



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Hirah Ahmed

Law School: Northeastern University School of Law

Organization: Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts

Update 1: As you may have seen recently, I posted some fun updates about working with Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts while being an Equal Justice America fellow! I'm roughly two weeks into working with PLS, and I am already loving it. I'm surrounded by a great staff, ranging from attorneys to admin, who are all so passionate and supportive. The transition has been nearly seamless because of how accessible the staff is for answering questions and just general chats! I'll be working on two specific project teams this summer: the Racial Equity In Corrections Initiative (REICI) and a lawsuit against the Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center. I highly encourage you all to check out the PLS website and see what work they do, and I'm happy to answer any questions! (<https://plsma.org/>)

My work on these projects this summer is being funded by Equal Justice America (EJA), which I am so grateful for. If you know me personally, you know my passion for making the legal field accessible and equitable for first generation, low income, students of color, and EJA has helped the public service field be accessible for me. T

Update 2: I'm back with EJA Update number 2! I feel like my first post was mostly introductory, but that's because the work just started. This past week has really ramped up and I feel like I have a ton of exciting stuff on my plate. Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts has been giving me such a diverse workload I feel like I'm learning so many different facets of prisoner's rights and beyond just the legal scope. I've learned how to do research beyond Lexis/Westlaw, heard about policy & legislative initiatives, and even wrote an advocacy letter for an incarcerated client to get them the medical care they need.

It's also been harrowing to see and hear firsthand how harmful the carceral system truly is. You think you know, but then you write a letter for a client your age experiencing months of medical neglect and it just clicks even more. I'm working with our ICE detention team and it has two people who were directly harmed by ICE's



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

violent detention. I am lucky to be trusted by these people with their stories, and I'm glad PLS and Equal Justice America are equipping me to be an advocate in any way I can. Previously, at times it felt like 'harm reduction' was not conducive to the greater framework of abolition, but after meeting clients, volunteers, survivors, I now know this work paves a stronger path to getting rid of these systems by building community-based advocacy.

Update 3: It has been quite the busy few weeks since my last update but all great! I sat in on some client calls for Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts RIZE project, which works on getting specialized medical treatment and plans for clients with substance use disorders. I will say as someone with an extremely non-STEM background (yes I was an English major!), I have been learning so much about medicine and its intersection with the legal field. I also have been working on a project for the Racial Equity in Corrections Initiative (REICI) that has me deep diving into the health disparities between white clients and Black and Brown ones and developing a plan on how to get these clients equitable access to products that minimize the disparity.

A great win that also happened last week is that an attorney I work with (and fellow NUSL alum) Sarah Nawab published a report on the conditions of incarceration at Women's Prisons. It is an amazing, intersectional piece of work that I had the privilege to get a sneak peek of during my early days here at PLS, and I am so excited to fully read through it. Definitely take a look at it here: <https://lnkd.in/eY3dXYqk>

Update 4: I'm back at it with another EJA Fellow Update! This week has been ramping up with the public health & incarceration research. After a lot of consultation, I'm deep into this presentation and I've learned firsthand how important community building is in advocacy. Being able to talk to diverse groups of people to produce a final work product is super important, and sometimes working around people in the same field for a long period of time may hamper that ability. My work at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts has exposed me to so many diverse people with diverse backgrounds, and I hope the work I do in the future exposes me to many people as well. Meeting new people and new communities is super important to me, and beyond just for networking purposes. I love seeing the ways different people come together for one common ground, and my work at PLS and Equal Justice America helps me do that. Searching through the hashtags and seeing the different fellows doing great work is such an amazing example of community in a field that may not emphasize community. Check out Equal Justice America and all the work they do to build community among students passionate about public interest work!

Update 5: I'm here with a bittersweet post- my final EJA Fellow update ! It has been such a perspective shifting summer that was seamlessly supported by Equal Justice America and I truly could not be more lucky and blessed.

This week is generally the end time for many internships, so it was filled with goodbyes and reflections on the future, so I'd like to share a few with you all. (I'm lucky to have two more weeks with Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts).



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

I recently wrapped up the project I was working on for REICI that I discussed in my last few posts. It felt great; all that was left was final feedback from REICI's Director, LaToya Whiteside, when she got a call the morning before our meeting, stating that our point person no longer wanted to view the presentation. All the research the team put in before me, the time we put in amalgamating the information into an amazing presentation, had to be shelved. And this reminded me the slight fickle nature of advocacy, and the need for persistence. When you work as an advocate, you may need to work alongside people you don't even want to interact with. You may need to work with people who aren't willing to listen to your perspective. But that doesn't mean your role in advocacy ends there. Rather, you shift perspective.

The REICI team spent time reworking who we can present our work to. Who can be a voice for change with us? I learned passion for working with communities doesn't solely come from large scale change, but also that no change is minute. Each step we take, each person we inform, builds a network towards change and restoration. The project focused on getting culturally specific items and nutritious food into MA DOC prisons. And at first, it seems a bit minute. It's just food in the canteen. It's not a big class action suit; it's not some form of parole. But these seemingly minute actions have much greater consequences than we think. We cannot work towards the restorations of our communities if they are not healthy enough to advocate for themselves. If they do not have food resorting their bodies, culturally and religiously specific items fortifying their minds, how can they focus on being a part of the greater community? All positive change is restoration, even if it's in ways we may not realize.

I am big on community building. The saying "it takes a village" did not come from nowhere. I think it is so important to build and nourish our communities, and my time at PLS has helped me realize I can do it in different ways. Thank you to PLS, EJA, and you all for being my community this summer. I hope I can take this momentum and build my BIPOC and First Gen communities as a 2L with the semester lurking around the corner. Please take a minute to check out Equal Justice America and support its initiatives. To any EJA fellow who may see this post, please feel free to reach out! I love to help in any way I can.