



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: I'm excited to share my first EJA Fellow Update. As some of you may know, I was generously selected as one of this year's Equal Justice America Fellows. I am currently working in New York City for the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) in their Southern District of New York Federal Pro Se Legal Clinic. For the past two weeks, I have been primarily assisting formerly incarcerated individuals who are unable to obtain a lawyer to file civil lawsuits for violations of their civil and constitutional rights that occurred while in prison. I already have five clients, and I'm looking forward to taking on more soon. I'm quickly learning the complexities of the federal courts and the importance of access to justice for all people. The work is incredibly rewarding. The legal experience I'm receiving is fantastic, and I know I'm helping to make a difference in peoples' lives. I have seen that sometimes the most beneficial thing I can do for a client is simply listen to the hardships they have faced and make sure they know they are being heard. I'm looking forward to starting to work on new kinds of cases, especially employment discrimination cases, in the coming weeks.

Update 2: Hi everyone! I'm happy to share my second EJA Fellow Update. Since my last post, the variety of cases I'm working on has really diversified. I am now working with eight total clients that are dealing with disability rights, employment discrimination, contract dispute, arbitration, and domestic violence cases. Jumping back and forth between different areas of substantive law has been a great intellectual challenge. Lately I've been thinking a lot about how the law and morality can be distinct from each other. So often the clients I'm working with have been seriously wronged, but the legal framework prevents them from recovering compensation and having these wrongs rectified. It can be very frustrating working with the pro se litigants to help them come up with unique and novel legal arguments that we know have only a small chance of succeeding in court. However, the gratitude that the clients express when we assist them with their case makes all the hard work I've been doing at NYLAG incredibly worth it. As one client said to me, "It gave me a measure of relief to hear a sincere heart and mind listen to something which was not easy for me to talk about." I'm excited to continue providing a helping hand for more clients as the summer progresses.



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Update 3: Hi everyone! I'm happy to share my third EJA Fellow Update for the summer. Since my last post, I've received even more interesting and challenging cases. I am now working with twelve total clients, and my organizational skills are definitely improving! In addition to some new and fascinating personal injury and defamation tort cases, I have been spending most of my time working with two clients who lost custody of their children and are hoping to sue the government for violating their civil rights as a result. These cases have presented challenging jurisdictional issues, and stories these litigants shared with me were some of the most difficult and heartbreaking that I have ever heard. It is clear that the legal system failed these people at every step of the process, and racism and homophobia very likely impacted the poor treatment they received. I am optimistic that the legal recourse these litigants can receive in the Southern District of New York will help alleviate some of the suffering they have experienced. It is shocking to me that my summer at NYLAG is more than halfway over, but I'm really looking forward to learning more about the federal court system and aiding as many clients as possible in these next few weeks.

Update 4: Hi everyone! I'm happy to share my fourth EJA Fellow Update for the summer. Since my last post, I have had the opportunity to participate in a settlement negotiation on behalf of one of the pro se litigants I work with. My client is a formerly incarcerated individual who alleges he was attacked by a corrections officer while in prison. This settlement process has caused me to think a lot about the goals of litigation and what it means to receive true justice through the courts. Settlement allows pro se litigants to receive some form of compensation for the wrongs they endured and allows them to put whatever hardship they faced behind them as soon as possible. On the other hand, litigants in settlement negotiations often seem frustrated by a corporation or government's ability to pay their way out of accepting responsibility. Settlements create an interesting dynamic that evoke unique questions about what constitutes a new form of justice. Regardless, it has been an amazing experience to hone my negotiation skills through this settlement procedure. Even as my summer at NYLAG comes to a close, I plan to continue working with this client for the remainder of the settlement process.

Update 5: Hi all! I'm both excited and saddened to share my fifth and final EJA Fellow Update. It is so hard to believe that my summer in New York is already at an end. My time at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) Federal S.D.N.Y. Pro Se Clinic has been a truly incredible experience. Throughout the summer, I had the opportunity to participate in so many different aspects of the federal litigation process. I got to conduct client intake interviews, perform investigations to gather factual background information, draft and edit complaints and responses to motions to dismiss in federal court, analyze documents produced during the discovery process, and negotiate with opposing counsel in settlement proceedings for pro se litigants. I was able to sharpen my skills in legal research and writing, and I learned a great deal about the substantive law of civil procedure, civil rights, employment discrimination, contracts, arbitration appeals, tort defamation, and many other areas of law. Some of my most interesting cases included Section 1983 civil rights claims alleging misconduct by prison officials, police officers, and Child Protective Services as well as employment discrimination claims against major corporations and universities. I'll never forget how nervous I was when I



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had to call my first pro se client by myself with only a few days of training under my belt. But I quickly saw how desperately these litigants needed the legal assistance NYLAG provides, and, with time, I obtained the confidence to assist these clients to the best of my abilities. I truly think the most beneficial skill I gained during this summer was learning how to clearly communicate complex legal issues to people who are not familiar with the relevant laws or legal terminology. I believe this ability will serve me incredibly well throughout the remainder of my legal career. This summer also showed me how challenging the litigation processes can be to navigate and how access to legal assistance is absolutely critical for success. Pro se litigants are at such an immense disadvantage at every stage of their case, and I am proud to have helped level the playing field for those who are unable to afford or obtain legal representation. I wish the litigation process was not so drawn out so I could have helped some of my clients see their cases through to the end this summer. After my experience at the Pro Se Clinic, I really hope to do more pro bono work that involves direct client interaction and continue to learn about the intricacies of the federal court system when I return to the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School in a few weeks. I cannot thank my supervisors at the NYLAG Pro Se Clinic (Robyn, Hans, and Susanne), all my fellow interns, and all the support staff at NYLAG enough for making my summer experience so informative and enjoyable. As always, please consider supporting Equal Justice America. It is truly an incredible organization, and I highly recommend this fellowship to all interested 1Ls.