



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: Happy to be starting my third week as a legal intern with Ascend Justice and the Women's Justice Institute! This summer I'm working in Chicago with incarcerated survivors of domestic violence, to help meet their civil legal needs. I've already learned so much about the innumerable barriers for those trying to access legal resources while incarcerated, and the ways in which so many people are criminalized just for trying to stay alive. Thankful for this opportunity and the support provided by Equal Justice America. EJA funds public interest law students across the country who are working to provide legal services to those most marginalized.

Update 2: Struggling to write a post that encapsulates how I've felt these past few weeks, as I've watched the new ways that our legal system has gutted our rights, and as I've been with our clients and watched the ways that our legal system routinely and mundanely harms so many, and has since its inception.

This past week I drafted an affidavit for a client seeking an order of protection from a past abusive partner, I sat with a client as she cried about the inhumanity of her incarceration, and I heard from so many of our clients about how the legal system has failed them.

Did you know that women in prison are handcuffed just to have a video call? Or that they pay 20 cents per email they send? Or that 99% of women, trans, and nonbinary people incarcerated at Logan Correctional Center here in Illinois (which is by no means exceptional) have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse at some point in their lifetime?

This week, I've had to keep reminding myself of the words of Mariame Kaba, one of my favorite abolitionists. "Hope is a discipline." I've been reminding myself to believe that it's possible to abolish our current system of punishment, and build one of healing instead. That it's possible to have a legal system that actually protects women, nonbinary, and trans people rather than further harming them for trying to protect themselves. That we can all not only have bodily autonomy, but safe and healthy communities where we can choose if and when we want to reproduce.

Learn more about the work of the Women's Justice Institute and Ascend Justice and all of our resilient clients by reading this article (featured on the front page of the Tribune last week!): <https://lnkd.in/ga5Wsy8y>



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Update 3: Feels crazy to think that my time with Ascend Justice and the Women's Justice Institute is more than halfway over! I've appreciated my time as a legal intern and have grown as an advocate for incarcerated clients in so many ways.

This morning I had the pleasure of joining zoom court for the monthly Incarcerated Litigants call, a long-term collaboration between my supervisor and the Honorable Judge Grace Dickler. The Incarcerated Litigants call requires coordination with multiple prisons, lawyers, legal representatives, legal aid organizations, incarcerated and non-incarcerated clients, and court staff, but it enables incarcerated litigants to have their civil cases heard. Often, incarcerated litigants are unable to get their civil legal needs met due to their criminal conviction, but this call helps ensure that everyone is able to access their civil rights.

Update 4: Feels crazy to think that I only have two more weeks left of my time at Ascend Justice and the Women's Justice Institute! This experience has been so enriching and I'm so grateful for all that I've learned.

I'm spending my last few weeks finishing up some work for clients that I've been working with and working on projects that will likely be continued after my tenure. What I've learned most in this internship is just how much there still remains to be done.

Update 5: On the last day of my internship, I'm feeling incredibly grateful to Ascend Justice, the Women's Justice Institute, and Equal Justice America for this incredible opportunity.

While all attorneys discuss incarceration and criminalization in their first-year Criminal Law class, not all attorneys work with incarcerated clients, or see the impact incarceration has on those outside the prison walls. On my last day, I'm happy to know that bus took off from Chicago early this morning to transport the families of incarcerated mothers to Logan Correctional Center for a family-friendly visit, where children have a chance to visit their mothers and grandmothers, sometimes for the first time in years. While I'm so grateful I could play a role in coordinating the logistics for this event, I'm ashamed to live in a society where children cannot see their mothers without waking up at 6am, riding on a bus for three hours, and going through prison security, just to have a few hours together every few months.

If I've learned anything this summer, it's that the cost of incarceration does not end with those who are incarcerated. The United States spends over \$80 Billion on incarceration every year. In addition to the 2 million people currently incarcerated who feel the affects of the carceral system daily, incarceration also affects children who can no longer see their parents, mothers who can no longer hold their babies, and families who are torn apart.

I thank Equal Justice America for their support this summer - without it, I wouldn't have been able to have this experience. And while this work is currently necessary, I wish it were obsolete. I do not wish for a world in which public interest attorneys are funded (though that would be a good start), I hope for a world in which we are unnecessary.