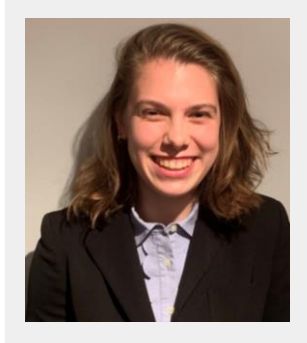




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Gwenyth Szabo

Law School: Washington College of Law

Organization: Legal Aid of the District of Columbia

Update 1: On Friday, I finished my second week as a summer legal intern at Legal Aid DC. Legal Aid provides essential access to justice for those living in poverty and facing systemic barriers in DC.

This summer, I will have the opportunity to work with the Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project litigating appeals in each of Legal Aid's focus areas (domestic and family, consumer, housing, and public benefits law) on behalf of Legal Aid clients and filing amicus briefs on important issues for people living in poverty.

In only two weeks, I have already assisted in filing a brief, helped identify cases that merit appeals, conducted legal research on current appellate issues, and helped prepare our team for an upcoming oral argument.

My experience would not be possible without the financial support from Equal Justice America. EJA helps fund law students working in public interest providing legal assistance to those living in poverty. I am grateful for their support. I also want to thank my family, friends, mentors, and professors at American University Washington College of Law for their support, advice, and guidance in getting me to this point.

Update 2: As I finish the first month of my summer legal internship with the Legal Aid for the District of Columbia, I have already learned so much and am inspired by my team as well as the Legal Aid community in its work in advocating for systemic change for those living in poverty. I am grateful for the opportunity to assist with such important work Equal Justice America.

For me, this month's highlight was attending my first ever oral argument before the DC Court of Appeals where Legal Aid argued as amicus (great job to @Alec Sandler!) to affirm a lower court decision that found source-of-income discrimination where a landlord posted advertisements discriminating against people with



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housing vouchers, which provide financial assistance to low-income renters to cover the gap between what a family can afford to pay in rent and the market cost of housing.

Source-of-income discrimination makes it even harder for low-income families to find housing and can serve as a proxy for other types of discrimination. While source-of-income discrimination is illegal under the DC Human Rights Act, it remains prevalent. Legal Aid's presentation before the DC Court of Appeals not only argued against these discriminatory advertisements but voiced the perspectives of its clients who face serious consequences as a result of source-of-income discrimination, including preventing families from placing their vouchers, barring them from safe, affordable housing, and decreasing housing options for low-income renters.

This experience inspired me, and I am excited to continue my work with Legal Aid.

Update 3: While appellate advocacy does not often involve meeting with clients, last week, I had the opportunity to meet with a client in-person and draft a motion for his case. It was a pleasure meeting him and a reminder of how rewarding it is to serve Legal Aid DC's client community.

So far at my legal internship, I have researched issues relating to administrative law, standing, and anti-discrimination law, and as I navigate the complex statutory and regulatory structures at play in DC to answer difficult research questions, I am frustrated that the law is not accessible to the every-day person, especially Legal Aid's clients who cannot afford attorneys and attempt to navigate the legal system without legal representation.

The difficulty in accessing justice has serious consequences for Legal Aid clients who are litigating housing, public benefits, family law, domestic violence, immigration, and other cases. I am grateful that as a legal intern on the appellate advocacy team, I am included in Legal Aid's systemic advocacy meetings where the team develops strategies to advocate for easier access to justice and legal understanding whether it is through affirmative litigation, appeals, testifying at DC Council hearings, and/or discussions with agency leadership. I look forward to continuing my work this summer, and I continue to appreciate Equal Justice America's support in my work.

Update 4: Last week, I assisted with intake at Legal Aid DC's Southeast office and learned about Legal Aid's community outreach efforts. Legal Aid recently reopened its Southeast office at the Anacostia Professional Building, otherwise known as the Big Chair, to offer additional walk-in hours and provide an additional location for Legal Aid's client community to access legal services.

While helping with intake, I was reminded of the intersectionality of legal issues that our client community faces. To wholistically address the needs of our clients, Legal Aid has developed a network of organizations to refer clients when issues arise outside of Legal Aid's focus areas (housing, domestic violence and family, public benefits, and consumer law). Issue spotting these overlapping legal issues is essential, and I was grateful to learn



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from the Southeast team how to better my client communication and issue spotting skills. I plan to return to the Southeast office throughout my last two weeks of my internship with Legal Aid.

Since my last post, I also was invited to attend a @Equal Justice America meet and greet where I had the pleasure of meeting with other EJA fellows and EJA alumni. The event was a great opportunity to share experiences with current and former Fellows as well as learn about career opportunities. I am grateful for EJA's support this summer, and I look forward to attending future events.

Update 5: Last week, I concluded my internship with the Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project at Legal Aid DC, and I cannot thank the Legal Aid team enough for such an amazing and rewarding experience. I also want to thank Equal Justice America for its support in making my summer experience possible and Rachel Janger who made it possible for me to secure these prestigious opportunities.

In a short ten weeks, I was able to better my research, writing, and issue spotting abilities while improving my client and team communication skills. I helped draft appellate briefs, motions, and amicus briefs; met with clients; conducted research on anti-discrimination, public benefits, standing, and property interests; learned about DC regulations and administrative law; and watched my first ever oral argument.

With each assignment, I learned of an additional barrier perpetuating systemic inequalities and expanded my understanding of achieving systemic change. Appeals can reveal patterns of injustice. Appellate advocacy is unique because the precedents set through effective appellate litigation can lay the foundation for systemic changes. For example, if a person is denied certain public benefits due to an unfair reporting system, while the trial level only allows litigating the denial of benefits, an appeal can be an opportunity to challenge the reporting process itself. By contesting the reporting process, a successful appeal could strike down an arbitrary barrier that serves only to further disadvantage communities in need from obtaining essential public benefits.

Unfortunately, systemic change is slow, and appeals are limited in their systemic reach because the courts cannot create new laws. However, one of the best parts of interning with Legal Aid was watching and learning about its holistic approach to systemic change. At Legal Aid, an appeal may be accompanied by further litigation and advocacy strategies to manifest that systemic change. I was grateful to be included in the process through conversations and meetings with the various teams and Legal Aid partners.

It was truly an honor and pleasure meeting and working with the Legal Aid community and serving its clients. I look forward to continuing my career in public interest including this upcoming fall semester when I will be participating in Washington College of Law's Reentry Clinic.