



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** The disAbility Law Center of Virginia

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### Update 1:

It has been an exciting and busy first few weeks of my internship with the disAbility Law Center of Virginia (dLCV). I have been able to work on some interesting, forthcoming, publication projects as well as provide crucial legal research for other client projects. Interestingly enough, a good portion of the research that I conducted for my legal writing class last year was directly relevant to the work I am doing right now. In this short time, I have already learned so much about the scope and impact of organizations such as dLCV. The work they do is incredible and has tangible impacts on the lives of Virginia residents. It has been a true privilege to have been brought onto the team as an intern and I look forward to the weeks to come!

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### Update 2:

In between the first update and this second update, I was able to have more client contact while interning at dLCV. This was a pleasant surprise! I joined another dLCV intern and dLCV staff member on a site visit to a juvenile correctional facility. The purpose of the visit was to check in with current clients and verify that certain, necessary, changes were implemented in the facility. Although this was not my first time in a correctional facility, the experience was quite impactful. I was able to see, in a tangible way, how disability rights advocacy is so crucial in every space. It was also important for me, to be able to put some faces to the names of clients for whom I had been drafting documents on behalf of dLCV. When not engaging directly with clients, I continued to assist the dLCV staff in other ways by providing necessary legal and fact research. dLCV is often at the forefront of many issues related to disability rights and as a result, I have learned quite a lot while researching. I have really appreciated that the staff at dLCV take the time to learn about our interests as interns because each project or assignment that I have been given has been perfectly tailored.

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### Update 3:

A most recent highlight of my internship was presenting to the dLCV staff, at our monthly staff training. My presentation was about accessible telehealth legislation. At the beginning of my internship, my supervisor gave me this long-term project with the expectation that I would educate myself about the different telehealth laws in Virginia, as well as investigate the different barriers to telehealth that Virginians with disabilities must overcome. After doing this research, I was then asked to brainstorm different ways that organizations like dLCV could help



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support Virginians with disabilities by informing legislature of the different considerations when drafting telehealth legislation. The presentation I gave was a distilled version of my research.

In doing this research project, it became clear to me just how often people with disabilities are left out of important conversations. I read on 70-page report, published by a major organization, that purported to detail all of the barriers to telehealth, but barriers related to disability were never mentioned. This is unacceptable. A lot of work has been done to advance equity for those with disabilities, thanks to organizations like dLCV, but there is still so much more work to be done. It has been a humbling and rewarding experience to be able to be a dLCV intern.

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#### **Update 4:**

For the last week of my internship, I wrapped up a few final projects. First, I drafted some client correspondence. This is something that I was able to do early on in my internship as but it was interesting to note my own confidence in completing the project this time. While I still submitted my work to a supervisor to be looked over, I was no longer concerned that I might be “missing the mark” in the way the letter should have been drafted. My supervisors had been careful through the length of my internship to provide helpful feedback that would help to grow in my legal skills and increase my confidence in executing these skills.

I also completed a memo concerning the authority of Protection & Advocacy agencies. The memo was given to a social work supervisor to help in the creation of a presentation. The goal of the presentation was to educate different state institutions about their responsibility in responding to agencies like dLCV.

Finally, I worked on my last memo for one of the cases that dLCV is currently litigating. The memo involved legal theories that drew from both constitutional law and contract law. I provided research for this case on a number of occasions, and it was an incredible experience to watch the development of a case.

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#### **Update 5:**

For my final update, I would like to take this time to reflect on the summer. Interning at the disAbility Law Center (dLCV) was informative in so many ways. I was able to have a variety of experiences that gave me a window into different types of legal work: client engagement, drafting, research and writing. I also had the opportunity to work with, not just lawyers, also other members of the community, who are all working towards a common goal. The dLCV is able to be incredibly successful, in large part to the staff who work tirelessly to get results. It was humbling and inspiring to be surrounded by people who are so passionate about what they do.

Conversely, it was also quite frustrating to realize that a severe lack of funding materially hinders the work of the dLCV attorneys and staff. The hours spent planning and executing fundraising events could also be spent working to get children glasses so that they can succeed in school. Society puts Americans with disabilities on the backburner, and then similarly ignores the very organizations created to provide support. This is unacceptable and needs to change. As the legal landscape keeps changing and becoming more nuanced, Americans with disabilities will continue to be left behind and left out of the conversation without the necessary support from protection and advocacy agencies.

I am beyond grateful for this experience as it helped me to get a better sense of how I want to fit pro bono and public service work into my broader legal career. I am also grateful for the support provided by Equal Justice America, without which, this internship might not have been possible.