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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: For the past two weeks, I have been working as a Legal Extern with the Immigration Detention Accountability Project (IDAP) at the Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center, a program which exists at the intersection of immigrant and disability justice to fight for the full human rights of disabled people incarcerated in immigration detention. IDAP provides both individual representation for immigrant clients and engages in impact litigation to advocate for systemic change.

So far, I have been able to dip my toes into all sides of IDAP's work, and it has been a whirlwind combination of illuminating and rewarding—and also frustrating when encountering the legal barriers which violently harm disabled immigrants and their communities. I have accompanied IDAP's attorneys to meetings with other immigration, disability, and civil rights organizations, where I gained insight on inter-organization teamwork as my supervisors devised legal advocacy plans for individuals who need proper medical care, mental health support, and release from immigration detention. For one of IDAP's class action suits, I listened to questions and concerns from community members directly impacted by the case and started conducting legal research to answer their questions, learning how to center individual clients even when doing large-scale systemic litigation. I also underwent trauma-informed training for IDAP's hotline, which enables immigrants who are detained and have certain medical vulnerabilities (that make continued detention especially dangerous due to COVID-19) to call and receive legal protection. I start my first shift with the hotline tomorrow, and I am looking forward to doing whatever I can to contribute to protecting disabled and medically vulnerable people in the U.S. immigration system.

Update 2: What a time to be in the social justice lawyering field, to say the least. While the Supreme Court has stripped and dismantled rights over the past few weeks, at the Immigration Detention Accountability Project (IDAP) at CREEC Law, we have been working diligently to ensure that our clients continue to be protected and supported. This recent period at my externship has been a foundational learning experience as we tried to



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find creative solutions around the quickly shifting nature of the law. On the heels of immigration-related Supreme Court decisions like *Egbert v. Boule*, *Garland v. Aleman-Gonzalez*, and *Biden v. Texas*, I have been completing research to help inform our legal team on how to best shift advocacy strategies for both individual clients and class action lawsuits. I also assisted my supervising attorneys as they broke the law down for some of our individual plaintiffs, making sure they felt informed and empowered to make decisions concerning new circumstances in their cases. I am especially grateful for the other law students and attorneys I work with during this time, because as the nature of the law in the United States has taken a disastrous turn—for detained immigrants, but also for reproductive rights, climate change, and indigenous sovereignty—I look around and see so many people who are fighting tirelessly for justice, equity, and human rights, and it gives me some hope.

Update 3: More than halfway done with my 10-week internship! We have been spending the past few weeks adapting our immigration detention hotline protocols to ensure that callers are met with updated resources after the issuing of a mandate in one of our big cases. I completed a few more hotline shifts, and I helped develop an advocacy strategy for hopefully extending the longevity of the hotline post-mandate.

I also took part in meetings with attorneys from other immigrant rights and disability justice organizations, where we shared tips, sought advice for our cases, and discussed how to better equip other advocates to work at the intersection of these important issues. It is important to make sure disabled and medically vulnerable people are uplifted in immigrant rights advocacy, because confronting the unique barriers they face—rather than neglecting to mention them—can be the difference between life and death. I am very grateful for the chance to learn from these meetings.

Otherwise, I have been completing research for a memo which discusses administrative, disability, and immigration laws with the goal of finding new avenues for advocating for our clients' rights. It is frustrating beyond comprehension how the distinction between one court's interpretation of a line in a law can make such a huge impact on a person's life and wellbeing, particularly in immigration detention cases. I just hope we can continue getting people released from detention and reunite them with their families.

Update 4: Wrapping up the last few weeks of my internship now! I have been so thankful to learn from tireless advocates protecting the rights of noncitizens in the United States, and I am absolutely going to carry these stories with me as I join the fight to abolish immigration detention.

Recently, I have been helping IDAP and CREEC with a variety of projects—from arranging social media and press announcements to celebrate the 32nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act to drafting and editing talking points for discussing complex litigation strategies with individual clients. And this evening, I will be speaking and running a meeting with one of our clients who is D/deaf/hard of hearing. With IDAP and in past immigration law experiences, I have been able to work with some clients without a language interpreter, I have served as an interpreter (for French-English), and I have worked with interpreters for languages I don't



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peak, but I have yet to work with an ASL interpreter or a D/deaf/hard of hearing client. I am really looking forward to this experience to understand more about the ways we must make immigration advocacy disability inclusive

Update 5: My ten weeks with the Immigration Detention Accountability Project at the Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center were insightful, emotional, empowering, and motivating. After tearful goodbyes, I sat down and reflected on my experience with this organization, and I kept returning to IDAP's approach to legal services by working at the intersection of immigrant and disability justice. As a disabled person myself, it was refreshing to intern with an organization that not only acknowledged and supported disabled and medically vulnerable clients, but also loudly and continuously resisted ableism (and its interactions with other systems of oppression).

This internship was also a lesson in patience and a guide on transforming anger into action. It was not an easy summer to engage with civil rights or social justice work, and as the Supreme Court handed down decisions that had the very real potential to directly harm our clients in immigration detention, it was, at times, difficult to remain collected. I remember answering a hotline call from a father whose life was at risk as he was detained in unsafe and dangerous conditions in an ICE detention center and then having to sit in on a Zoom call with an opposing counsel who mentioned he would be playing sports with his son after the meeting—as he actively worked to detain fathers like the one I had spoken with through the hotline. I broke down after this meeting, crying on the phone with my direct supervisor. She reminded me that these emotions and our compassion powers this work, and so I carried this sentiment with me to transform my anger and frustration at a system that disables, harms, and splits families apart into fervent legal advocacy.

This summer experience absolutely reaffirmed my drive to work in solidarity with immigrant and disability justice movements as a public interest lawyer. Building from my internship with IDAP, I hope to work in immigrant removal defense, fighting to ensure that non-citizens are safeguarded from immigration detention and deportation, especially pertaining to indigent clients who may not have easy access to legal representation.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for the support in pursuing legal aid and direct client advocacy. As law students are pressured and funneled into corporate law and private practice, EJA's encouragement for public interest career paths remains invaluable. Public interest law students and attorneys deserve resources and tangible support, as it can be difficult to forgo the promise of a "cushy" legal career, even if that means further entrenching wealth inequality and making the rich richer. With the help of organizations like EJA, we become better equipped to ignore outstretched "golden handcuffs" and dedicate ourselves to practicing the law as a tool for eliminating poverty, inequity, and injustice.