



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: I'm happy to share that I started my summer internship with the Immigration Legal Services team at Catholic Charities DC a few weeks ago! Although I naively thought I had a strong fundamental understanding of immigration law, I have since realized how much I still have to learn. Thankfully, the attorneys at Catholic Charities have provided us with comprehensive trainings on various aspects of immigration law from U-visas to FOIA requests. As we continue throughout the summer, I hope to utilize the knowledge I gained from these trainings to best serve clients.

So far, I have sharpened my legal research skills by researching country conditions for asylum cases, drafting closing arguments for immigration court, and writing memos on various topics for attorneys. I look forward to engaging in more direct client interactions in the coming weeks and will report back on these experiences!

I'm also honored to be an Equal Justice America Fellow. Equal Justice America provides funding to law students who are helping low-income clients access essential legal services. Catholic Charities provides low-cost or pro bono services to local residents in order to ensure that everyone has access to legal help regardless of their ability to pay.

Update 2: I can't believe that my time with Catholic Charities is already reaching its halfway point. Since I last shared about my internship, I have learned so much and worked on many new projects that have broadened my understanding of immigration law.

Last time, I mentioned that I was excited to work more directly with clients. I have since had the opportunity to partner with clients on a variety of cases included 601-A hardship waivers, asylum, and PD requests. Although legal research has been very helpful in shaping my understanding of the law, I love interacting with clients and learning more about their lives. I enjoy making those connections.



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Lastly, I wanted to touch upon a peculiarity of asylum law. One of the five bases of asylum eligibility is "particular social group" (PSG). PSGs can range from women treated like property to people with disabilities to LGBTQ+ individuals. The most imperative part of arguing a PSG is that it must be an "immutable" trait. What I have learned, however, is that the "immutability" standard is very subjective when it comes to immigration court. Unfortunately, immigration judges are sometimes difficult to convince that a PSG is relevant and valid. It is thus vital to provide in-depth country conditions to prove a PSG's validity in court and help the client.

Update 3: I'm back with another update! My internship work has really picked up pace, as I head into my final two weeks here at Catholic Charities. It is amazing how much I have learned about immigration law in the past 1.5 months. Right now, I am working on a prosecutorial discretion (PD) request and an extreme hardship provisional waiver (I-601A). I never thought that I would have the opportunity to work on documents that would actually be submitted to court!

Even more significantly, I have been able to communicate and form connections with the clients for whom I am drafting these documents. Although it might seem bizarre, when I spoke the other day with the woman who I am helping with the PD request, we talked about our favorite Starbucks items and our weekend plans. Because a PD request is subjective, I wanted to make sure that she would come across as a human, and not just a name on a paper. Adding in these details creates a more complete image of who the petitioner really is. I am excited to hand in the drafts I've been working on to my supervisor next week.

Update 4: My time at Catholic Charities is quickly coming to a close. As I reflect back on my experience, I am amazed at how much I have learned over the past weeks. I have gained substantive experience that will be transferable no matter where I go next -- I have drafted closing arguments for court, authored various memoranda, met with clients to help author declarations, and will even be litigating an asylum case before a judge alongside my supervising attorney. I never imagined that I would get such a wide range of experiences when I began the internship. I especially appreciate my supervisor who has given me work assignments based on my specific strengths and interests.

Furthermore, I recently attended a meetup with other current EJA fellows as well as with program alumni. I loved hearing about everyone's experiences at places ranging from a public defender's office to a non-profit supporting domestic violence survivors. What most stuck out to me was that all the attending fellows were women. It was a testament to EJA's commitment to supporting women attorneys in their future career paths.

Update 5: I am writing with my fifth and final EJA Fellow Update on my summer internship experience at Catholic Charities. I am immensely grateful for the learning opportunities I have received over the nine weeks I spent interning this summer. To summarize some of my highlights, I:

- 1) Wrote a closing argument for an asylum case



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- 2) Met with clients to draft declarations for extreme hardship waivers
- 3) Went to court and observed a master calendar hearing
- 4) Worked one-on-one with a client to determine for which forms of immigration relief she qualified
- 5) Furthered my understanding of different forms of immigration relief including VAWA, U visas, T visas, and NACARA, among many others
- 6) Drafted a prosecutorial discretion request for an asylum case

These experiences were invaluable in further developing my research and client services skills to become the best attorney I can be to help those who most need it. I am excited to utilize all that I learned this summer in my Refugee Law seminar this semester and at mutual aid asylum clinics where I volunteer under attorney supervision. Looking further into the future, I hope to use these skills when working with clients of my own.

This internship did not only provide me with the opportunity to provide meaningful direct work; I also developed both personally and professionally. The other three interns and I grew close over lunches where we chatted about our shared passion for immigration law and the cases we were working on. I also formed strong relationships with attorneys from the ILS team who offered me career advice and mentorship. On a professional level, I was lucky enough to have a supervisor who took a sincere interest in my development as future lawyer. The interns and I had one-on-one meetings with our supervisor every few weeks where we talked about our future goals and brainstormed ways to achieve them. I feel much more confident leaving this internship than I did going into it, and I think these personalized meetings are a big reason why.

Again, this summer internship would not have been possible without the generous funding of Equal Justice America (EJA). EJA offers law students pursuing public interest internships the funding needed to be able to do this necessary work.