



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: I have been with the Disability Rights Legal Center for three weeks now and the work I have been doing is amazing. I have had the opportunity to work on multiple cases at a time, while also attending webinars and weekly seminars hosted by my supervising attorney. I am learning a lot about the American Disabilities Act (ADA), and the impact of ADA violations. I was taken aback when I realized that ADA violations occur in jails across California. The lack of access to showers, toilets, visiting areas, or even the outside yard provides an inhumane way of living for incarcerated persons with disabilities. The work that DRLC does permanently impacts people's lives as they advocate for fair and equal opportunities.

Update 2: These past few weeks I have worked on impact litigation cases that aim to change the systemic barriers in place affecting people with disabilities. I have found that despite the many obstacles that people with disabilities face, many have overcome adversity by advocating for themselves throughout their lifetime. Many disabled individuals advocate for equality in their education to receive the necessary accommodations that will allow them to learn and thrive in the area they wish to specialize. On the other hand, I have learned that persons with intellectual disabilities that do not have adequate support face the risk of becoming homeless. These individuals are vulnerable to living on the streets and run the risk of being incarcerated. While stories of triumph exist, work must still be done to help our vulnerable populations and create equality in all systems of life.

Update 3: I am halfway through my summer externship with Disability Rights Legal Center and I have had to opportunity to help investigate a case involving an incarcerated disabled individual who was not receiving equal access to medication. Being part of the team strategy meetings showed me the staff attorneys' compassion and skill in deciding if a lawsuit was appropriate. To help, I had the opportunity to do some research regarding standing, and what injury would need to be shown if another person brought the lawsuit on behalf of this individual. The amount of strategy and work that goes into investigating a case while ensuring that the client's best interest is always prioritized takes skill and compassion.



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I also assisted with a special education case by reviewing the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). I researched staffing requirements for schools K-12, with a focus on special education. This research was to help identify whether schools were meeting the staffing requirements outlined in the statute, to ensure every child's right to education.

Update 4: I had the opportunity to help staff attorneys on an appeal they were drafting. I read the brief that was to be submitted and cite checked for accuracy. Cite checking required that I look through trial court testimony, exhibits, findings of fact and law, case law, and statutes, to ensure that the citations were correct and that each sentence was supported by the citation. I also had the opportunity to attend meetings with co-counsels and amici to discuss the case and the strategy that was being used in the brief. Working with attorneys who care and are passionate about ADA law and helping Disabled persons assert their rights has been inspiring. Seeing the brief and the amicus brief come together has opened my eyes to the amount of teamwork it takes to represent underserved communities.

Update 5: While I was researching the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) I was most impacted by Congress's statement that "Disability is a *natural part of the human experience* and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society." In helping research staffing requirements, I worked with a senior paralegal who was passionate about special education because of her own experiences as a mother of a special needs child. Her advocacy for her child allowed her to get the help that her child needed, which ensured her a bright and successful future.

The current education system fails in that children in need of special education are not prioritized because of the lack of resources and funds. While speaking to a former special education director, she informed us that teachers and staff do all they can to ensure equity amongst the students, but the funds and resources available make it impossible. DRLC's work in helping children with special needs is integral in helping ensure that children get the proper Individualized Education Plan, or that parents know about the resources available to them. Education, I believe, is the foundation for a person's life and helps individuals rise out of poverty and achieve some sense of stability as an adult.

I learned so much from my summer with Disability Rights Legal Center (DRLC). I value the opportunity to be part of meetings with co-counsel, amici, and special education experts. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute some research to cases in the investigation phase and listen in on case strategy meetings. Most of all, however, I am grateful to have met such passionate attorneys who work diligently to fight for equality.