



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Nationalities Service Center

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**Update 1:** I'm excited to share that I am interning with Nationalities Service Center this summer on the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project. I'm working with clients who are or have been in immigration detention while defending themselves from deportation. Despite having almost six years of immigration law experience before starting at Temple University - James E. Beasley School of Law, I had done almost no work with removal proceedings or detained individuals until two weeks ago. But in two weeks at NSC I've already observed three immigration hearings before two different judges for detained clients. For a hearing later this week, I helped write a motion requesting additional safeguards for our client's proceedings and I drafted the questions for our agency to ask the client during the hearing on our motion. I'm thrilled to be getting so much experience and to contribute to NSC's work.

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**Update 2:** I've now completed four weeks of my summer internship with Nationalities Service Center and the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project. I'm working on several cases but one in particular has had my focus for the whole month. Seeing how the case progresses over time has been an invaluable experience. I've attended four virtual hearings on the matter, including a competency hearing, which was a first for both me and my supervisor! I helped her write a motion requesting safeguards for the client's final hearing, and half of the dozen safeguards we requested were granted. The speed of removal proceedings for detained individuals can be overwhelming, but the upsides are that the respondent gets a decision quickly and that someone like me can help with an entire case from start to finish.

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**Update 3:** I'm amazed that six weeks have already passed at my internship with Nationalities Service Center and the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project. As I had hoped, I'm learning about the intersection of criminal law and immigration law in my work here. Last week my supervisor and I submitted a brief arguing that a client's conviction was not a Particularly Serious Crime through a novel analysis based on a decision by the U.S. Attorney General that just came out in May. This week I'm starting work on another case in which the potential relief is based on new classifications of crimes as determined by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2021. It's amazing to learn about these changes in immigration law as they're happening, and to use them to help clients get relief. I am grateful to be learning from the amazing team at NSC, who are always looking to test new arguments and push the law forward.



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**Update 4:** It's hard to believe that my internship with Nationalities Service Center and the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project will be over in less than two weeks! I'm still learning new things and helping new clients every week. My supervising attorney and I had a huge win with our argument that a client's conviction was not a Particularly Serious Crime: the judge agreed with our analysis and found that our client is still eligible to apply for asylum and withholding of removal. Because we were working with totally new law, our arguments felt like a long shot. We—my supervisor, the client, and I—were over the moon when we received the decision. His final hearing will be the week after my internship ends, so I'm doing everything I can in the meantime to make sure his asylum application is as strong as possible.

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**Update 5:** Last Friday, I wrapped up my ten-week internship at Nationalities Service Center with the Pennsylvania Immigrant Family Unity Project. I am so grateful to NSC and my amazing supervisor and mentor Lilah Thompson for taking me on this summer. In the past, I'd always felt intimidated by immigration court and removal proceedings. From the first week of my internship, Lilah had me sitting in on hearings and writing briefs, and now I don't know what I was so worried about! I'm looking forward to getting more removal experience in the future and I know I have an enormous head start after these ten weeks.

I'm also very proud of my contributions to the NSC team. I assisted with about a dozen of Lilah's clients, including writing my first BIA Appeal brief and helping to write Motions to Reopen, Reconsider, and Terminate. I also took on new research challenges, including finding Eleventh Circuit caselaw on asylum, withholding of removal, and withholding under the Convention Against Torture. Eleventh Circuit law is not as favorable as the Third Circuit on those issues, so we argued that the Eleventh Circuit should be more in line with its sister courts.

Most of the clients whom I helped will not receive final decisions in their cases for several weeks or months, so it will be some time before I know the results of my legal work. I know, however, that just having an advocate who listens to your story and supports you makes removal proceedings less overwhelming. One of the client's whose hearings I observed recently decided to request removal instead of fighting it. Because his attorney fully explained his options and likelihood of success, he was able to make that decision for himself. He chose to be deported and live freely in his home country instead of fighting his case from detention for an unknown amount of time. In a way, it feels disappointing, but I think that one of the goals of universal representation for detained immigrants is simply that: educating people so they can make informed decisions. Without counsel, people in these situations don't know what they're up against. Pro bono and low-bono services like those offered by NSC and PAIFUP are so important to supporting the dignity and autonomy of immigrants in removal proceedings. I'm glad I've been able to see and participate in that firsthand.

I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for granting me a fellowship this summer to help me do this work. EJA provides funding for law students taking unpaid internships at legal nonprofits. In immigration matters in particular, the disparity in outcomes for people who are represented and those who aren't is huge. Funding from EJA helps organizations like NSC take on more clients and narrow the gap in outcomes for unrepresented individuals. You can help law students contribute to nonprofit work by donating to EJA.