

**VETERANS' RIGHTS  
FELLOWSHIP**

**POST GRADUATE  
ANNUAL REPORT**

**EQUAL JUSTICE**  
A M E R I C A



**ALEXANDRA HIMONAS**  
**EJA FELLOW**

**WASHINGTON, DC**  
**FALL 2025**

**NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL  
SERVICES PROGRAM**



## I. REFLECTIONS



Alexa Himonas, J.D. 2022  
Georgetown University

Reflecting on my fellowship experience, I am struck by the profound impact that seemingly small actions can have on the lives of our clients. I have seen this in action at library clinics, which have been one of the most rewarding aspects of my work as a fellow at Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP). These clinics allow me to connect directly with clients and to offer immediate assistance to individuals facing urgent legal issues at D.C.'s public libraries. For instance, I assisted a veteran who was struggling with housing issues because his landlord illegally increased his rent. I gave him advice at the library clinic and later wrote a letter to his landlord demanding that they stop illegally over-charging my client for rent. My work on this case only took a few hours, but the client was grateful and relieved to know he would not have to face a potential eviction case for rent he did not owe.

My fellowship experience has also highlighted the compounding issues and structural barriers that our clients face. My client, Mr. P, for example, suffered because against his landlord refused to fix housing conditions at Mr. P's apartment. Dealing with poor housing conditions was extremely stressful for Mr. P—stress that increased because Mr. P. suffers from PTSD. When Mr. P cannot relax in his home, it aggravates his PTSD symptoms. This makes it harder for him to continue with the many administrative burdens required for him to maintain his housing voucher and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Mr. P's circumstances are not unique. Many of my veteran clients not only suffer because of their landlords' behavior, but because this behavior amplifies conditions my clients already struggle with as veterans. Learning about the multiple and re-occurring challenges



that our clients face has reinforced my commitment to thinking about systemic change while continuing to provide individual support.

*“MANY OF MY VETERAN CLIENTS NOT ONLY SUFFER BECAUSE OF THEIR LANDLORDS’ BEHAVIOR, BUT BECAUSE THIS BEHAVIOR AMPLIFIES CONDITIONS MY CLIENTS ALREADY STRUGGLE WITH AS VETERANS.”*

## **II. INITIATIVES**

During my fellowship, I had the privilege of collaborating with the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA) to support D.C.’s veteran community. This partnership was instrumental in co-hosting library clinics with MOVA in November of 2024. I also attended MOVA’s monthly roundtable discussions, where I learned about essential resources and information for D.C.’s veterans. Through these clinics, I was able to learn about and share MOVA’s programs, such as Vets Ride, which offers ten free rides to veterans each month, enhancing their mobility and access to services. This collaboration not only strengthened our outreach efforts but also allowed us to address the unique challenges faced by veterans in the community. I also helped clients with claims against their landlords for illegal debt collection.

The D.C. debt collection statute applies to landlords and can help protect D.C. tenants, but attorneys have not tested the full breadth of these protections in the courts. I helped clients with these claims by researching the D.C. debt collection statute, the federal debt collection statute, how courts in other states have interpreted similar debt collection laws, and legal procedure in the D.C. Landlord & Tenant Branch. I hope the arguments I crafted from that research will help emphasize the broad scope of D.C.’s debt collection laws will protect tenants from their landlords’ illegal debt collection actions.



## III. CLIENTS SERVED

Below is an overview of the clients I served throughout my fellowship:

- I represented, provided brief services for, or gave advice to clients in ninety-seven cases
- I served seventy-one distinct clients
- I helped two veterans get compensation benefits from the VA, one compensated at 100%
- I helped eleven clients avoid eviction

Below is a table representing all the clients I served throughout my fellowship:

Client *	Services provided	Current status of client's cases
1	Got client's loans out of default, resulting in \$70,000 benefit to the client Advised client on their landlord's use of non-rent fees Advising client on status of their student loans	First student loan case closed, advice on landlord fees closed, current advice case for student loans open
2	Helped client avoid eviction by getting eviction case against client dismissed and represented client at a fair hearing to get her housing voucher restored	Cases closed
3	Advised on SSDI and mortgage contract	Cases closed
4	Settled eviction case against client and helped client avoid eviction	Case closed
5	Advised client on VA benefits	Case closed
6	Helped client avoid eviction by getting two different eviction cases against client dismissed	Cases closed

