



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Grace Alzaibak

**Law School:** Northeastern University School of Law

**Organization:** Project Citizenship

---

**Update 1:** This is my first update for the EJA Summer Fellowship. I have been working this summer at Project Citizenship as a Legal Intern. I assist the attorneys and the Program Team with a variety of tasks, including reviewing N-648 medical waivers and assisting folks with hunting down documentation such as dockets for criminal proceedings that they may struggle to find themselves. This work involves a lot of front-facing customer service, which I think is something many law students should engage in during their time in law school, as it gives an important perspective that many of our law schools neglect to provide. While I have worked in immigration before, I have enjoyed working in the citizenship sphere, as it is generally a more positive experience for clients as it is the final step in many of their immigration journeys and often less driven by stressful deadlines. I have also appreciated working on medical waivers, as I believe in immigration accessibility and one way to encourage that is use of waivers to allow greater access to citizenship by waiving the English and civics exam for those who cannot take it. I look forward to continuing my work with Project Citizenship over the rest of the summer.

---

**Update 2:** This is my second update for the EJA Summer Fellowship. I have continued my work with Project Citizenship as a Legal Intern. This has included tasks such as following up with individuals for missing documents and continuing to prepare revisions of medical waivers. I have also assisted with several application workshops, both virtually and in person. The workshops are a good opportunity to interface with clients one on one. This is valuable in a system that is faceless and treats individuals as merely a number or file as opposed to a whole person. By interacting with clients one of one and assisting with applications, we are able to make at least one step of the immigration process personable and welcoming, which is supposed to be the entire point of the immigration system. I have appreciated the in-person appointments, as it is always nice to meet folks without the barrier of a screen; however, I am glad Project Citizenship has continued their virtual appointments (started during COVID) as it allows for even greater access to the immigration process and our services than was previously possible. Any step we can take to increase access is a step in the right direction.

---

**Update 3:** This is my third update for the EJA Summer Fellowship. I have continued my work with Project Citizenship as a Legal Intern. I have had the opportunity to represent clients at naturalization interviews held at



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

USCIS. One client was unsuccessful, but the second interview I attended was one where the client did pass and become a citizen. In the first case, the client likely would have benefited from a medical waiver, which is something Project Citizenship will luckily assist him with. In the second case, the individual was able to utilize a medical waiver to become a citizen, something he would not have been able to do otherwise. This experience is something that folks have told me is a “good experience” for me from a work perspective. However, for me it has driven home two points. One is our immigration system is highly flawed and needs to be more accessible for those who need accommodations – medical waivers exist but the current form is cumbersome, challenging, and often denied. Second, while I am happy to serve as legal representation, these folks deserve real attorneys, not just law students, and it’s unfortunate that we are in a situation where there are not enough attorneys for everyone who attends these interviews despite the hard work of Project Citizenship staff and our pro bono volunteers. The legal profession needs to do a better job of valuing public interest attorneys and making that job path feasible so folks can have the representation they need and deserve.

---

**Update 4:** I have continued my work at Project Citizenship as a Legal Intern this summer. Over the last week we have started to say goodbye to other interns in separate parts of the organization who are moving on to new opportunities. A big part of the Project Citizenship team are AmeriCorps interns. While they are amazing individuals who do great work, it really drives home how “public interest” is not only underfunded and unappreciated by the legal field – that is the status quo across the board. Without unpaid and underpaid staff, places like Project Citizenship that do amazing work would not be able to function. It is unfortunate that there is so much need, and so little way to fill that need. The staff who have left taught me a lot about the actual day-to-day functioning of Project Citizenship as a nonprofit, and I have appreciated their insight as it has given this internship a more well-rounded feel, rather than just a legal position. So much of legal work is informed and supported by the work of others, and that is very obvious at a small nonprofit where everyone is involved with every aspect of the work being done.

---

**Update 5:** This is my final update for the EJA Summer Fellowship. I finished my legal internship on August 19<sup>th</sup>. I had a very good summer and was able to leave most of my work in a very good place for my now former colleagues. This summer was an interesting one. While I had a lot of immigration experience prior to joining Project Citizenship for the summer, I had not had a chance to work in a nonprofit sphere. I was hoping that this summer would give me a good sense of what it is like to do immigration work outside of the private sector. In many ways I think that goal was achieved this summer. Project Citizenship is a small nonprofit, especially compared to Boston heavy-hitters like Greater Boston Legal Services and Rian Immigrant Center, but it pulls a lot of weight especially since it does the majority of naturalization and medical waiver work for the Boston and New England area. I was able to get a sense of how immigration nonprofits operate, but also how they interact with and support each other. A lot of times this summer we were either referring clients to other community organizations better positioned to assist them with green card or work authorization concerns, while other groups sent us their naturalization clients. There is a significant need for nonprofit groups to support each other, and I saw that in action this summer. I did also see the ways in which private firms try to also provide



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

support for local nonprofits. However, similarly to the way I feel student legal representation should be deemphasized as a “resume builder,” I would like to see private firms view nonprofits not just as “pro bono opportunities” but a more holistic type of support that acknowledges and amends the wide financial disparities between private firms and nonprofit organizations. More than anything this summer drove home to me that there needs to be an overall reevaluation of how the legal community values and prioritizes nonprofit organizations. They fill a huge gap in the legal services sphere, and small funds and foundations, underpaid employees, and unpaid interns should not be the only way to keep these organizations afloat. Is the work rewarding? Absolutely. But as a legal industry we need to move away from that being the only way we value those in the legal profession who are doing the critical nonprofit work that serves the vast majority of legal clients and also provides all those private firms with their pro bono hours. All my systemic concerns aside, I am grateful for my experience with Project Citizenship this summer, and I plan to continue to volunteer with them moving forward as a student and hopefully in the future as an attorney. They are a great nonprofit holding down many areas of immigration work in Boston, and I am glad to have had a chance to support their mission over the past 15 weeks.