



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts

Update 1:

Finishing up my third week at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts, I am so grateful to have the support and network of Equal Justice America to allow me to continue the exciting work that I am doing. At PLS, I have been assigned to projects in the areas of Brutality and the Racial Equity in Corrections Initiative. With this work, I have interacted with clients and reviewed materials that showcase the many oversights and failures of carceral system. PLS is a resource for this population with a mission that aims to eradicate the injustice enrooted in that system.

It has been a pleasure to work on initiatives moving towards that goal. As a nonprofit that bridges the gap between law students and underserved populations in the legal world, EJA is invaluable to sustaining passion for public interest work. I am excited to return to Boston College Law School and bring the skills I have learned to my studies and future endeavors.

Update 2:

Since my last EJA Fellow Update, I have only gotten busier at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts. I now have a handful of clients who are seeking relief in their claims of brutality by prison/jail staff. Though the scheduling process and security screens are frustrating at times, being able to visit my clients in prison has remained my favorite part of the job. I was initially intimidated before my first in-person non-contact client visit - largely because of what we're taught to fear about prisoners. However, it quickly became clear that the conversations I have with my clients are no different from those I would have with clients on the outside. There are not many wins when combatting the prison system, but being able to meet my client face-to-face makes the bad news a little easier to swallow and makes the good news feel incredible.



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I am also working with PLS' REICI team to improve MCI's use of medication-assisted treatments (MATs) for those battling addiction. Though this is mainly community engagement and policy work, this project reminds me that there are innumerable avenues for advocacy. The best one is one that impassions that person to help their community. EJA helps fund those who have found their passion and are dedicated to using it in the public interest.

Update 3:

For this EJA Fellow Update, I wanted to discuss a specific instance that I had with a client. Last Friday, I spent virtually all day at Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center, Massachusetts' maximum-security prison, to talk to clients about their claims of brutality against prison staff. These conversations are never easy - we often talk about sensitive topics and have to ask detailed questions about their assault, their injuries, and their fears of retaliation. Though, after one of the conversations ended and I waited for SBCC's staff to escort me out of the facility, my client and I's conversation took an unexpected turn. He told me that he knew of Boston College Law School because his goal was to be a clergyman. This started a discussion on faith and tradition that only ended when I realized that a CO had been waiting outside the door for a while.

I try to avoid language in my updates about incarcerated people being "just like us" because I don't want to entertain a narrative that one should consider them as anything else. However, at this moment, I realized the collateral damage that comes from incarceration. There are whole lives that can't be lived when someone is locked up. It was sobering to see that in another life, I wouldn't have been talking to this person because he was my client but instead, because he was a professor, coworker, or peer.

I have learned a lot of practical legal skills during my internship at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts. Still, I am glad that these social ones - arguably the more important ones - are the unspoken parts of my job description.

Update 4:

Tomorrow marks the end of my internship with Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts! It is incredible how fast the time has gone this summer, and I still feel like there's so much left I want to keep working on! I had to write goodbye letters to my clients today, which was a sobering exercise. It was difficult, to sum up all the work we'd done together on their case from the good progresses to hard setbacks. However, I do not doubt that I am leaving my clients in the best hands.

PLS constantly has its finger on the pulse of prisoners' rights issues in the state. From the macro-lens policy initiatives pushing for enhanced Medication-Assisted Treatment programs in prisons to the micro efforts in trying to get my prisoners their canteen access back, I was honored to have been a part of this incredible organization. As someone interested in criminal justice work, I've known that PLS is a powerhouse in this state. Still, that reputation was nothing in comparison to the dedication and passion that I witnessed despite only a



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small portion of the effort making its way into headlines. I highly recommend supporting their cause by donating here: <https://lnkd.in/d5X3VSS2>.

Update 5:

Wrapping up my last EJA Fellow Update, I wanted to reflect on my takeaways and the skills that I learned while at Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts. Client communication was the highlight of my internship. PLS trusted me to have my own client pool that I was responsible for. By the end of the internship, I would schedule prison visits by myself and knew every retort to a correctional officer who wanted to keep me from going inside. Moreover, submitting Use of Force package requests and sending medical advocacy letters to the superintendent of the prison became second nature. Nearly every prisoner that I worked with told me that they were grateful I was there to help them and that PLS had returned their calls. Time and time again, the criminal justice system makes prisoners feel as though there is nothing they can do in instances of abuse, suffering, and constitutional violations. Obviously, this work doesn't have a lot of victories, but it was enlightening to be a part of an organization that does give our clients hope. Oftentimes, they call us when there is no other place to turn, and I was told by many clients that just having me on the other line made them feel heard for the first time in a while.

I believe that my time with the Brutality Team - which was only one other full-time employee - was necessary as prison assaults happen almost daily and that team is the only one in the organization that handles that type of case. By helping offload the work and learning to do an array of things, I think I left PLS making a great impact on the organization and the lives of my clients. I am sad I couldn't see my clients' cases until the very end, but I know that they are being left in great hands. I believe that PLS needs all the resources and support that they can get, so please consider donating to their missions: <https://lnkd.in/d5X3VSS2>.

Lastly, I would like to thank Equal Justice America for giving me the opportunity to do this work without external worries that would have certainly hindered my performance. I am grateful for the network, support, and connections that I have made through this fellowship. Please consider donating to them. I am eager to return to my final year of law school and use everything I've learned from this opportunity.