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Client *	Services provided	Current status of client's cases
7	Helped client avoid eviction by representing client in eviction case against them and by working with NLSP team to find alternative housing for client	Case closed
8	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
9	Assisting client with eviction defense case	Case open
10	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
11	Helped client avoid eviction by representing client in eviction case against them and settling the case	Case open
12	Enforced tenant's rights to decent, habitable housing by writing a letter to client's landlord	Case closed
13	Advised client on SSDI issue	Case closed
14	Advised CL on two different housing issues	Cases closed
15	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
16	Advised client on obtaining their driver's license	Case closed
17	Advocated for the VA to recognize client's honorable service in the military resulting in client receiving back pay from the VA of over \$180,000 and receiving \$4,000 each month going forward	Case open
18	Advised client on VA benefits	Case closed
19	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
20	Advised client on custody issue	Case closed
21	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
22	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
23	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed

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Client *	Services provided	Current status of client's cases
24	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
25	Advised client on student loan issue	Case closed
26	Advised client on her case against previous landlord	Case open
27	Assisting client in their claim for VA benefits Advised client on consumer issue	VA benefits case open, consumer issue case closed
28	Advised client on VA benefits issue	Case closed
29	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
30	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
31	Advised client on criminal record sealing issue	Case closed
32	Assisting client in their case against their landlord Got eviction cases against client dismissed Advised client on consumer issues	Affirmative case is open, other housing cases are closed, first consumer advice case is closed, second consumer advice case is open
33	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
34	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
35	Advised client on security deposit issue	Case closed
36	Helped client avoid eviction by settling eviction case against client Advised client on consumer issue	Cases closed
37	Enforced tenant's rights to non be over-charged for rent by sending demand letters to client's landlord	Case open

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Client *	Services provided	Current status of client's cases
38	Assisted client with their unlawful eviction case	Case open
39	Advised client on family law issue	Case closed
40	Advised client on housing issue and on VA benefits issue	Cases closed
41	Assisting client with their case against their landlord Advised client on VA benefits issue	Case against landlord is open, VA benefits case is closed
42	Advised client on security deposit issue	Case open
43	Advised client on criminal record sealing issue	Case closed
44	Advised client on VA benefits issue	Case closed
45	Advised client on family law issue and SSI	Cases closed
46	Assisted client with eviction case against him	Case open
47	Assisted client in eviction case against him and helped client avoid eviction and judgment	Case closed
48	Assisting client with getting their criminal records sealed	Case open
49	Assisting client with getting their criminal records sealed	Case open
50	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
51	Advising client on VA benefits issue	Case open
52	Advised client on housing issue and individual income issue	Cases closed
53	Successfully got client compensation benefits from the VA Advised client on consumer issue	Cases open
54	Advising client on their consumer case	Case open

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Client *	Services provided	Current status of client's cases
55	Advised client on TANF issue	Case closed
56	Helped client avoid eviction by assisting client with eviction case against them and by working with NLSP team to find alternative housing for client	Case closed
57	Advised client on debt collection issue, VA benefits issue, and housing issue	Cases closed
58	Enforced tenant's rights to decent, habitable housing by writing a letter to client's landlord, advised client on housing matters and consumer issue	Cases closed
59	Advised client on consumer issue	Case closed
60	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
61	Assisted client with divorce forms, advised client on social security issue	Cases closed
62	Assisted client with their case against their landlord Advising client on employment case	Cases open
63	Advised client on criminal record sealing issue	Case closed
64	Successfully got client over \$3,000 due to their landlord charging them illegal fees	Case closed
65	Prevented client's eviction by getting eviction cases dismissed. Advised client on housing issue.	Cases closed
66	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
67	Assisted client in eviction case against him	Case closed
68	Assisted client with eviction case against him and advised client on housing issues	Case closed
69	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
70	Advised client on housing issue	Case closed
71	Advised client on VA benefits issue	Case closed

\*Identified by anonymous number



## **IV. SUCCESSES**

One of my biggest achievements during my fellowship was assisting Mr. J, a veteran who had been denied Department of Veterans Affairs benefits due to his discharge status, despite suffering from health conditions related to over ten years of military service. I advocated on his behalf by maintaining consistent communication with the VA and emphasizing the significance of his honorable service. As a result, the VA determined that Mr. J was eligible for benefits. This victory entitled Mr. J to back pay exceeding \$150,000 and monthly benefits of over \$4,000 for life. Mr. J expressed his deep gratitude, stating that NLSP's work was the reason he was finally able to receive these benefits.

