



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Carson Smith

Law School: University of Texas School of Law

Organization: MALDEF

Update 1:

This summer, I'm working in San Antonio, Texas with MALDEF - Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund. As a Summer Human Rights Fellow with the Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, I am learning how a commitment to community and justice intersect with human rights. My work here also wouldn't be possible if it weren't for funding from Equal Justice America.

One thing I do not take for granted after my first year of law school is great teachers. My professors at The University of Texas School of Law showed me how I might enjoy litigation. The staff here at MALDEF have already taught us a lot--not only about voting rights litigation but about what it means to practice law. I'm also learning from my fellow summer law clerks who have helped me to enjoy myself in San Antonio. (Shoutout to Araceli Garcia, Sabrina Rodriguez, M.A., Sam Holloway, and Christiana Segura.)

Update 2:

This summer, I'm working at Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund - MALDEF. In my first month here, we have assisted the office with its voting rights litigation. Next week, we will travel to New Orleans to hear arguments in front of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals on Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA). I feel honored to be part of what's been many years in the making. This litigation has been going on for at least six years. I've talked to people who have been there since the beginning. That's the interesting thing about being an intern doing litigation: many hands went into making this happen. I'm happy to learn from those who came before.

Update 3:

At four o'clock in the morning last Wednesday, seven interns and a staffer with MALDEF - Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund were waiting in line in front of the Fifth Circuit to see our boss, Nina



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Perales, argue on behalf of DACA recipients. We had driven eight hours from San Antonio to New Orleans to wait outside for another five hours before arguments began.

As a law student interested in litigation, there are a lot of questions: What do I wear to court? How do I prepare for an oral argument? Some of this information is at least hinted at during first-year legal writing. However, there are also other questions that--without a doubt--can only be answered through experience. How do I work with clients while they're leading protests outside? How do I handle an adverse argument from an aligned party? What do I tell the press afterward?

Most of what I've learned since my last EJA Fellow update is that being a young lawyer is as much about knowing to ask the questions as it is how you respond when the answer matters.

Update 4:

I am finishing my ninth of ten weeks at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund - MALDEF. In my second month here, we have continued to assist attorneys in the discovery process for redistricting litigation. We also attended oral arguments in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. There has been a significant share of document review and preparation for depositions. Two things have surprised me about this job so far: 1.) the importance of working with good people and 2.) I enjoy the work of litigating as much as I the high-level writing and research that we do in legal writing classes. There's very little that's glamorous about putting a fine-tooth comb through documents. At the same time, there's no other way to get to the truth. I am already making plans for next summer and hope to continue to do more of this kind of work soon.

Update 5:

Well, my time at the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF) in San Antonio has come to an end after ten weeks of assisting attorneys in the discovery process and working on other projects as needed. Looking back on it all, two things surprise me the most: 1.) the importance of surrounding yourself with good people and 2.) the importance of every little task from going through raw material to making high-level decisions about legal arguments. In other words, personnel is policy. It's also what makes difficult work enjoyable. I am already making plans for next summer and hope to continue to make connections with great people. Speaking of great people, funding for my summer comes from Equal Justice America.