



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: Coming at you with a little life update! This summer, I have the privilege of being an Equal Justice America Fellow. Equal Justice America is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting law students who are passionate about providing civil legal services to those most in need. As someone pursuing a career in public interest law, I know all too well that funding is unfortunately hard to come by. That's why I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for financially supporting me this summer during my legal internship at the ACLU of Pennsylvania. Without this support, I would not be able to do the work that I love.

Throughout this summer, I will be posting #EJAFellowUpdates on the exciting work I am involved in! My first few weeks at the ACLU have been inspiring, empowering, and motivating. Upon meeting the attorneys in the office, it became immediately clear to me that these are my people. Like myself, everyone here is wholly dedicated to advocating and fighting for justice. In just these last three weeks, I have been able to assist with cases involving voting rights, education, criminal justice reform, and LGBTQ rights. I feel privileged to work alongside such passionate and impressive people every day and cannot wait to see what else this summer brings.

Update 2: As I started writing my next EJA Fellow Update, the Supreme Court released its decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. I was writing about how busy and exciting my work at the ACLU has been, about how I have learned so much and feel privileged to be doing such important work. Of course, this is still true. But I have swiftly gone from feeling empowered, uplifted, and optimistic to feeling defeated and heartbroken. But I suppose that is how this work goes. We fight and we work, and we push for change, and sometimes it feels like we're getting somewhere, and sometimes we get a punch to the gut like this. Earlier this week the other interns and I met with Reggie Shuford, the executive director of the ACLU of Pennsylvania. Among the many pieces of wisdom he shared, there is one that seems especially salient in this moment: you have to be in it for the long game. This work is rewarding and inspiring and amazing, but it is also really, really hard. So, I will let myself feel grateful and sad, but then I will continue working because our lives literally depend on it. Through all of this, I am grateful that I get to show up every day and work with people who carry the burdens of the world on their shoulders and who pour their hearts into making it better.



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Update 3: Time for another EJA Fellow Update! It's hard to believe that I only have three weeks left at the ACLU. This week I finished a legal memo for one of the attorneys on a case involving the First Amendment. It was probably the most complicated legal issue I have ever had to research, but I learned so much in the process. I also have been helping out with intake lately, which has allowed me to get a different perspective of the work of the ACLU. We get hundreds of calls, letters, and emails a year asking for help, and it is up to staff and volunteers to get back to as many people as possible. It is really heartbreaking reading these stories, many of which are from people in prisons experiencing horrible jail conditions and violence. Despite it being more emotionally taxing, I've appreciated the chance to hear from the individual people who are impacted by our work. It can be really easy to get lost in the amorphousness of legal research and writing. In my last few weeks, I will be continuing to help with intake, wrapping up some other projects, and helping out wherever else I may be needed. Very grateful for this opportunity, which of course, I would not have been able to do without Equal Justice America.

Update 4: It's hard to believe that my time at the ACLU is coming to a close! During the last few weeks of my internship, I have been reflecting on how much I have learned in such a short time. Substantively, I have gained a solid understanding of various constitutional and criminal legal concepts. However, the transferrable skills I have acquired are what I am most grateful for. Learning how to unpack legal questions through extensive legal research, writing up legal conclusions for the staff attorneys, and participating in client interviews are all things that I know will make me a stronger attorney in the future, no matter where I end up. At a place like the ACLU, where there are so many different types of legal matters we come across, it is nearly impossible to become a subject matter expert on everything. However, being able to quickly become versed on a new topic is incredibly important to this work, and something that I am grateful to have learned during my time here. As my last week comes to a close, I want to thank Equal Justice America for providing the financial support I needed to be able to do this work.

Update 5: This summer at the ACLU has been a wonderful experience. Most of the summer was spent conducting legal research for various claims that the office was considering bringing. For instance, one of the biggest projects of the summer was researching the validity of a first amendment retaliation claim. A teacher at a local school district was suspended after filing an Office of Civil Rights complaint on behalf of a transgender student who was being bullied. I researched whether the ACLU could bring a First amendment retaliation claim on behalf of this teacher and wrote a memo for the attorney working on the case. This was the longest legal research memo I had completed so far in law school, and it was a really great chance for me to hone my research and writing skills. Another research assignment I completed pertained to challenging bench warrants in PA state courts. There are thousands of people in PA who have outstanding bench warrants because of failure to pay of previous fines. My supervising attorney wanted to potentially bring an impact litigation case to challenge the constitutionality of bench warrants for failure to pay. Surprisingly, this procedural process was not something that was established in Pennsylvania. As a result, my supervising attorney stated that we would



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use Habeas Corpus to challenge the bench warrants and see how a judge responded. It was interesting to experience an instance in which there was no precedent to provide a clear path. Finally, I helped with intake towards the last few weeks of the semester. The ACLU of PA gets hundreds of calls, emails, and letters from individuals seeking legal help. Unfortunately, most of these requests are things that the ACLU can not assist with. Either because they already have a lawyer in a criminal case, it is not a civil liberties issue, or it is not a legal issue at all. However, it felt important to respond to as many of these people as possible to let them know that their concerns were being heard, even if we could not take up their case. Most of the time, I was able to refer each person to a few other services and organizations that may be better able to help them. In addition to these various projects, I spent a lot of time meeting with different people in the office, attending meetings, and sitting in on depositions. I really appreciated how welcoming people in the office were to all of the interns. Even though most of the summer was virtual, they all made an effort to set up meetings so we could ask questions and better understand their roles in the office. It was interesting hearing all of their different backgrounds. One of the supervising attorneys had worked at a law firm for 18 years before coming to the ACLU, and it was a nice reminder that there are many different paths that people can take to get to their goals. All in all, I genuinely enjoyed my time at the ACLU. I learned a lot that I know will come in handy in the years to come.