I also successfully assisted Mr. K, a U.S. Army veteran, who faced mental health challenges and was discharged from the military under conditions "other than honorable." The VA previously denied him benefits because of this discharge. I filed a new application and advocated for Mr. K's eligibility for benefits based on his honorable service. After multiple examinations, the VA approved his benefits, providing him financial support and access to PTSD treatment. This marked a significant victory for Mr. K and highlighted the power of persistent advocacy.

Over the course of my fellowship, I also got at least six eviction cases against clients dismissed. This included a case where my client did not actually owe any rent and another case in which the landlord who sued my client no longer owned the building. I also got eviction cases dismissed because my clients were not properly served or were not served at all. These dismissals helped low-income D.C. veterans stay in their homes and avoid eviction.



## **V. CHALLENGES**

During both years of the fellowship, I faced challenges rooted in the need to continually expand my legal expertise and adapt to evolving laws. I worked in the housing law unit, the family law unit, and the economic security unit. Each of these units covers a variety of topics, but especially the economic security unit, which covers public benefits, criminal record sealing, consumer law issues, and more. In addition to these topics, I also worked on multiple VA benefits cases and discharge upgrade cases. Working in all these legal fields and learning about the law in each one was challenging.

This was also challenging as many of these areas are undergoing significant legal reform. For example, early in my second year, substantial portions of student loan law began changing. These laws will remain unsettled for some time. It has been difficult to advise clients on what to do or what to expect when the law is nebulous.

I was lucky to have access to excellent trainings at NLSP and to colleagues who were generous with their time and knowledge and helped me navigate new and changing areas of law.

## **VI. GOALS FOR THE NEXT HALF YEAR**

After my fellowship ends, I will continue to work at NLSP as a staff attorney. I am excited to continue working with my clients and pursuing their cases. I am particularly looking forward to the Consumer Rights Litigation Conference in Washington, D.C. in November. I attended this conference in Chicago in 2023 in the second month of my fellowship, and it was a highlight of the beginning of my fellowship. I am eager to continuing growing and learning as a staff attorney at NLSP.



*"I AM EAGER TO CONTINUING GROWING AND LEARNING AS A STAFF ATTORNEY AT NLSP."*

## VII. MEDIA



A picture at NLSP headquarters.

Thank you to EJA for this amazing opportunity. I am thrilled to continue my work at NLSP.



# **SUPERVISOR EVALUATION FALL 2025**



September 2, 2025

## Equal Justice America Veterans' Rights Fellowship Supervisor's Report

Alexa's fellowship required her to provide legal services in each of NLSP's practice areas. From her first day until now, Alexa has made great efforts learn the law that we practice, identifying not only the legal issues presented but also those unique to each case. She quickly became proficient in housing law, veterans benefits, debt collection protections, family law, and other public benefits.

She has shown a keen ability to assess a case. She provided advice, limited services, and/or extended representation to clients after determining each client's goals and how she could meet them. She discerned the risks and opportunities posed by potential legal actions, identified affirmative defenses, and formulated legally sound counterclaims to reduce the potential harm posed. She communicated her analysis clearly with her clients and offered the appropriate level of service commensurate with that analysis.

Alexa revived a dormant program to assist veterans with their benefits and discharge upgrades. She secured life-changing veterans benefits for a client by successfully advocating for a discharge upgrade. She also successfully secured a discharge upgrade for another client, which entitled him to both benefits and health services that he needed.

Alexa initiated and developed significant pro bono assistance for a major housing case. Her client, a disabled veteran who received a housing subsidy, suffered from substandard housing conditions that made the unit uninhabitable for years. Alexa recognized that the case required a level of expertise that NLSP could not provide, so she recruited attorneys from a private firm to assist her with pre-trial discovery that included several depositions. In doing so, she ensured that she has been able to zealously represent her client.

Alexa has also brought affirmative claims on behalf of tenants facing eviction suits based on incorrect calculations of rental debt. D.C. law makes it unlawful to bring a legal action to collect a false debt. Using this law, Alexa developed affirmative suits against landlords who bring eviction suits on unpaid fees other than rent, under the theory that an eviction suit for non-payment of rent is a debt collection action.

Finally, Alexa proved to be a valuable member of our team, always eager to assist her colleagues by discussing legal issues, editing filings, and offering her thoughts on cases. From her first day, she has shown a high degree of professionalism, a strong attention to detail, and a willingness to



ask questions and explore legal issues. Because of her contributions to NLSP, we enthusiastically asked her to remain with us as a Staff Attorney after her fellowship ends and we are thrilled that accepted this position.

Sincerely,

*Mark Trumbore*

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