



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc.

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**Update 1:** I'm happy to share my first Equal Justice America update. I've thoroughly enjoyed the past month interning at North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc. For those unfamiliar, NCPLS is a non-profit law firm that represents clients in a variety of civil and post-conviction cases. While this summer has only just begun, I've already learned so much from the talented lawyers and staff at NCPLS.

Prior to my internship, I didn't know about the past (and current) challenge of providing incarcerated individuals with access to legal materials to build their cases. This is important because many of these litigants go on to file pro se. One legal library case, which originated in North Carolina, even reached the Supreme Court in the 1970s.

Normally, when I'm not researching legal issues, I'm in the office during staff meetings or observing court just down the road. But this past week looked a little different: NCPLS interns took a field trip to Durham, where we attended a three-day seminar hosted by the Center for Death Penalty Litigation. We received training on a variety of topics, such as legal writing, mitigation, and jury misconduct. It was great opportunity to meet other Triangle-area interns, and I'm sure that I'll apply the practical skills we learned during this summer and in practice.

Looking ahead to the fall, I was able to register for my second-to-last semester at Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law. While I'm glad to have a couple of months left at NCPLS, it was a great relief to get into the classes I wanted.

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**Update 2:** If you come from a theatre background, you've likely heard the infamous words "hurry up and wait." As a surprise to very few, that saying is equally applicable to the legal profession. Since my last EJA Fellow Update, I've learned a lot about the extensive work that goes into preparing for court and how important it is to be flexible with the court calendar.



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Over the past week, I've observed a pre-trial motions hearing in one case and a first appearance in another. Before starting my internship at North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc., I had little opportunity to go to court. What likely seems monotonous to seasoned lawyers is entirely new territory for me, and I'm taking full advantage of watching advocacy at work. That education extends to client meetings, as well, where I've been able to watch my supervising attorneys build relationships with their clients.

Outside of my internship, Kendall Woodlief, M.S. and I have started preparing the Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law Peer Mentor Program for the upcoming school year. As a Co-Director and returning Peer Mentor, I look forward to highlighting opportunities that are available to law students through non-profit organizations like Equal Justice America (EJA). EJA depends on donations from those who support increasing access to legal aid in communities across the country. If you're able to support, donations to support future EJA fellowships can be made at the following link: <https://lnkd.in/guejFVew>

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**Update 3:** This summer has truly flown by—in just a few short weeks, I'll be starting my final year at Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law.

If you've been following along, you might have seen some of my earlier posts chronicling my time at North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc. as part of my #EJAFellowUpdate series. From Batson challenges to the Americans with Disabilities Act, I look forward to continuing to learn about the issues that affect incarcerated individuals within North Carolina's prison system.

Since my internship started, I've expanded my knowledge about civil and post-conviction casework while working alongside supervising attorneys and fellow interns. I've also been able to observe several staff attorneys in court as they are assigned trial-level cases for indigent clients.

Last month, the Indigent Defense Services organized a tour of the State Crime Lab in Raleigh for local criminal defense attorneys and interns. During the presentation, I learned about the capabilities of the different crime labs across the state as well as the individual tests conducted within each department. Knowing how often forensics plays a role in post-conviction cases, this was an excellent opportunity to demystify forensic testing. It was helpful to see an overview of the testing process—from the submission forms utilized by law enforcement to the actual labs where the science takes place.

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**Update 4:** It's hard to believe this is my second-to-last EJA Fellow Update. Next week, I'll be wrapping up a few projects and taking my final trip to court.

One of my favorite things about North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc. is getting updates on cases from both the civil and post-conviction (PC) teams. Every success, no matter how big or small, has a direct impact on clients' lives. This is true whether a client is seeking release or time credited toward their sentence.



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A large part of that success is attributed to the dedication among the staff of both the civil and PC teams. Last week, I learned about the civil intake process, which includes reading and sorting through letters from incarcerated individuals seeking legal help. On the PC side, I attended a brainstorming session with attorneys and the other summer interns. Attending these meetings as a law student has been invaluable for learning how to apply the law and strategize effectively. These lessons will certainly follow me into practice.

Look for my final #EJAFellowUpdate in a few weeks, which will be a reflective post about my summer as a whole. Until then, I look forward to my final week at PLS before starting 3L year at Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law.

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**Update 5:** For my final EJA Fellow Update, I'm called to reflect on my summer experiences and how my internship will impact my future practice.

Before my internship with North Carolina Prisoner Legal Services, Inc., I knew very little about the rights of those incarcerated in our state's prison system. I had a baseline knowledge of what Section 1983 litigation was from class, but it wasn't until this summer that I learned how it provides PLS' clients with a pathway to legal relief. And by researching legal standards, I learned about use of force claims and the process for requesting ADA accommodations in prison.

Outside the legal research realm, I learned a lot simply by being in the courtroom. This summer—for the first time—I attended a calendar call, a motions hearing, a first appearance, and a status hearing. I also observed part of a trial here in Wake County. What looked effortless to me as a law student likely took years of practice. Even during brief client meetings, the knowledge I gained from these practical interactions was so much more than I could've learn from a casebook.

Perhaps the most impactful field trips were to the courthouses located outside of the Triangle. It was impossible to ignore the legal and food deserts in North Carolina's eastern counties. Regardless of what city or town I'll practice in, I recognize the importance of understanding how these broader, systemic issues impact access to legal representation in rural communities.

Overall, I'm grateful to everyone at PLS for such a transformative summer. This internship was my first advocacy experience, and I'm thankful to the supervising attorneys and staff who were wonderful teachers.

If any Campbell University, Norman Adrian Wiggins School of Law students are interested in interning in a civil legal aid or civil rights organization, I highly encourage you to apply for the EJA Fellowship next year! I'm happy to answer any questions about the Fellowship or my summer at PLS.