



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Women's Law Project

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**Update 1:** This summer I am working with the Women's Law Project through generous funding from the Allegheny County Bar Foundation and Equal Justice America. One aspect of my Equal Justice America summer fellowship is sharing my experience.

The Women's Law Project uses impact and individual litigation, policy advocacy, and community education to create a better, more equitable world and protect the rights of women and LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians.

I was lucky enough to attend two amazing webinars in June. The Institute for Women's Policy Research presented "Occupational Segregation and Equal Pay." I was shocked to learn that 33 percent of the gender pay gap is explained by occupational segregation: the tendency of men and women to work different jobs and the tendency of woman-dominated occupations to pay less.

The Black Mamas Matter Alliance presented "Changing the Narrative: Black Maternal Health and Abortion Care." The incredible panel members shared their knowledge of OB-GYN care, midwifery, birth equity, and healthcare reform. Dr. Joia Crear-Perry from the National Birth Equity Collaborative shared [this](#) incredible resource on reproductive justice.

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**Update 2:** This summer I am working with the Women's Law Project with funding from Equal Justice America. One aspect of my Equal Justice America summer fellowship is sharing my experience.

My week was, of course, dominated by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. A 5-4 majority disregarded constitutional law and judicial restraint to overturn *Roe* and *Casey*. That majority believes there is no constitutional right to abortion in the United States. The pain of this outcome, while expected, cannot be overstated.

The Women's Law Project anticipated the *Dobbs* decision and prepared accordingly. Our incredible communications director released a statement (<https://www.womenslawproject.org/2022/06/24/wlp-statement-on-dobbs-ruling-overturning-roe/>) within minutes, and our attorneys were quoted in many national publications. I worked with my amazing fellow interns Namita and Shayna to divide up the *Dobbs* opinion and distill each portion to its key points.



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This day tested my ability to work through intense stress, and I am so unbelievably grateful to work under staff who operate so well. I lean on the knowledge that attorneys working for reproductive rights, health, and justice will continue to show up and fight for bodily autonomy and dignity for all Americans. We know, as the *Dobbs* dissent wrote, “[c]losing our eyes to the suffering today’s decision will impose will not make that suffering disappear.”

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**Update 3:** I cannot believe that I am eight weeks into my summer fellowship with the Women’s Law Project! As I have mentioned in previous posts, my summer work is generously funded by the Allegheny County Bar Foundation and Equal Justice America. For my third EJA update, I want to share how the reproductive rights community has worked together over the past three weeks.

Since the *Dobbs* decision, leaders like the National Abortion Federation, National Advocates for Pregnant Women, and National Network of Abortion Funds have held events and assembled resources for healthcare providers, patients, lawyers, and volunteers. Spending time with other professionals in the reproductive rights sphere is so encouraging.

This week, I went to an event for summer legal interns by If/When/How. It was lovely to see how many panelists have worked together in the past and still maintain professional and personal relationships. In a concentration that remains controversial even in the legal world, community is essential!

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**Update 4:** Today concludes the tenth week of my summer fellowship with the Women’s Law Project. As I mentioned in previous posts, my summer work is generously funded by the Allegheny County Bar Foundation and Equal Justice America. For my fourth EJA update, I want to discuss the Women’s Law Project; this organization’s culture has been so inspiring to witness this summer.

In our first organization-wide meeting after the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision, leadership took the time to thank the law student and undergraduate interns for their work. In turn, the law student and undergraduate interns expressed gratitude to the staff for including us in their work and for trusting us.

Every week, I witnessed staff congratulate each other on legal victories, successful presentations, and published interviews. Three staff attorneys even took time over the summer to speak to the law interns about post-graduate fellowships. Public interest law is difficult and can easily become discouraging. A supportive working community really makes all the difference.

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## **Update 5:**

I found it difficult to write updates this summer because of the nature of my work. If there is no issue, I would like to just submit this update internally and not post it on social media. I discussed my updates with my supervisors to make sure I was not revealing information that would reflect negatively on the organization or draw unwanted attention to certain work that the organization does. It was difficult to frame my updates in a way that shows the amazing work my organization does without giving opponents more information than they need. Reproductive rights are still so contentious.



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I appreciate that Equal Justice America funds work that relates to abortion. Many organizations still stray away from abortion-related work. Reproductive rights law is still seen by many in the legal field as a niche women's issue. In a post-graduate fellowship interview, I was told that the organization, aimed at criminal justice, does not work on abortion issues because some of its funders do not want to be connected to abortion. While I still love the organization, it was disappointing to hear that a funder who cares about criminal reform does not see the importance of bodily autonomy and choice.

The most essential thing I learned this summer is that nearly every issue in public interest law is related. When pregnant people cannot access abortion, they face financial strain and risk criminal prosecution. Lack of abortion care affects a person's ability to work and provide for themselves and children they may already have. Reproductive justice advocates believe that every person deserves to decide if, when, and how they have children, deserves to deliver those children safely, and deserves to raise those children in a safe environment. When we see reproductive rights as part of this lifelong throughline, we realize that they are in no way a "niche."

A colleague made a comment that many clients she saw this summer have extensive experience in the legal system. Poverty and other disadvantages cause certain people to be involved in the legal system frequently. So many issues are grounded solidly in economic inequality, racism, and other forms of discrimination. What that means, however, is that attacking one issue in public interest will hopefully have an impact on other difficulties in the client's life.

I am interested in many aspects of public interest law: family law, public criminal defense, reproductive rights, etc. Although I know I will likely develop a specialty, it feels good to know that the entire community of public interest lawyers is working toward similar goals. No matter where I go, I will bring my experience in reproductive rights with me and make sure I consider how that jurisprudence affects all of my clients.