



## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** Georgetown University Law Center

**Organization:** the Legal Aid Society of DC

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**Update 1:** I am so grateful to have received funding through Equal Justice America (EJA) to support my legal work with Legal Aid DC in their Family/Domestic Violence Unit this summer. I am thrilled to have this opportunity to help survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence and families in poverty through direct legal services.

For many people, the legal system is opaque and inaccessible. Having a lawyer can make this experience bearable, especially for survivors of domestic violence. Legal Aid provides free civil legal services to DC residents in poverty, guiding them through the legal system when they otherwise might be unable to afford a lawyer. Through my work thus far with the Family/DV Unit, I have seen firsthand how Legal Aid does this amazing work. I also have learned so much about DC law on intrafamily offenses, civil protection orders, child support, divorce, and custody. I look forward to continuing to support and empower survivors as they navigate the legal system and to working toward ensuring survivors' safety and access to justice in the long term.

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**Update 2:** As I write my second ever LinkedIn post (thanks Equal Justice America for forcing me to actually use my profile!), I am finishing my first month at Legal Aid DC in the Family/Domestic Violence Unit. Given the huge need for civil legal services, I hit the ground running right away here and took on substantive work immediately. It has been quite a learning curve to adjust from being a full-time student focused on my academics to serving Legal Aid's clients in child support, custody, and civil protection order cases. I have met clients whose resilience and determination blows me away, and I am so thrilled to be able to help them navigate the legal system.

At Legal Aid, I do something every day that I have never done before, whether it be gathering discovery, writing direct- and cross-examination questions, learning about trial strategy, writing motions, or conducting full-length family matter intakes. It has been eye-opening and humbling.

In my observations, the amount of trust and faith that Legal Aid has in its attorneys and support staff is only matched in their capacity and dedication to serving low-income clients here in DC. If you can, please support their Making Justice Real campaign at <https://lnkd.in/e5cQpwwM> so that they can continue to do their amazing and necessary work every day.



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**Update 3:** It's time for my third EJA fellow update! I am now more than halfway through my time in the Family/DV Unit at Legal Aid DC. Even this late in the summer, I still have the opportunity to try or experience new things every day.

One of the most exciting experiences has been conducting intakes with applicants for Legal Aid's family law services. I have discovered that I truly enjoy interacting directly with these applicants, both in person at Legal Aid's court-based projects and over the phone. Talking to the applicants and hearing their stories has brought my work this summer into perspective.

I worked especially closely with two applicants this past week, helping them file pro se (on their own behalf) motions to modify their child support payments. One of the applicants was on Medicaid and was being charged unnecessarily through their employer for private health insurance for their child based on an old child support order. The cost of private health insurance was over half of this applicant's monthly income and the monthly deductions left them without enough funds to support themselves. With the support of my Legal Aid supervisor, I helped the applicant write a Motion to Modify the existing child support order to lift this burden and submitted it to the court. The applicant now has a path to financial security and being able to take care of their child in the long term. It felt amazing to be able to use the legal knowledge and experience I've learned from my internships and Georgetown University Law Center to support this applicant.

If you can, please support Legal Aid DC's Making Justice Real campaign through their website ([www.legalaiddc.org](http://www.legalaiddc.org)) so that they can continue to do their impactful and necessary work every day.

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**Update 4:** I so appreciate all the opportunities I've had to put my legal skills into practice at Legal Aid DC. This summer I've been able to research novel legal issues, draft a variety of family law petitions, interview clients, prepare discovery, and support survivors at court. My favorite part has been working with survivors and helping them learn to use the civil legal system to achieve their goals- whether it be getting some protection from their abuser through a civil protective order or custody of their children or financial relief from court-ordered payments. As my work here winds down and I reflect on all I have learned this summer, I am so grateful for the attorneys and clients I've had the chance to work with here.

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**Update 5:** For my last EJA Update, I would like to share a brief overview of what I learned during my summer in the Family Law/Domestic Violence Unit at Legal Aid DC.

This summer, I had the privilege of supporting Legal Aid's efforts to confront emerging issues in the epidemic of violence against women. I helped Legal Aid's Domestic Violence and Family Law attorneys prepare civil protective orders, advocate for fair and accurate child support and custody, and work to improve legal services for domestic violence survivors living in DC. I conducted legal research; drafted legal memoranda, briefs, pleadings, motions, and letters to support Legal Aid's ongoing legal assistance; and assisted in the discovery



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process. I interacted directly with Legal Aid clients: assisting with intakes; observing client meetings, hearings, trials, and several court-based legal projects.

I plan to build my legal career around serving other women and girls who are survivors of violence. Working at Legal Aid this summer, with the financial assistance of EJA, helped me to continue to develop my personal philosophy on gender-based violence and reflect on how I can best contribute to advancing women's rights. This internship helped me hone foundational skills that I will use as a new attorney advocating on behalf of survivors of gender-based violence and also taught me how to deploy holistic, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive lawyering to be a zealous and empathetic advocate.

I am so grateful for this opportunity to work to ensure fair and equal access to justice for DC residents most in need, including survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence. Gender- and sex-based violence haunts almost every society and is aided and abetted by legal systems, including here in the US. The experience I had this summer at Legal Aid DC makes me confident that using my law degree is my path to help right some of these wrongs.

As I prepare to study international human rights this fall at Georgetown Law's Center for Transnational Legal Studies in London, I look forward to applying all I have learned from my experiences this summer about family law in DC to the international sphere. Thank you to Equal Justice America and Legal Aid DC for supporting me this summer and allowing me to contribute to this amazing organization.