



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



Name: Malak Shahin

Law School: Washington University School of Law, St. Louis

Organization: Legal Aid Justice Center

Update 1: I am grateful to be an Equal Justice America Fellow this summer. This marks the start of the third week of my summer internship with the Legal Aid Justice Center and my first EJA Fellow Update. The last two weeks have been energizing as I've learned more about the work the Civil Rights and Racial Justice division of LAJC does.

I'm currently working on issues of fines and fees in the court system. Courts impose costs on defendants -- including charging indigent defendants for their Constitutional right to a court appointed attorney. It's a deeply unjust system that only works to criminalize poverty. In the context of deferred dismissals, any person with the means to pay their Court costs can avoid conviction. I'm proud to be doing this work and excited to get more deeply involved in CRRJ's other projects as the summer goes on.

Update 2: This is my second EJA Fellow Update for Equal Justice America. I am about halfway through my internship at this point, and I am continuing my work on fines & fees as well as expungement!

Many states, including Virginia, impose court costs on indigent defendants. In the case of a deferred disposition, where a charge would be dismissed if a person fulfills all their conditions, it is especially egregious. Where a rich person would be able to avoid conviction merely by having the money to pay their court costs, an indigent person could complete all other conditions expected of them and still face a conviction merely because they don't have the ability to pay.

This is one of the many ways the criminal legal system oppresses poor people, and I am thankful to be part of the work LAJC does in opposing it.

Update 3: I'm nearing the end of my internship at this point and have had a really great experience thus far. I am continuing my work in fines & fees and expungement.

The current expungement law in Virginia is incredibly limited -- only misdemeanor non-convictions are eligible, and even then, there are many hurdles. The process is long, expensive, and can be difficult to navigate. Some of



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my work this summer has been crafting community legal education about the current expungement law and the new record-sealing law coming in 2025. The new law is better, in that more people will be eligible, but incredibly complicated with plenty of hurdles for people to get over.

I am so appreciative of the work of the Expungement Council in improving the state of record sealing. They recently had a listening session for directly impacted people to explain the current & new law. I learned a lot from the trainers and am excited to continue learning and working on expungement education.

I have also just received my first expungement client, and I'm excited to get to work on their case!

Update 4: Spending the summer doing work that is led by the community + community organizers has been incredibly rewarding. This is exactly the kind of work I went to law school to pursue: legal strategies that place power in the hands of the people. Along the way I've seen how difficult it is and how constraining the law can be. In my experience this summer, I've had to be creative about potential legal arguments as bad law backed us into a corner on just how much justice we can even seek. While unsurprising, this was still very disheartening to experience. I'm so thankful to the CRRJ attorneys who have modeled how to be a movement lawyer & how to deal with the uncomfortably narrow arguments the law sometimes requires us to make. I'm also so thankful for the organizers who guide the work and always center community self-determination. I'm grateful to have spent the summer learning from the CRRJ team at LAJC.

Update 5: I am very grateful to have been an intern at Legal Aid Justice Center this past summer. I was exposed to issues in the criminal legal system that disproportionately impact low-income people, and it is deeply gratifying to have been a part of an organization that is dedicated to challenging and transforming that system. I learned so much from the attorneys I worked with. My direct supervisor Teresa R. Hepler always pushed me to think bigger and be more precise with my legal arguments. I learned so much from Wyatt about community lawyering and the role of a lawyer in community spaces. I learned a ton from Rob Poggenklass from the nuances of Virginia expungement law to equal protection frameworks. I'm also very appreciative of all the career advice I got from Maisie.

I'm very thankful to the Expungement Council, who are truly the experts on the upcoming expungement law. Without the community forum they hosted this summer, I doubt my understanding would be quite as good.

Along the way I was able to have valuable conversations with organizers like Harold Folley, who imparted some valuable organizing advice that I will be taking with me into my organizing work.

Overall, this was a very valuable summer experience, and I am excited to apply the skills and legal knowledge I developed to the clinics I'm participating in this year. I'm also very thankful to have gotten to know the wonderful people at LAJC for the summer.