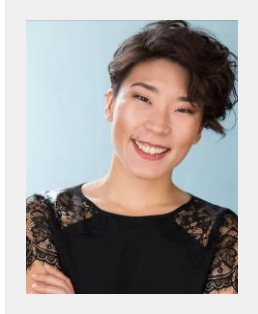




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Audrey Yaujin Park

Law School: Chicago-Kent College of Law

Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1:

I have started my internship with Legal Aid Chicago, an organization providing free representation in civil legal matters for clients who lack the resources to hire an attorney on their own. Legal Aid Chicago fights for individual rights to affordable housing, basic healthcare, fair working conditions, protection from abuse, and economic stability. Over the next 10 weeks, I will be working in the Public Benefits Practice Group to assist vulnerable communities obtain and retain benefits such as: SNAP, TANF, AABD, and Medicaid. I am excited to begin and learn more in this role that will provide direct legal services experience as well as research within the practice area!

Update 2:

Here with another update on my summer with Legal Aid Chicago. I was excited to be assigned my first client last week, who needed assistance in applying for additional benefits. I reached out and scheduled an interview with them and got to know more about their story and hear them share about themselves. After hearing their situation, I believe that in addition to the initial benefits they reached out to us about, they may be eligible for some allowances they were not aware of. Through the guidance of my supervisor and paralegal, I have been learning about additional benefits available to qualifying low-income applicants. While they are available, applicants applying on their own who are not familiar with state benefits and the Department of Human Services procedures may not be aware of all the ways in which they can seek additional aid, due to no fault of their own. I am energized to be a direct support for this individual. I look forward to facilitating the application process with them and helping them to navigate what can sometimes be a complicated and overwhelming process.

Update 3:

I have currently been working on a project with other supervising attorneys and paralegals, helping individuals complete reimbursement claims for stolen EBT benefits. Individuals that have been victims of "skimming".



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Skimming occurs when point-of-sale machines are implanted with a device to copy EBT card information. Irregular transactions that drain a victim's account of their benefits will be made in states outside of Illinois, where a victim clearly was not present to make such a transaction. Up until now, all individuals who have been a victim of this kind of theft have been unable to be reimbursed for their stolen transactions. Only until a few weeks ago, Illinois Department of Human Services released a policy stating that victims who experienced EBT benefit theft after October 2022 will be eligible for reimbursement. The past few weeks have been busy with reaching out to our eligible clients so that we may assist them in filing a reimbursement claim. It has been rewarding to hear how relieved our clients are. However, there are still many of our clients who are victims of skimming that are not currently eligible, since the theft they experienced happened prior to October 2022. We are currently working with these clients to gather all necessary information to help build a strong case for why they should also become eligible for reimbursement.

Update 4:

We have been busy working on the current project from my last update, which is getting reimbursements for individuals who were victim to stolen EBT benefits. It has been extremely rewarding to hear from clients whose applications have been approved and received reimbursements in as little as 10 days. One client was extremely relieved and almost in tears when I was on the phone with her. Another client was interviewed by CBS, along with one of our supervising attorneys. You can read about the process here:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/chicago/news/snap-fraud-reimbursements/>. Aside from this project, I was just assigned a new research project by my direct supervising attorney. I have yet to dive in, but am excited to start as it will be my last research project of the internship. This Friday we will be celebrating the law students in our program group, along with a full staff summer celebration. I look forward to connecting with everyone in person on Friday. It is almost time for this experience to end, and it seems to have flown by.

Update 5:

For my last few days at Legal Aid Chicago, I was focused on the latest research assignment from my supervising attorney. I was tasked with researching whether there was any case law or regulations that allows for general extensions of the deadline to disenroll from SSA benefits. Any individual who is 65 or older and entitled to social security is also entitled to Medicare Part A benefits. The only way to avoid Medicare Part A entitlement is to forego social security, the source of the entitlement, by one of two ways: (1) fail to apply even if qualified; or (2) withdraw one's application and repay all retirement benefits already received. We were wanting to research the option of withdrawing an application completely. There are instances when such a withdrawal will be more beneficial for an individual's entitlement to other public benefits. This was an enjoyable assignment, and my supervisor was very helpful and praised my memo. I hope it proves to be useful. I am glad for the time spent at Legal Aid Chicago this summer.