



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Rio Dennis

**Law School:** Georgetown University (JD/MBA)

**Organization:** Legal Services of Northern Virginia

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### Update 1:

Today, I started my internship at Legal Services of Northern Virginia (LSNV)! LSNV is a full service, nonprofit law firm that provides services in a variety of substantive civil legal areas, including family law, housing law, elder law, public benefits claims, access to health care, child advocacy, consumer law and AIDS/HIV issues. I'm really excited to spend the next 10 weeks contributing to this amazing work to assist some of the most vulnerable populations in the US while also learning about the role of direct legal services in the public interest space!

As my internship is unpaid, I have been granted a Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship. EJA is a nonprofit supporting law students who are joining the fight to end inequality in our civil legal justice system.

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### Update 2:

I MADE DEAN'S LIST!!!! Anyone who has been to law school will tell you that the 1st year of law school is the hardest year and sometimes the only one that really matters. Let me tell you, this year was HARD both academically and personally. But I persevered and earned a spot in the TOP THIRD of my class!

I was able to assist in a custody and child support case helping a victim of domestic violence get some of the justice she deserves!

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### Update 3:

Last week, Legal Services of Northern Virginia hosted a free estate planning clinic for low income Virginia residents. My fellow interns and I were able to help residents walk out of our office with a fully executed Last Will and Testament, Living Will, Durable Power of Attorney and any other estate documents they needed. This work is so important as Caring.com reports that only 1 in 3 Americans current has their estate documents in order, but only about 1 in 5 Americans with a low income (less than \$40k annually) has a will. This is further



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emphasized by only 1 in 4 Hispanic Americans and 1 in 3 Black Americans have a will.

Without proper estate planning, your heirs can be subject to increased probate costs, long delays in accessing financial means to pay for your final expenses, and an inability to make medical decisions for you if you are unable to. There are so many reasons to make sure your family knows your wishes and are able to execute them effectively! Please reach out to your local legalaid organization or a private attorney to get your documents in order!

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## **Update 4:**

One of my favorite experiences this summer at Legal Services of Northern Virginia has been having the opportunity to participate in a mock trial in front of a sitting judge! My partner and I were tasked with representing the (fake) petitioner in a request for a 2 year protective order on the basis of family abuse and WE WON!! The judge granted all of the provisions we requested for the protective order.

This mock trial served as an amazing opportunity to get more practice in applying the Federal Rules of Evidence, learn how to use direct examination to tell a story, and to practice making closing arguments. I loved every bit of it!

As I go into the last 2 weeks of my internship, I'm so grateful to have had this opportunity to learn and grow!

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## **Update 5:**

On August 4th, I wrapped up an extraordinary internship with Legal Services of Northern Virginia! LSNV truly helped me learn and grow as an individual and future attorney. I drafted petitions, motions and orders for family law cases (such as adult guardianships and divorces), drafted a comment in response to a Request for Input by a federal agency for our housing law unit, participated in a mock trial for a protective order, and had the opportunity to watch housing and consumer law trials. This experience not only met but exceeded my expectations and helped to solidify my interest in litigation work going forward. I cannot thank the organization enough for the experience.

As I have mentioned in my previous posts, none of this would have been possible without the support of Equal Justice America! EJA provided me with a summer grant which helped over my living expenses during this unpaid internship.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me this summer! Words cannot express my immense gratitude!