



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Update 1:** These first few weeks working with a firm that I whole-heartedly believe in has been an amazing experience. I help provide legal assistance to victims of domestic violence who would not otherwise afford a divorce or child custody case. Although there is tedious work such as completing pleadings and various other paperwork, the time I get to spend getting to know each client is an eye-opening experience.

Some stories of domestic violence that I have heard seem so surreal to me and I did not fully appreciate the gravity of these people's situations. I am thankful that I can be that person they rely on. My clients have taught me to be more personable, understanding, and empathetic to their experiences. Many of them have shown me that if not for MAP, they would not know what to do or where to go. Although we are not always able to provide representation or assistance in the way the clients are looking for, it is still amazing to see how grateful the clients are and how much of an impact we have made on the lives of these survivors.

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**Update 2:** The past two weeks I have been really thinking about whether public interest or legal aid is right for me. I have always been concerned about the pay and whether I would be able to live a comfortable life on a legal aid salary. I was concerned about my mental health and whether the stories from my clients would eventually take a debilitating toll on me.

Ultimately after hearing from many attorneys at Michigan Advocacy Program. I was convinced that legal aid is where I am meant to be. Yes, compared to large corporate and private firms, the pay is significantly lower, but being a lawyer is so much more than just the pay. I love the idea that with legal aid I am helping people who would not otherwise be able to. I feel that I can go home and always be proud of what I do. In such a capitalistic society, I have learned that it is not about the money, but it is about the people. This is why I wanted to be a lawyer.

As a law student, I know loans are on the back of everyone's minds, and thankfully there is loan forgiveness while working at legal aid and plenty of stipends and fellowships to help support a legal aid path. Additionally,



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the pay is not all so bad, it may not support the life of luxury that lawyers have been depicted to have, but the mental comfort that I am doing great things for my clients is well worth the slight inconvenience.

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**Update 3:** My time at Michigan Advocacy Program is slowly coming to a close. It is definitely a bittersweet moment. A few days ago, I had to chance to see lots of family that I have not seen since I was a child. I talked a lot about what I do at MAP and what I want to do with my life. As I talked about my experiences and interests, I took a chance to reflect on the career path I am choosing.

I asked myself questions like can I see myself doing this for the rest of my life, am I proud of what I am doing, am I proud to show off what I am doing. Ultimately, the answer is yes. I was proud enough to talk about my work hundreds of times, and after looking at myself, I would be happy to do it a hundred more times. I am grateful that I am able to pursue a path that I am proud to walk.

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**Update 4:** During the last few weeks at my clerkship, I have seen both the wrath of clients going through a really tough time in their lives, and the kindness of those clients who really appreciate what we do at Family Law Project. This really got me to think about both sides of that coin and appreciate and understand the not so pleasant side.

I have been told by my peers who are not in the legal profession to “not let clients talk to me like that” or when clients consistently miss their scheduled meetings to “just drop them.” Their argument was that since the client doesn’t have to pay for legal fees, I am doing them a favor and for them to respect me more. I have also gotten comments like “well if they don’t have to pay for legal fees then of course they aren’t going to respect you.” However, I think this narrative is wrong.

Part of being in the public sector is understanding where the client comes from. Lots of Family Law Project clients are indigent people just looking for a break in life and looking to move on from their past abusers. Maybe yes, you could consider what FLP does for them a favor, but it is a path that we all choose and are happy to do. This means that we have accepted all the ups and the downs of the job. I am 100% sure that people working in private practice and get unappreciative and disrespectful clients as well. There really is no escaping it.

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**Update 5:** Now that my clerkship had concluded, I feel like I never truly appreciated the hands-on experience a clerkship gives. The more I worked with the attorneys the more I realized that law school does not really teach you how to be a lawyer. Maybe I can tell you all about the Rule Against Perpetuities or tell you the elements of a battery, but that really does not go into practice unless you are practicing in a field that uses those topics. I am so grateful that I got an opportunity to see what it is like to be an attorney in the field and how different that environment is from Law School. I feel that all the motions I drafted and all the times I went to court is something I will always remember and will be able to use wherever I go.



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This got me thinking about how more people must have this opportunity. It should be incorporated into the curriculum and made available to all law students. Students should not have to choose between an essential hands-on experience and being paid.

I plan on continuing my work in the public sector and eventually hope to be able to give back to the law students following in my footsteps. I know it is hard to step into the public sector because it does not provide the “ideal” vision of a “rich lawyer,” but the work is so rewarding in other aspects. These aspects are worth more than what money can buy and are in my opinion, priceless.

As fall approaches, I return back to the grind of a student and back to the stresses of classes that won't really apply to the field I want to work in. Although this can be frustrating, I do not think it will be long before I am back on the field interacting with clients again. I am excited for what is to come and honestly wish my whole legal education could be done in the field. However, on the flip side, I am also excited to go back to school. I get to learn about things that I would never on my own choose to study and maybe even find a new passion along the way.

I do not think I will end up in the private sector, but after taking classes of my choosing and seeing what is a good fit for me, I can never say “I'll never end up in the private sector.” I do not know what the future holds, but I am excited to see!