



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Jessica Wang

**Law School:** Georgetown University Law Center

**Organization:** Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services

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**Update 1:** Today is the beginning of my third week working for Legal Aid Society of [Metropolitan Family Services](#), Individual Rights and Social Justice Practice Group. #EJAFellowUpdate Georgetown University Law Center. The first week of my internship comprised mainly of trainings, where I was able to learn about basic immigration law, special forms of relief for immigrant victims of crime, trauma-informed lawyering, and vicarious trauma. During my second week, I began working on three clients' cases, two of which involve U-Visa applications. I also began work on a research memo about the impact of crime admissions on a noncitizen's inadmissibility status.

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**Update 2:** I have been interning with Legal Aid Society (LAS) of [Metropolitan Family Services](#)' Individual Rights and Social Justice (IRSJ) practice group for almost a month now. Since my last update, I've been able to work on a variety of assignments. #EJAFellowUpdate [Georgetown University Law Center](#)

Many of IRSJ's clients are applying for U-Visas, which is a form of immigration relief available for victims of certain qualifying crimes, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. In the past two weeks, I drafted and sent a Supplement B request letter to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office. The Supplement B form is a form that is required for the U-Visa and demonstrates that the client's application has been certified by law enforcement. Such certification supposedly demonstrates to immigration authorities that our client cooperated with law enforcement's response to the crime she was a victim of, which in this case was domestic violence. I also drafted the exhibit list for the client's U-Visa application, as well as the cover letter and exhibit list for her work authorization application.

In addition, I have been working on another client's I-765V renewal application, which allows the abused spouses of certain visa holders, such as H-1B holders, to independently obtain work authorization. I conducted research about the renewal period for I-765Vs and drafted a declaration explaining why the client does not



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currently have access to certain required evidence. For another client, I drafted two FOIA requests to local police departments in order to compile evidence for her potential U-Visa case.

The highlight of the last two weeks was definitely the immigration legal clinic that IRSJ conducted in Chicago's Belmont-Cragin neighborhood. Through this clinic, I was able to observe numerous legal consultations with community members, all of whom were seeking a way to obtain lawful status in the U.S. My supervisor even allowed me to take the lead on screening the last two clinic attendees for potential eligibility for certain immigration benefits, such as asylum, the U-Visa, the T-Visa, etc. While the opportunity to meet with clients in-person was invigorating, it was also difficult and emotional. The majority of those we met with were not currently eligible for any type of relief. In addition, due to the nature of many types of relief, we often had to ask attendees to discuss their traumatic experiences with domestic violence, labor exploitation, and gang violence. The clinic experience reminded me of the importance of trauma-informed lawyering, as well as the urgent need to establish a pathway to citizenship for the over 11 million undocumented people in the United States.

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**Update 3:** I can't believe I'm over halfway through my summer internship with Legal Aid Society (LAS) of [Metropolitan Family Services](#)' (MFS) Individual Rights and Social Justice (IRSJ) practice group! #EJAFellowUpdate [Georgetown University Law Center](#)

I was extremely grateful last week for the opportunity to lead a call with a VAWA client. VAWA is short for the Violence Against Women Act, which allows immigrants who have been abused by a current/former spouse, parent, or child who is a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident to self-petition for status. During the client call, I walked through the various forms that will comprise the client's VAWA application, filling out information along the way and making note of information we still need to obtain and/or confirm.

I also found out that the Cook County State's Attorney's Office recently completed a Supplement B form I requested for another client last month. The Supplement B form demonstrates that law enforcement has certified a client's U visa application, supposedly showing USCIS that the applicant cooperated with law enforcement's response to the crime they were a victim of. Law enforcement certification is required for the U visa, which presents a potential barrier for many immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other qualifying crimes.

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**Update 4:** I'm sad to say that I only have a couple weeks left at my summer internship with Legal Aid Society (LAS) of [Metropolitan Family Services](#)' Individual Rights and Social Justice practice group. #EJAFellowUpdate [Georgetown University Law Center](#)

Earlier this month, I was finally able to meet the client whose I-765V application I prepared this summer. These materials included Form I-765V, a declaration explaining our inability to access certain required evidence, and a cover letter presenting the legal argument for why our client is eligible for this benefit. She came into the office



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to review and sign her application, and we mailed her materials to USCIS that same day. The I-765V application grants work authorization to individuals who have been abused by a spouse who was admitted in A, E-3, G, or H nonimmigrant status. This immigration benefit allows a domestic violence survivor to independently obtain work authorization, rather than having to depend on their abusive spouse. Benefits like the I-765V can play a monumental difference for an immigrant domestic violence survivor, as abusers often leverage a survivor's immigration status and/or work authorization as a method of power and control.

In the past two weeks, I finished writing my research memo on what constitutes an "admission" of a crime or its essential elements in order to be found inadmissible during immigration proceedings. I've also submitted multiple FOIA requests to local police departments to compile evidence for various U visa and VAWA clients. In addition, I drafted the cover letter for one client's U visa application, which lays out the legal argument for why she satisfies all the elements of a U visa.

This photo is from last week's intern thank you event, which LAS kindly threw to celebrate and say goodbye to our intern cohort. It was a lot of fun to socialize with staff and the other interns, especially next to the river on a Chicago summer day!

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**Update 5:** I can't believe my summer with Legal Aid Society of [Metropolitan Family Services](#) is already over! The last day of my summer internship was August 12th, although I will continue to work with LAS on a remote, part-time basis. Since my last update, I finished drafting a Supplement B request letter to the Illinois Department of Human Rights. In addition, I was notified that the Cook County State's Attorney fulfilled a Supplement B request that I submitted a few weeks prior. I also submitted a FOIA request to a local police department to gather records for a client's VAWA application and led an intake call with another client, which involved asking questions to screen her potential eligibility for the U visa, T visa, VAWA, asylum, etc.

The most impactful part of my summer was the opportunity I had to lead several calls with a VAWA client to prepare his declaration. The declaration is one of the most important pieces of evidence included in a VAWA or U visa application. This document tells the client's story and is supposed to demonstrate to USCIS that the applicant was, in fact, the victim of a crime that would make them eligible for a U visa or VAWA. As one can imagine, the process of interviewing a client to draft their declaration can be invasive and re-traumatizing, as it requires them to describe the violence they experienced in extensive detail. I was not only honored that my supervisor trusted me to lead these client calls, but also that the client trusted me enough to share his story.

Overall, I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity I had this summer to intern with LAS's Individual Rights and Social Justice practice group, as well as the opportunity to stay on this fall. I learned so many technical skills through my internship, such as how to draft and submit FOIA requests, how to write cover letters and other legal documents related to immigration, and how to conduct legal research about immigration law. I came away with a basic overarching understanding of our immigration system and learned a great deal from observing how



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my supervisors and other attorneys approached their humanitarian-based immigration cases. It was also very interesting for me to do direct service work in a legal capacity, as opposed to a general advocacy/case management role like my previous job.

I'll also, of course, remember the clients I interacted with. I'll carry their stories with me as I continue my legal career and think of them when I need a reminder of why I'm on this path. More than anything, my summer with LAS was a grounding and rejuvenating experience for me, and I'm truly excited to continue working with the organization in the coming months.

I am extremely grateful to have support from [Equal Justice America](#) to make my summer legal internship possible. The need for civil legal aid is urgent. If you are so inclined, you can donate to EJA.