



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Meenah Keenan

**Law School:** Suffolk University Law School

**Organization:** Harvard Legal Aid Bureau

---

### Update 1:

I am so excited to share that I have been selected as an Equal Justice America Fellow for the summer. EJA helps to support my work as a member of the family team at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau where I am working alongside other summer counsel, and clinical instructors to provide free representation to low-income and marginalized communities in the Greater Boston area.

These first few weeks at HLAB have flown by, and I am so thankful for the incredible learning opportunities I have had so far. Between visits to court, small group discussions on family law topics, and Bureau wide trainings, it has been a busy start. My favorite part of the summer has been working one on one with clients and working with our instructors to help them understand their options and the legal consequences of their cases. Getting to talk one on one with clients has been so rewarding, and I am so grateful to HLAB and EJA for the opportunity to learn.

---

### Update 2:

This summer has been flying by and it is truly amazing to see how much I have learned over the past few weeks at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. I can't believe we are halfway done with the summer!

This past week, the family unit received a request for an urgent Special Immigrant Juvenile Status case for a client whose birthday is quickly approaching. Our instructor inquired if our workload would permit us to take on another matter. While we are all busy working hard on our existing clients' cases, we were able to sit down and come up with a plan to take on this special request together as a team. We quickly began dividing up the workload, contacting the client, scheduling interviews, and coordinating with our amazing in-house interpreters to get the process moving.



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

I am so thankful to work with such an incredible team at HLAB. Not only are we able to learn from each other every day, but the opportunity to work together on cases has been truly the best experience.

---

## **Update 3:**

These past couple weeks, I have been working closely with a client who has one of the more complex cases in my caseload. She has a case both in the family court and a case in housing. Dealing with a case like this has made me reflect on how important it is to really understand the needs and goals of clients while working on a case. Although I do not represent her in the housing action, I have learned the importance of looking at the client, and their specific circumstances to understand how to best move forward on their case.

In addressing my client and her specific needs, I have worked not only with my co-counsel and clinical instructor within the family department, but also with other students and instructors within the housing department at the **Harvard Legal Aid Bureau**. One of my favorite parts of working at the Bureau this summer has been the opportunity to work as a team and learn from each other as we help our clients meet their goals.

---

## **Update 4:**

Last week, I had the opportunity to appear in court, for the first time, on behalf of a client. This case was one that came to the Bureau as an urgent request, and our team worked together to prepare all the necessary documents for court. After working together with two of my fellow Family-Unit student counsel, our Clinical Instructor, interpreters, and attorneys at the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Clinic, the time had come to present our case in court. I was honored to be nominated by my fellow student attorneys to stand with our client that day, along with my incredibly supportive supervising attorney.

As my colleagues had already made their first appearances in court, I relied on them heavily in preparing for the hearing. The team was incredibly supportive and encouraged me every step of the way. I'll be honest and say I felt nervous on the walk over to the courthouse, but seeing the client arrive turned my nerves into excitement. The hearing was quick, and after just a couple of minutes in front of the judge we walked out with the necessary paperwork and wished the client well. Leaving the courthouse with a smile from the client and coming back to the office to congratulations from the team topped off a successful day as a Student Attorney.

---

## **Update 5:**

I truly cannot believe that the summer has come to an end. As I reflect on the past twelve weeks and my time at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, I have thought a lot about what I have learned from this experience. Going into my summer, I expected to get practical and court experience, however my time at the Bureau gave me much more to be thankful for. During my summer in Cambridge, I was able to gain valuable skills and training in working with clients and being able to present in front of the court. Additionally, I learned a lot about the importance of working with a team to address a client's needs.



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Working with clients in the family unit gave me a unique opportunity to really dive into a client's life, and I gained a deep understanding of the issues they were facing both in and out of court. I learned that not only is it important to understand a client's legal goals and needs, but I gained an appreciation for understanding their personal needs as well. For example, a client dealing with a divorce case may have different needs when they are experiencing housing instability. Additionally, understanding a client's immigration status, or ability to access resources, could greatly impact the strategy in a case.

Going into law school, I knew I wanted to do public interest work, and I knew that part of this work would focus on not only a client's legal needs, but also understanding their personal circumstances, life experiences, and ability to access resources. This was confirmed during my time at the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. Understanding a client's life circumstances was central to addressing their needs in their family cases.

I am so thankful for the experiences and knowledge I have gained over the last twelve weeks. I want to thank Equal Justice America for supporting me, and many other law students, in this type of work. I am thankful to Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, including the clinical instructors, administrative staff, interpreters, and social work staff for all of the hard work they do to support our work with clients. Finally, I want to thank my fellow Summer Counsel for an incredible summer. Coming from all across the country, we gathered in Cambridge, learned from each other, and grew together. I am so excited to see where you all go!