

Dear Dan Ruben,

This summer I was an Equal Justice America Fellow at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)'s Special Litigation Unit (SLU). SLU brings class actions on behalf of low-income New Yorkers in a wide array of issue areas, including immigration, consumer protection, public benefits, education, and housing. I was lucky enough to be involved in several aspects of SLU's work and the experience reaffirmed my commitment to public interest law.

A large part of my summer was spent supporting an active special education case. In *J.S.M., et al. v. N.Y.C. Dep't of Educ. et al.*, NYLAG brought a class action on behalf of New York City schoolchildren deprived of the free appropriate public education to which they are entitled under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This suit was brought against the New York State Education Department and New York City Department of Education, which jointly manage New York City's special education impartial due process system. Our clients allege that Defendants systemically fail to deliver decisions on students' due process complaints within the time periods mandated by the IDEA. I researched and wrote several memos on class certification, the federal enforcement prong of the IDEA, and other issues brought up by the Court. The experience of working on the *J.S.M.* lawsuit brought to life many of the complex litigation topics I have been learning in law school. I came to realize that many of the civil procedure concepts taught during 1L impact people's lives in a meaningful way and it is important that lawyers deeply understand procedure to be effective advocates for their clients.

I also worked on developing the litigation strategy for a class action on behalf of Section 8 housing recipients in the Bronx. Although I came into this project with no background in housing law, I learned the ins and outs of the HUD recertification process and notice requirements. It felt rewarding to dive into an unfamiliar topic and identify potential state and federal claims we could bring on behalf of our clients. And I enjoyed collaborating with the housing attorneys at NYLAG whose work revolves around the intricacies of housing court.

Finally, I also drafted research memos on various immigration issues. A particularly notable project I worked on was assessing the viability of national origin discrimination claims on behalf of migrants seeking shelter in New York City. The experience of working on such a current and pressing issue was exciting and inspired me to enroll in a civil rights litigation course during my 2L year so I can better understand the legal issues in this area.

I had an amazing experience at NYLAG, and I am grateful for EJA's support this summer. I got substantive work that helped me imagine a future public interest career for myself and I am excited to dedicate my life to serving those who are overlooked by our legal system.

Sincerely,  
Shannon Lee  
Stanford Law School  
J.D. Candidate 2025