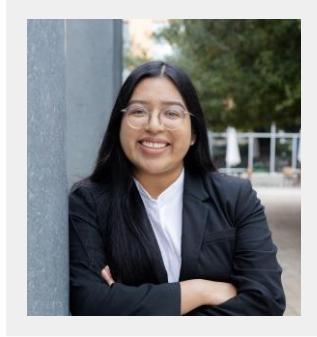




# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

**Organization:** Public Counsel

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### Update 1:

A few weeks ago, I completed my second year at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles. This week, I began working as a Summer Law Clerk with the Immigrants' Rights' Anti-Detention Team at Public Counsel. I will be working on cases of detained and non-detained individuals who are in removal proceedings. I am eager to explore a different part of the immigration field by tackling the detention system. Unfortunately, the immigration detention system is still growing with now over 25,000 individuals detained across the U.S., so there is a lot of legal advocacy needed in this area.

I look forward to working with an incredible team at Public Counsel to aid those harmed by the detention system and other systemic institutions and become a better advocate for the immigrant community.

Equal Justice America is a nonprofit that supports law students who work directly with people experiencing poverty. I am extremely grateful to EJA for their monetary support to pursue an opportunity in the public interest sector.

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### Update 2:

I am now one month into my Summer Law Clerk position with Public Counsel, and it has been an incredible experience thus far. I am greatly inspired by Public Counsel's outstanding team of advocates that seek to provide quality legal services to indigent communities.

For me, there were two main highlights from this past month. For one of our clients, I drafted a motion to place a case on the status docket, which requests the immigration judge to put a case on hold while perhaps waiting for another court or agency to take action related to the case. Throughout the drafting process, I extensively researched this type of motion through immigration-related case law, DHS advisory memos, incredible practice guides from various non-profits, and my team's expertise. I am excited to continue learning and contributing to the team where I also gain valuable legal writing experience and knowledge about the immigration court system.



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Last week, I observed my first merits hearing at one of Los Angeles' immigration courts. The case involved a respondent in removal proceedings, who asserted the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) as a deportation defense. If NACARA relief is granted, it will adjust the beneficiary's status to hold legal permanent residency in the U.S. To everyone's joy, the immigration judge granted NACARA relief to the respondent. As you can imagine, this was a life-changing moment for the respondent and his family that brought tears of joy for many of us. Although I know not every immigration case I encounter will produce a favorable result due to the never-ending systemic barriers, this moment, and any future ones, further solidify why I want to pursue a career in immigration law.

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## **Update 3:**

I can't believe I am more than halfway through my internship with Public Counsel!

Once again, I am awed and inspired by my team at Public Counsel. This past week, due to the amazing advocacy of the team, a respondent was released from detention even though the outcome did not seem favorable. Yet, the incredible effort, preparation, and diligence of the team led to a great outcome and he is now reunited with his family!

Currently, I am researching country conditions and cognizable social groups for Guatemala for an asylum case. Guatemala, like many countries in Latin America, has experienced immense political, economic, and social turmoil since the 1960s. The current ongoing elections in Guatemala, which have been riddled with corruption, have vast consequences for the impoverished communities, many of which are majority indigenous peoples. Many people flee from Guatemala due to increasing gang activity, high extortion rates, and limited economic opportunities. Sadly, once they arrive, they are confronted with systemic barriers within the U.S. asylum process. Many indigenous peoples from Guatemala cannot read or write in Spanish leading to very difficult language barriers that add to the other difficulties of attaining asylum relief in the U.S. Upon researching many of these issues, both in and outside the U.S., I reflect upon how incredibly important it is to approach each case with a holistic and compassionate mindset and method to appropriately advocate for clients.

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## **Update 4:**

I am nearing the end of my summer with Public Counsel! It has been incredible journey thus far with a wonderful community that supports, cares, and fights for our communities within an unjust legal system.

These last few weeks have been a whirlwind for the Anti-Detention team. As mentioned in a prior post, our team's efforts obtained a client's release from an immigration detention center. Unfortunately, the court scheduled a merits hearing for this same client that will occur in a few weeks, which is an unusual occurrence for the removal proceedings timeline. A merits hearing is a court appearance where the DHS counsel and the client present their sides for and against removal. The judge will usually decide that same day on whether the client is granted relief, ordered removed from the U.S., or provides another outcome. As you may guess, a merits hearing requires a lot of preparation from counsel including case briefs, client declarations, direct and cross-examination preparation, evidentiary filings, etc. With less than two weeks to meet the filing deadline for the merits hearing, our team worked tirelessly to file an asylum application, a country conditions report, client declarations, case-related statements, and more. The lack of due process (insufficient time to prepare a case, insufficient notice,



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insufficient access to legal resources, etc.) for these removal proceedings continues to be appalling especially when considering that over 50% of individuals in removal proceedings are self-represented. This is why it is so important to support and expand programs like RepresentLA, a new partnership between non-profit organizations and LA County that aims to “provide legal representation to detained immigrants in the Los Angeles region by operating, to the greatest extent possible, a merits-blind approach.”

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## **Update 5:**

Last week, I completed my internship with the Anti-Detention Team at Public Counsel, so this is my final update.

Working at Public Counsel was a bit of a nostalgic experience since I grew up in Koreatown, a mere few blocks away from the Public Counsel office. I remember sometimes walking by this building and wondering who and what were in the building. Now I know that it is a building filled with fierce, compassionate, and supportive advocates who strive to obtain justice in our systems. The Public Counsel family is a special community that uplifts one another in their journeys, and I am happy to be a part of it. I had various opportunities to meet other attorneys to learn about their journeys, what motivated them to pursue public interest, and what keeps them in this field. This is very important to me because I want to know what is going to keep me in this field for a long time to help our communities.

This summer provided an incredible learning experience where I obtained a more in-depth look at removal defense for detained and non-detained individuals. Fortunately, my team was very open and flexible to helping me achieve my goals. I attended various coalition meetings that addressed important issues about removal defense for clients in LA County. I gained valuable writing experience through drafting several motions to request administrative actions from immigration judges. I also interviewed one of our clients, who was recently released on bond from the immigration detention center after more than half a year of being detained, to complete his asylum application. Lastly, I researched country conditions materials and relevant case law from the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) and 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in support of our client’s fear of return claim. Through all of this, I kept seeing further proof of how archaic and arbitrary our immigration system is to purposefully make it difficult for low-income and BIPOC immigrants to effectively navigate the systems. Change is slowly happening, but it will take many more years of efforts and advocates to create a better system, so I encourage everyone to participate in these efforts by keeping up-to-date on current news, donating funds, contributing pro bono hours, and voting for fair and just immigration policies.

I enjoyed learning so much from this team that I am happy to share I will be returning to the Anti-Detention Team this fall when I begin my 3L year at Loyola Law School, Los Angeles.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for their funding support as this would not have been possible without EJA.