update as an Equal Justice America Fellow. This week, as *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, I thought about the impact that this will inevitably have on domestic violence rates nationally. Abortion is healthcare— and it is also a procedure that has saved the lives of countless people in more ways than one. People in abusive relationships can be put at increased risk of experiencing violence as a result of limited access to safe abortions. This SCOTUS decision will have frightening consequences for people who are already in difficult situations. However, I am proud to see that many students at Columbia Law School are already mobilizing in light of this, and I am hopeful that activists will be able to make positive changes in response to a disappointing outcome.

Update 3: For the past two weeks, my supervising attorney at NYLAG has been out and I have been managing my own workload without too much discretion. It has been a really interesting experience, as I was assigned multiple assignments including a memo and two research projects, along with weekly intake assignments, and I am learning how to manage my workload independently. I believe that the time management skills that I have fostered during my 1L year Columbia Law School have helped me a lot throughout these past two weeks, and it is very important that I begin my legal career with a strong understanding of how to manage my time. Additionally, my team at NYLAG has been working on a domestic violence law case for mock trial, and this has been a transformational experience since we are getting a taste of how public interest attorneys actually work in



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

collaboration with one another. I am excited to continue working with my mock trial team this summer, and I am grateful to be learning so much from this internship!

Update 4: For the past two weeks of my internship at the Domestic Violence Law Unit of NYLAG, my mock trial team and I have been preparing our three witnesses for trial. This is my first time participating in a mock trial, and my only experience with anything similar was during 1L in environmental law moot court at Columbia Law. I am grateful to be able to experience more of the litigation side of family law, as I think it's a valuable experience that will help me decide whether or not I want to pursue litigation or transactional work in the future. This is especially relevant right now as I am going through OCI and thinking more about what I want to do for next summer. My experience at NYLAG has provided me with a lot more insight about what I am looking for in a career, what sort of work I hope to do, and what type of organization I want to work for.

Update 5: For my fifth and final EJA Fellow Update, I wanted to summarize my experience this summer working at the Domestic Violence Law Unit at New York Legal Assistance Group. After completing my 1L year at Columbia Law School, I was eager to gain more practical experience outside of the classroom in order to build upon the skills that I had been developing throughout the year. 1L is very litigation-focused, so I was interested to learn more about the reality of working in litigation rather than the classroom version of it. My tasks throughout the summer generally included working on custody petitions, family offense petitions, uncontested divorces, child support issues, legal research assignments, and intakes. I also had the opportunity to participate in a mock trial in which my team and I represented a petitioner seeking an order of protection against an abusive ex-partner. Of all my tasks, I found conducting intakes to be the most interesting because it allowed me to speak directly with clients in order to better understand their circumstances and what led them to seek help with NYLAG.

Furthermore, I found the process of drafting custody and family offense petitions to be a great learning experience for the same reason— it allowed me to listen to our clients and write down their stories. While I learned a lot from this process, it was simultaneously disheartening to hear firsthand accounts of trauma and neglect from those who were victims of abusers. My internship this summer has inspired me to continue doing important pro bono work in my future career, regardless of where I end up working, so that I am still able to make a difference in the lives of those who have experienced domestic violence.

This summer, I was also lucky enough to observe a custody hearing. This particular trial had been going on for years, and I was previously able to sit-in on one of our attorneys preparing the client for cross-examination, so it was incredibly fascinating to see how that all came together during the hearing. It was the first time that I had actually experienced a real courtroom, albeit virtual, so it was fun to observe the various dynamics between both sides' lawyers and the referee. Overall, my internship at NYLAG was a great way to gain more practical experience outside of the classroom, and I am grateful that @Equal Justice America supported me through it this summer!

If you are able to do so, I would encourage you to please donate to Equal Justice America so that they can continue to support public interest interns for next year's fellowship and beyond. It is critical that we continue to support public interest interns, as they are often compensated less than those working in other fields, despite doing such necessary and impactful work.