



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: My first two weeks at my position with New York Legal Assistance Group and the LegalHealth team have already been such a valuable and enlightening learning experience. With LegalHealth, we hear client cases that range from immigration issues, to domestic violence assistance, to housing, etc.; and the intersection of these barriers with the accessibility of quality healthcare.

I've already gained more practical knowledge than I have my whole first year of law school for helping New Yorkers experiencing poverty who are simply trying to access necessary healthcare. Obstacles -- notwithstanding the inability to afford healthcare -- to getting a routine medical procedure, medical devices, or even prosthetics require such specific and intricate knowledge of the U.S. and NY legal system that makes it almost impossible to access healthcare for those experiencing housing instability, disabilities, undocumented status, etc.

I'm happy I get to contribute to the work that the NYLAG folks do on a daily basis and hope I can provide meaningful assistance for people throughout the rest of the summer.

Update 2: The decision by the Supreme Court on Friday is obviously incredibly devastating on a personal level, but even more distressing as I work on cases where it is already extremely difficult for so many people to access necessary and lifesaving healthcare in a safe and timely manner. People will die as a result of Friday's Dobbs decision, and those people will disproportionately be those experiencing poverty, racism, misogyny, disabilities, homophobia, transphobia, and marginalization by the law.

I've worked on cases in the past month where people are attempting to get something as necessary as liver dialysis, chemotherapy, prosthetics, and not only are there general insurance issues, logistical issues, and inability to afford the exorbitant costs of care -- but the law actively prohibits and precludes certain people from accessing any sort of healthcare.



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It's hard to stay positive in a time like this, and it's hard to see where progress can be made when things keep seeming to get worse. The United States is the wealthiest country in the world, but cannot provide our citizens with the lowest, basest level of support in the form of necessary healthcare.

Grassroots organizing, fundraising, and providing free legal service are tools that can make actual differences in peoples' lives. See below for information and resources about how you can help people access lifesaving healthcare:

- Donate to many national local abortion funds at once: <https://lnkd.in/gsrgHPYq>
- Order a delivery of abortion pills: <https://lnkd.in/gmmkdK8i>
- Find an abortion clinic near you: <https://www.ineedana.com/>
- Legal helpline for reproductive rights/abortions: <https://lnkd.in/gjYm3N4x>
- Find local practical support with obtaining abortion: https://lnkd.in/g2QnE9_U
- Emotional support for people taking at-home medication abortion: <https://reprocare.com/>
- After-abortion emotional support and mental healthcare: <https://lnkd.in/gbNkEq5n>
- NYC - Volunteer to house and escort out of town people to abortion appointments: <https://lnkd.in/gEAK6hQq>
- More logistical support for obtaining an abortion anywhere: <https://lnkd.in/gRZ2WdQR>

Update 3: Over the past couple of weeks I've been working with LegalHealth attorneys on cases coming to us through NYC hospitals. Oftentimes I'm asked to help with applications and documentation for clients to be able to get Medicaid in New York State through a "PRUCOL" public benefit categorization.

In 2001, the highest court in New York State found in *Aliessa v. Novello* that qualified immigrants and persons residing under the color of law (PRUCOL) were entitled to public benefits. The NY State Constitution requires the state to provide public services to the needy (regardless of their documentation status) and the 14th Amendment requires equal protection under the laws of any jurisdiction.

Practically, this led to PRUCOL and qualified immigrants being able to acquire NY State Medicaid. The main issue that this helped fix was that people who are waiting for -- often incredibly lengthy -- immigration application procedures to be completed (can be years) can have access to medical care, as opposed to simply emergency medical care.

I've been able to contribute to cases where this type of practical solution is available for people who cannot afford basic, necessary healthcare, and were not even aware of this option previously.

It seems clear that we should provide all of our neighbors with basic healthcare, and I am glad I get to help those who've been systemically prevented from doing so.



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Update 4: I'm back with another update from my legal internship with NYLAG LegalHealth. I only have two more weeks left and I feel like I've learned so much throughout the past few weeks.

Two weeks ago, I was able to accompany a client to Housing Court who had a first appearance in a case against their landlord for a multitude of housing violations. Throughout the past few years, this client has experienced myriad violations of the Housing Maintenance Code in their apartment, many of which are considered "immediately hazardous" or "hazardous". Tenants in NYC may commence a proceeding in Housing Court to compel a landlord to correct violations or for harassment.

This seems like a promising avenue for housing justice, but there are many barriers to getting relief. Filing a case in Housing Court is a complex process. Many, if not most, tenants commencing a proceeding to correct violations are doing it on their own while their landlord usually has an attorney on retainer to represent them in any matter. Tenants are not guaranteed counsel in these proceedings and often have a hard time with procedural complexities. Additionally, tenants typically must come back to court several to many times before there are any consequences for repeated and continuous hazardous housing conditions.

In our case, the client filed the case themselves and made a typo, which meant that the client's case was dismissed and they were sent back to the clerk to initiate the process all over again. It's very frustrating to try to get relief for tenants, especially in a time of an extreme housing crisis in NYC. But, I am glad I was able to assist in some way and learn about how to work towards a future with basic tenants' rights to proper housing.

Update 5: I am very grateful to both Equal Justice America and the University of Minnesota Law School for funding my incredible summer experience with the New York Legal Assistance Group's LegalHealth Unit.

LegalHealth builds on the idea that social determinants of health directly affect peoples' health and ability to access necessary healthcare. These determinants range from income, racism, housing security, gender, immigration status, disability, and many other forces that are normally disentangled from the conversation around healthcare.

I worked with several amazing attorneys who helped guide me through challenging situations and took the time to walk me through dealing with specific legal issues or ethical issues. Each of the LegalHealth attorneys and paralegals are helping hundreds of people a year with civil issues that act as barriers to getting care for issues ranging from cancer treatment to medical devices to mental illness support. I worked on a such a wide variety of cases came through hospitals which is what made this experience so unique with such a steep learning curve.



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I worked on a case where an older person who has been in the U.S. for 40+ years could not be naturalized as a citizen because they experienced a gang assault that led them to have severe traumatic brain injury, and therefore they were unable to take the tests that we require of people seeking naturalization. The legal remedy was making their spouse a limited guardian that could complete the naturalization process for them. After naturalization, this person could receive their social security retirement benefits for which they worked their whole life.

Another case I worked on was a person who has attempted for over 40 years to get their landlord to fix 70+ outstanding hazardous violations in their home. Speaking to this client, I learned of the many intersections of issues they experienced including intimate partner violence at the hand of their partner for years on end, physical and mental disability, poverty, and harassment by their landlord. This client, on their own, had to navigate the procedural hoops that the landlord's law firm attorneys were taking advantage of in court to throw their case out, multiple times. It should not take multiple lawsuits to have a livable apartment that you rent from a landlord.

The main lesson I learned from my experience is that the laws in this country, these states, municipalities, are not enough for people experiencing poverty and major health issues. There's way more that needs to be done both policy-wise and in practice to give people the substantive rights that were promised in this democracy, but are currently only available to the wealthy and the privileged.

Thank you again to the New York Legal Assistance Group, Equal Justice America, and University of Minnesota Law School for the privilege to work on these issues and for people who need help.