



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1:

This summer, I am working as a legal intern on Legal Aid Chicago's Migrant team, which provides legal assistance to migrant farmworkers across Illinois. After only a couple of weeks, I have already gained invaluable experience working on pesticide litigation and T-visas.

Yesterday, I spent the day driving around central Illinois with the Migrant team's incredible outreach paralegal, Pedro Gaytan. We were looking to connect with H2A workers and discuss any workplace issues that they might be facing. Finding workers was no small feat- I soon learned that this was a task that required patience, diligence, and commitment. It was an honor to witness Pedro build relationships with these workers and I look forward to hopefully conducting more outreach in the future.

Update 2:

It's an exciting time to be at Legal Aid Chicago's Migrant team. One of the pesticide-safety cases our team is litigating on behalf of a sizable group of farmworkers is currently heating up as we move through pre-trial discovery; however, as we fill out dozens of interrogatory responses, I am particularly struck by the words of one of our many clients on what this detailed work represents.

He discussed the idea of accountability. For him, it was baffling that the case had not settled and was continuing to trudge on, years later. Although I have only spent a few short weeks on this case, my conversation with this client made me see the grueling reality of how difficult it is to bring abuses of power to justice. Even in a public interest field, I am learning that it is far too easy to get lost in the technicalities of lawyering to remember the real forces that power our justice system. My hope for my classmates and I (and perhaps the US Supreme Court) is that we remember to ground ourselves in those important realities.



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Update 3:

It's hard to believe that the summer is already more than halfway over, and that I only have a few weeks left at Legal Aid Chicago! Lately, I have been working on a T-Visa application for one of our clients. T-Visas are a type of immigration relief available to survivors of trafficking, including labor trafficking, for their cooperation with law enforcement in criminal investigations of their traffickers. This form of relief is necessary in the wake of widespread apprehension towards law enforcement, given the localization of immigration enforcement that has turned many local police forces into agents of deportation. And yet, there are significant hurdles to any person successfully gaining a T-visa. It is an honor to do this work and help my client work towards this goal.

Update 4:

The summer is almost over, and I have only a week left at Legal Aid Chicago!

Over the past few weeks, I have been doing more work on pesticide safety. Although farmworkers perform dangerous work, they are excluded from the majority of our federal labor laws. I am very grateful to have worked with Legal Aid Chicago's Migrant team to help ensure that farmworkers' dignity at work is respected by employers.

Update 5:

My time with Legal Aid Chicago has come to a close, and I am so grateful for all of the Migrant team for giving me an incredible experience this summer. Over the past few months, I have gotten an up-close look at civil litigation and immigration casework, working with attorneys to ensure that farmworkers across Illinois have access to safe workplaces. These experiences have given me great insight into the daily decisions lawyers have to make on how to present their clients' cases, lessons that I will carry with me for the rest of my career. Additionally, I have expanded my skills by practicing lawyering in Spanish, forming relationships with wonderful clients who have entrusted me with these serious matters.

Dignity at work matters. It matters to our clients, but it also matters for all of us. Ensuring that low-wage workers achieve equity and fairness at work is one of the few ways that we can combat an economic system built on exploitation of labor. Farmworker justice is entangled in so many other causes- food justice, racial justice, environmental justice, and immigrant justice, to name a few. I am honored to have spent a short window of time learning from all that this movement has to teach us.

My summer would not have been possible without the support of Equal Justice America. Please consider contributing.