



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: University of Michigan Human Trafficking Clinic

Update 1: The first month of my internship has taught me about the hidden schemes of human sex and labor trafficking present within the United States. Within the first week, I had the chance to work with my clients and learn about their legal goals. I wrote multiple legal memos to USCIS on behalf of my clients and helped a client expunge a minor criminal charge connected to her trafficking. I am excited to continue learning about this field as I serve as an advocate for my clients.

Update 2: This past week, I had the opportunity to meet with one of my clients in person. While this does not seem like anything unusual, this was actually my first time ever meeting a client in person. Since COVID, all my work has been remote. It was a pleasure being able to sit and have a conversation with my client to better understand their situation, explain the legal arguments I'm building for their case, and learn more about their goals and expectations. Being in person also made it easier to deliver some difficult news to my client--that they are being subpoenaed to testify against their trafficker. I was glad I could share this news in person and be there to help answer their questions and reassure them.

Update 3: This past week, I got assigned a new project with my co-workers. We are working on completing an asylum application for a client and their family who fled Afghanistan for fear of persecution. My particular role is to write the memo presenting legal arguments as to why they qualify for asylum. As part of this process, I have been able to revisit guidelines on torture, persecution, and refugee status under both domestic and international law, namely the Convention Against Torture (CAT). Having learned about the latter in my international law class this past semester, I am excited that I get to apply the material I learned in class to my actual work. It is also incredible to know that I am using my education to provide legal services to those who need it most.

Update 4: As my internship is wrapping up, I want to reflect on a research project I worked on this summer. I was trying to locate sources of existing labor trafficking indexes to assist in the opening of a Human Trafficking



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Problem Solving Initiative at the University of Michigan Law School. My research led me to a devastating reality: many of the products we use on a daily basis were made by sources of forced or trafficked labour. Some of the items and industries most at risk for being made by forced and trafficked labour include the following: cotton, sugarcane, coffee, bricks, garments, coal, fish, rice, cocoa, and electronics (including laptops, computers, and mobile phones). As consumers, it is important for us to understand how our goods get to us, and the impact our consumption has on people around the world. This internship has given me the opportunity to provide legal relief to those who have been trafficked into a worldwide network of forced labour. It has also allowed me to become more conscious of how I play a role in this injustice as well.

Update 5: As the summer comes to an end, I have the opportunity to reflect on the work I have done at the Human Trafficking Clinic at the University of Michigan Law School. The clinics at Michigan give students a unique opportunity to directly work with clients as an attorney would. This meant that I got to manage my own cases, contact and meet my clients, and serve as their legal representation and advocates. I was able to experience the joys and challenges of working directly with clients. Most of my clients did not speak English, so the language barrier was a challenge at first that I had to navigate so I could communicate important legal information to them. This was an important skill for me to learn since I hope to work on an international level, in which it is likely I will interact with many languages.

In addition to this direct client work, I also had the chance to do a lot of behind-the-scenes work: doing legal research, drafting memos, contacting USCIS and other related organizations, and filling out various immigration forms on behalf of my clients. All these experiences allowed me to truly see how complex our immigration system is and where there needs to be work. I truly felt this when working on a complex asylum application case for one of our clients. In the end, the application was so long (over 1,000 pages), we had to send it in a box, and it weighed more than 40 pounds!

Working here this summer was also a wonderful experience because of my coworkers and mentors. I worked with two other brilliant student attorneys. Though we had our individual clients, they served as a resource for me. We also completed the asylum application together as a team. By divvying up the tasks, we were able to successfully complete our project in a timely manner. I also had two supervising attorneys who served as my mentors. Their wealth of knowledge in this field as well as with law more generally greatly helped me as I developed my professionalism. As experts in the field, I learned so much from them about what it means to be a zealous advocate for people caught in a complex system. They also taught me about how compassion plays an important role in law.

As I learned to communicate legal processes to my clients and understood the inner workings of the immigration legal system, I learned lessons that will be applicable in my future career opportunities. I hope to take what I learned this summer and expand it to international human rights more broadly. This experience piqued my interest in working with clients directly and serving as their legal representation. I am so thankful for the experience I had this summer.