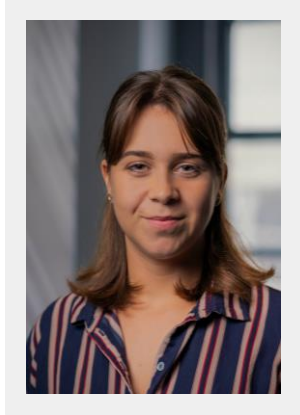




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Philadelphia Legal Assistance

Update 1:

It has been two weeks so far as a legal intern for the Unemployment Compensation Unit in Philadelphia and I have felt I have absorbed so much information in such a small window of time already! I have my first client, who I am working with to get an incorrect denial of unemployment benefits reversed. Such an incorrect ruling could leave her ineligible for future benefits, which could have a detrimental effect on future instances of needed assistance. The importance of unemployment compensation is really shown in the individuals who get laid off unexpectedly and when individuals are forced to quit their job due to external circumstances not in their control. The thing about it is that anyone could find themselves in these circumstances at any moment without much warning and people who are low-wage workers and are minorities feel the repercussions even more so. Everyone should be able to have an income regardless of situations out of their control.

Thus far I have also had the opportunity to witness a few appeal hearings and see firsthand the process I will soon be going through with my clients. The claimants who are appealing benefit denials are often nervous, systemically vulnerable, and trying to navigate a very confusing system. I can see the importance for them to have advocates, like me, in the room with them to help guide them, explain the law and their rights, and to ensure that they are not further taken advantage of.

Update 2:

A month into my internship for the Unemployment Compensation Unit of Philadelphia Legal Assistance and I've just had my first hearing. I represented an individual who had multiple hiccups in his attempts to secure benefits. At the hearing, the employer never showed up which allowed us to remove documents from the record under Hearsay. My client testified to what happened and why his termination was not due to some willful



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conduct but rather some miscommunication. We were ultimately able to get the original determination reversed and my client was found eligible for benefits. This was an extremely rewarding outcome. It was my first hearing, so it was reassuring to know I did a good job. But more importantly, I knew the financial status of my client and knew how much a determination in his favor meant. It was ultimately the difference between having some place to live and not.

I am very proud of the work I have done this far and I'm very excited to continue doing more. I already have my next hearing scheduled and I am also simultaneously working on a brief appeal.

Update 3:

The more time I spend at PLA this summer, the more types of unemployment compensation issues I come across and learn about. I am now working with 3 more new clients in helping achieve their goals. All the cases thus far have been very unique, allowing me to be creative in crafting their arguments and building their case. I thoroughly enjoy getting the opportunity to work one-on-one with my clients. I feel like I am getting a very holistic overview of what being a lawyer is really like. It is a good balance between writing, advocacy, client relations, and fact finding.

I have additionally had the opportunity to work on my writing and research skills as I have just submitted my first appeal brief! The process is quite different than the brief writing we have done in the school setting where you have months to work on it. Here, the turnover time is much quicker. There is definitely a learning curve with applying the things we learn in law school to the practice but its very fun when you finally adjust. Thus far this has been an amazing opportunity and fulfilling endeavor.

Update 4:

I am in the final couple weeks of my internship and by reflecting on what I knew at the start of my internship compared to now, I realize how much I have learned from my time here at PLA. Thus far I have helped 6 clients, one-on-one, obtain unemployment compensation. I have dipped my toes into various legal aspects of UC law and am now on my second appeal brief. The progress I have made is visible not only through my work but through my confidence as well.

Law school teaches us a foundational level of law to help prepare us for our future careers, but it isn't until you are out in the field working with clients and applying laws to real world problems that you fully reach your lawyering potential. Being able to help people in vulnerable and difficult positions in their lives has been beyond fulfilling and has only cemented that public interest is exactly the field I want to go into post-graduation.

I am a bit sad to finish my last couple weeks here at PLA. This is a place that I could potentially see myself at in the future. I am excited however, that after talking to my supervisor, they have agreed to let me continue to take on some cases and continue my work, pro bono, during the fall school year.



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Update 5:

I have just completed my summer internship with Philadelphia Legal Assistance but will be continuing to work with them pro bono throughout the school year! My time at PLA was a truly fulfilling experience. I was able to tip my toes into legal work I am interested in and get a taste of what I imagine my career will be like post-graduation. I always knew going into law school that I wanted to do public interest and this internship has just further cemented that for me. Being able to assist people in some of their most vulnerable moments is truly one of the highlights of the legal field.

Working with the Unemployment Compensation Unit was eye-opening in finding out how continuously backlogged government agencies remain. There were clients who had been waiting years for their benefits or simply for a hearing. It can be incredibly tedious for people to wait for needed benefits and lose hope in a system that they feel doesn't serve them. I was happy to serve people and provide as much assistance and insight as possible. A lot of times clients who should have been eligible for benefits were denied simply due to a mere mistake in filing. A lot of the questions are treated as easily digestible but in reality, for a lot of people, they are very confusing.

Overall, working with PLA was a wonderful experience and I am very grateful to EJA for helping me be able to do the work I have done!