



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:

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Update 1: I came to law school with the intention of continuing to work with immigrants and refugees. As part of learning how to be a better advocate, a goal of mine in law school is to gain as much hands-on experience as possible through seeking out externships, clinics, pro bono opportunities and summer internships in the field of migration. That is why I am thrilled to be spending my summer at Innovation Law Lab, a non-profit based in Portland, Oregon that leverages the work of coders, lawyers, and activists in order to end isolation and exploitation of immigrants and refugees, build permanent pathways to immigrant inclusion, and advance justice. Innovation Law Lab runs various different programs, including a universal representation program for Oregon residents in removal proceedings. Without programs like this, immigrants seeking humanitarian forms of relief would be forced to navigate the complex immigration system entirely on their own. I am excited to learn more about the universal representation program as the summer progresses, and the other amazing projects at Innovation Law Lab. I am very grateful to Equal Justice America for providing funding for my summer internship. The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Innovation Law Lab.

Update 2: Back with another EJA fellow update. It's hard to believe I am already half-way through my internship! I've already been able to work on a diverse range of projects and gain valuable hands-on experience. I've worked on re-filing an affirmative asylum application and am currently working on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) application and my first motion to re-open. In addition to providing direct services to Oregon residents, I've also enjoyed the opportunity to strengthen my research and writing skills by working with the Anticarceral Legal Organization team. Innovation Law Lab works with partners in New Mexico and West Texas to serve detained individuals. Innovation Law Lab specifically focuses on Tarrant County Detention Center (Tarrant) in New Mexico. Various human rights abuses have occurred at Tarrant and the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General even called for ICE to remove everyone from the center due to the terrible conditions. Part of my research has focused on economic alternatives to prison towns and repurposing prisons. You can learn more about Innovation Law Lab's work in Tarrant here:



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<https://lnkd.in/gH8yaVY2>. The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Innovation Law Lab.

Update 3: Back with another EJA fellow update. This week I've continued my research related to prison towns, as well as strategies to hold ICE accountable for conditions at detention centers. Ending detention means ending all forms of detention and it requires educating lawmakers on alternatives to prison towns. During my time at Law Lab, I was able to contribute to a research report aimed at rural communities and lawmakers who want to transition away from reliance on prisons as a means of economic growth and stability. The report illustrates that prisons are not the economic powerhouse proponents claim and draws on examples from around the country on ways to repurpose prisons for community uses. You can read the full report below. Postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Innovation Law Lab.

Update 4: Back with another EJA fellow update. Though I've enjoyed diving into a variety of research projects this summer, I've also had the opportunity to further develop my client skills. Ensuring immigrants have access to legal counsel is extremely important as folks with counsel are much more likely to ask for relief from deportation and win their cases. As immigration violations are civil and not criminal, counsel is not provided, even for those who are detained. This leaves thousands of people who come to the U.S. seeking safety and security without any assistance to navigate a very complex system. It is especially challenging for folks detained in remote locations, who are forced to try and find representation from behind bars. This is why programs like the Equity Corps of Oregon (ECO) that provide access to free counsel are so important.

As part of the ECO program, I've worked on a variety of applications to assist individuals and families in finding permanent status in the U.S. However, not everyone is eligible for permanent relief. I recently assisted a family in completing a Temporary Protected Status (TPS) application. TPS is available for certain designated countries where living conditions are unsafe due to war, natural disasters, or other extraordinary conditions. While TPS serves as an important short-term solution, more permanent measures are needed for TPS holders and other immigrants without long term options. Various bills have been introduced in the past to create a pathway to citizenship for TPS holders, such as the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021. While I was happy to assist a family in completing their TPS application, in the back of my mind I kept focusing on how it is only a temporarily fix. TPS will never lead to permanent status. Though it grants people the ability to work, there is a lack of permanent stability which prevents people from fully living their lives. Creating long-term solutions so newcomers can create a stable life would benefit everyone and we should strive to move our immigration system in that direction. The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Innovation Law Lab. Learn more about ECO here: <https://equitycorps.org/>. Learn more about the American Dream and Promise Act of 2021 here: <https://lnkd.in/g78pZrSv>

Update 5: It's hard to believe this is my final EJA fellow update. I've learned so much during my short ten weeks at Innovation Law Lab and am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with an organization that is



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explicitly abolitionist and works to provide quality representation to individuals and families in immigration proceedings.

While several states now have some sort of legal representation program for individuals in deportation proceedings, we still have a long way to go as a nation before everyone in immigration proceedings has access to counsel. It is frustrating to see the lack of capacity that still exists and the lack of funding towards assisting newcomers. Many more immigration lawyers are needed than are available. This means newcomers often need to wait months until they can meet with an immigration lawyer, causing lots of anxiety and frustration. Many people come to the United States fleeing for their lives, hoping to find safety and security here. What many people don't know is that you only have a year to apply for asylum. It can take months to prepare a strong asylum claim.

While it's true that the immigration court system is overloaded, this is only part of the problem. There are many people who need representation, but due to lack of capacity, non-profit legal services providers are either forced to turn people away, or must create months-long waiting lists, leaving people in limbo, unable to work and fearful for their future. At a family party recently, someone remarked to me that immigration lawyers will be needed once we have more immigration judges. Immigration lawyers are needed now, and more funding needs to be provided to ensure gaps in services can be met.

As I move forward in my career, I look forward to continuing to learn and grow from impacted communities to best support their needs. The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Innovation Law Lab.