



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Public Counsel

Update 1: Hi all! I am starting my third week as a summer intern with Public Counsel in their Center for Veterans Advancement (CVA).

For my work this summer, I was awarded an Equal Justice America fellowship. As some of you may know, I come from a single mother household and have paid my way through college and now law school on my own through loans and work study. It takes a village, and my family has stepped up to provide some financial support for me to continue my passions working with underrepresented populations. With the support of my EJA grant (and other wonderful grants -- more updates to follow soon), I've been able to work with CVA to help veterans receive benefits and discharge upgrades without the financial worries of an unpaid internship.

I am extremely grateful to be working for Public Counsel this summer for a cause that is particularly personal to me. Keep a lookout for more updates on my summer experience in the following weeks!

Update 2: Hi! It's me, again. We've reached the halfway point of my summer, and I wanted to check in and tell you what I've been up to at Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement.

A skill I hoped to strengthen during my summer clerkship was interviewing and client relationship building. With the desire to work with vulnerable populations, I am deeply concerned with my impact on a client's experience seeking legal help. Public Counsel has provided me with the amazing opportunity to speak with veterans directly. Through intake calls, I hear stories of their lives before, during, and after service. My eyes have been opened to the power of storytelling and how it can strengthen my advocacy skills. It's been an honor listening to those who have served and helping them share their stories to receive the benefits they so rightly deserve.



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Update 3: Hi! It's me, again. I wanted to check in and tell you what I've been up to at Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement over the last few weeks.

On June 30th, summer clerks were welcomed into the office for our first in person gathering. I was finally able to meet my peers and CVA team face to face over a luncheon celebrating their return to the office and the retirement of one of their attorneys. The amount of community I felt that day was unmatched to any other nonprofit I've interned with during my undergraduate studies. It was so inspiring seeing many diverse individuals could come together in pursuit of justice. Having an experience like this has truly been a blessing and reinvigorated my vocational call to public interest law. This profession has so much to offer, and I cannot wait to be a part of the next generation of lawyers pursuing a more equal justice system.

Update 4: I wanted to check in and tell you what I've been up to at Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement as I near the end of my clerkship.

This summer, I received funding from WLALA to work on a toolkit that assists veterans and their caregivers in appealing their Caregiver Program decisions directly to the BVA. My supervising attorney Amanda Pertusati was one of the counsel in the Beaudette decision that allowed veterans to use the BVA appeals process after being previously barred. Since this is a fairly new decision, Public Counsel and I collaborated to make a toolkit that would provide all the necessary forms, deadlines, and information for the appeals process. In addition, I drafted a template brief for veterans to use that contains all the necessary eligibility requirements and legal arguments. Hopefully, this toolkit will allow more veterans to appeal and get the benefits they so rightly deserve!

Update 5: Upon completing my clerkship with Public Counsel's Center for Veterans Advancement, I wanted to express my deep gratitude to Public Counsel, Equal Justice America, and WLALA for funding my experience.

I mentioned previously that I come from a single parent household and have been funding my higher education through scholarships and fellowships since my undergraduate studies. Without the generosity of many organizations and individuals, it would be extremely difficult and near impossible to pursue my goals of becoming a public interest lawyer. Choosing public interest law has been an easy decision based off my passions, but it has been worrisome knowing that summer clerkships in this field rarely offer paid positions. Currently, my mom and grandparents have been financially contributing to my living expenses while I live at my partner's family's house and commute to DTLA for school to minimize costs. Having to tell them I would be taking a position that didn't pay made me feel like a financial burden. Thanks to the generosity of Public Counsel, Equal Justice America, and WLALA, I was able to entirely fund my clerkship and take over my personal expenses for the first semester of 2L!



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While working with the Center of Veterans' Advancement, I was introduced to the public interest realm in a very personal way. I come from a long line of veterans and felt particularly called to help veterans receive the benefits they so rightly deserve after witnessing my great aunt take care of my great uncle due to the debilitating effects of agent orange exposure. No one who serves our country should struggle to receive support, especially from the disabilities incurred during service. Under the supervision of my supervising attorney Amanda Pertusati, I helped create a toolkit that assists veterans and their caregivers in appealing their Caregiver Program decisions directly to the BVA. This toolkit comprises of all the necessary eligibility requirements and forms, a template brief, and a sample declaration. This can help the nearly 400,000 veterans who are eligible to appeal. Since this is such a new appeals process, the toolkit is the first of its kind until VA can provide some solid information about how the process works. I am excited to see the way this toolkit will develop as new information is released and we begin to learn more about the appeals decisions.

Working with Public Counsel has been a dream come true as an inspiring public interest lawyer. The organization's stature in the Los Angeles and California community demonstrates an unwavering commitment to creating a more equitable justice system by directly serving underrepresented populations. During my time there, Public Counsel continually asked how it could better serve people, and that will be the driving question and challenge I will carry into my law career. I cannot wait to see where my legal career takes me and how I will contribute to molding a more just system that works for all its people.

Equal Justice America is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting the next generation of lawyers in delivering legal services to those most in need. If you'd like to support EJA, please donate.