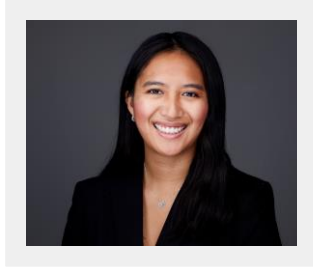




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Taylor Moises

Law School: The George Washington University Law School

Organization: Neighborhood Legal Services Program

Update 1: I am grateful to receive funding through Equal Justice America to support my legal work with Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) in their Economic Security Unit (ESU) this summer. I am about halfway through my internship, and I have already gained invaluable experiences.

I chose to work at this organization because of its impressive mission. It was the first legal services provider in Washington, D.C. with legal offices situated strategically within the community to achieve fundamental change for the poor of that community. NLSP builds its work on strong partnerships with community-based organizations and seeks to achieve lasting change for its clients and their communities by using a full range of advocacy tools.

Things I have worked on include conducting legal research and drafting memoranda analyzing consumer law, public benefits, criminal record sealing, and complaints regarding the Fair Criminal Records Screening Amendment Act; communicating legal information such as how to file a praecipe for an alias summons with community members through the D.C. Small Claims Court Resource Center; and staffing clinics and events at D.C. Public Libraries to participate in direct client communication along with staff attorneys.

I look forward to continuing to support the NLSP attorneys in the ESU unit by providing direct legal services to help D.C. residents with their critical financial needs.

Update 2: In addition to my experiential learning this summer, I have benefited from supplementary trainings and discussions hosted by Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP).

One of the aspects of the Economic Security Unit (ESU) that I love is that the unit is generalized (rather than specifically only working on public benefits cases for example). Because of this, it has been fantastic to attend trainings put on by the NLSP attorneys, including trainings on state level public benefits, debt collection (pictured below), and criminal record sealing in the District. The trainings provide important foundational knowledge often go back to the presentations from the trainings for reference throughout the days.



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Additionally, it has been great attending trainings not only on what the Economic Security Unit does, but also going to trainings for the other units within NLSP. Those units are housing, family law, and brief services. Clients often have different issues beyond what the ESU can help with, but another NLSP unit can address, so understanding what each unit does is helpful for referring clients to those units.

Lastly, NLSP attorneys and staff host weekly Lunch and Learns for the interns on various topics such as client interviews or vicarious trauma. This week's Lunch and Learn was on jury trials and two of the housing unit attorneys hosted an in-depth discussion on a recent jury trial they won and the strategies and history of the case.

Update 3: During my first semester at law school, I volunteered with NLSP with its Disability Application Project (DAP). As a volunteer, I interviewed D.C. residents and guided them through filling out and submitting Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance forms. While law school's first-year curriculum felt detached from what brought me here, working directly with clients was a constant reminder of the impact I can have as someone's advocate. It was because of my involvement with DAP that I applied for NLSP's summer position.

One of my favorite aspects from my summer internship has been the ample opportunities for direct client communication. In addition to continuing to help clients fill out their SSI and SSDI forms, I have also helped advise clients on what to do when their disability benefits application have been denied.

Further, while Neighborhood Legal Services has a Brief Services Unit that takes charge of most intakes with potential clients, the Economic Security Unit (ESU) hosts clinics in local D.C. libraries both to give general legal information to D.C. residents and to host specific clinics such as the Criminal Record Sealing Clinic and the Disability Application Project. Through these weekly clinics, the ESU team, including myself, speak with many people and either conduct a brief intake to follow up with them later or provide a referral that can address their issues.

Update 4: My time at Neighborhood Legal Services Program this past summer was an invaluable experience. Thankfully, I was able to achieve the goals I set out for myself at the onset of the summer. Here are the goals and how I achieved them:

My first goal was to improve my legal writing skills, so I can persuasively and concisely advocate for clients in litigation. I drafted a motion and other litigious written work in support of Neighborhood Legal Service Program's clients' cases. While my law school's first year writing class introduced me to legal writing, I learn more effectively when doing legal research and writing for real clients. Knowing there are high stakes to my writing makes me more intentional and motivated to produce the best writing possible. Through this externship, I gained a practical written experience that will strengthen my written communication.



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My second goal was to hone my time management skills. During the summer, I worked on various types of cases with different attorneys at the same time. I practiced my time management skills and communication skills by making sure I finished everything on time and prioritizing the most urgent assignments over assignments that were not time sensitive.

Another goal of mine was to strengthen and broaden my connections at this organization. I briefly volunteered with NLSP the fall of my first year at last school. During the summer, I was able to meet and network with many attorneys and staff members. There were also attorneys starting this summer who I had never met, including my supervisor, John Blake. I cultivated my relationships with him and the other Economic Security Unit attorneys and paralegals. Beyond my goal from the onset to build relationships with people, the relationships I made with the attorneys, staff members, and other interns have helped shape and inform the type of person and lawyer I want to be. That is, passionate, caring, empathetic, and driven.

Lastly, I discovered what interests me and what I am less interested in subject matter-wise. I found that I was most interested in criminal record sealing in the District of Columbia. This past summer with NLSP I began drafting motions to seal some criminal records, but the statute is broad and difficult to apply. However, I gained foundational knowledge of the criminal record sealing statute and helped write a motion asking the court to seal a client's criminal record. I hope to build on this knowledge in the future if this is where my career takes me.

It was and is an honor to work with NLSP. I appreciate everyone who helped get me to this internship this past summer, including EJA for helping sponsor me financially.