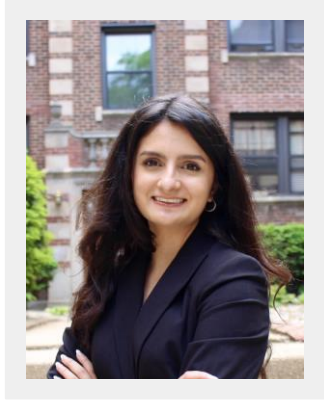




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Julia Linares

Law School: University of Chicago

Organization: Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1:

I am honored to announce that I am a recipient of Equal Justice America's summer stipend. As such, I will be sharing my summer interning at Legal Aid Chicago. I started my summer with the Public Benefits Practice Group two weeks ago. I have never worked in public benefits law. I chose the group to develop a more holistic understanding of programs to improve my legal aid advocacy.

My first weeks have been spent digesting tons of new information. I have learned about health care, social security, food assistance, and cash assistance. I feel grateful to have taken administrative law this past school year, as I spend almost every day knee-deep in it. I have enjoyed the creativity embodied by the attorneys in my practice group and hope that I, too, one day can master such an art.

I look forward to working on a social security case from start to finish. From record requests to review of agency policy manuals, I have yet to have a slow day, though I am uncertain if such is possible in legal aid. Above all, I cannot wait to continue zealous advocacy for my clients.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for helping make this possible.

Update 2:

Here's my second EJA update! A month down! Little over a month remaining in my summer internship with Legal Aid Chicago. This past week, I was fortunate to volunteer at one of our community clinics! I fully expected to be taking notes and acting as administrative support, but to my surprise, I was tasked with helping to intake clients. And I was able to contribute knowledge from my prior legal experiences! I have spent countless hours behind a computer screen helping folks, but this was one of the few times I have engaged face-to-face with



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clients.

While at the clinic, I helped witness power of attorney documents and transfer on death instruments. Some clients walked out of the clinic with an entire estate plan. I helped advise on a private landlord eviction, a project-based Section 8 eviction, and a rent-to-own contract gone wrong. As always, all our services were free of charge.

After a hard day, the experience revived my soul and genuinely made my month. It reaffirmed that I am on the right path. It was one of those days that I hope never forget.

Community clinics meet clients where they are. They provide clients with a face for the advocates that frequently now only operate behind a phone or a computer screen. They make legal aid advocacy all the more “real”.

I cannot wait until next month when I can attend another community clinic. If you are an attorney and interested in volunteering, please check out the link below!

Update 3:

This summer is flying by! Since my last update, I have been assisting individuals with their Social Security benefits issues.

Last week, I compiled supporting evidence and assisted with drafting the waiver and accompanying brief for an SSA overpayment waiver. An SSA overpayment can occur when a benefit amount is improperly calculated. This process can prove extremely complex, especially when multiple claimants receiving different benefits are involved.

For individuals that receive all of their income through SS benefits, any reduction in their payments can devastate their finances. It can force households into debt and foreclose their ability to meet their basic needs.

A waiver explains that a claimant cannot repay the overpayment because doing so would harm their well being because all of their current income goes to paying for life essentials. For more information on requesting an SSA overpayment waiver, see <https://lnkd.in/gJrmdui>

Additionally, last week I submitted my representative brief in a Continuing Disability Review. In it, I furthered both procedural and substantive arguments reflecting over a month of legal and medical analysis. I made sure to document my submission day as the brief reflects my first independent filing.

Through the process, I gained confidence in my construction of legal arguments. I learned strategies for



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preserving arguments for potential future proceedings. Most importantly, I developed a better understanding of the repeated trauma exposure our clients face when involved in these processes. And I observed legal advocates applying effective techniques to minimize this pain.

I look forward to continuing my growth over my final month!

Update 4:

Less than two weeks left in my summer internship! Since my last update, I have participated in two community events and a successful administrative hearing.

Every month, our Veterans' Rights Project staffs a legal clinic at the Community Resource & Referral Center. This month, I was fortunate enough to attend. There, I discovered a whole new legal world - that of Veterans' Benefits.

My partner is a veteran, and I have always just assumed that his service would forever render him certain benefits. At this clinic, I realized both my naivety and privilege in that assumption.

Some veterans served our country and still ended up with what is known as "bad paper". Bad paper, or a discharge less than "Honorable", results in individuals being locked out of benefits that may have attracted them to serve in the first place (if they were not drafted).

Unsurprisingly, some individuals received these types of discharges on account of discrimination based on race and sexual identity. Now, those veterans find themselves locked out of benefits that many need to meet basic necessities. Our Veterans' Rights Project assists with undoing these injustices.

In addition to learning from my colleagues, I led an intake interview with a veteran facing eviction. I applied my prior housing law experiences and walked the client through what he could expect in the eviction process. My team worked on connecting the client with our Housing Practice Group for potential representation.

At a community clinic in Austin, we met with over thirty clients all facing a wide array of legal issues. I talked with folks facing eviction, handling unemployment benefit problems, and seeking license reinstatement. Interacting with clients face-to-face is a welcomed break from behind a computer screen. I look forward to continuing my time at the community clinics during the school year.

Update 5:

When I look back over my legal career, I believe that this summer will stand out as the point in time when everything clicked. After two years of law school, I finally felt like I gained my sea legs. And Equal Justice America and Legal Aid Chicago allowed me to use them.



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This summer, I interned with the Public Benefits Practice Group at Legal Aid Chicago. For the first time, I held a legal position with an in-person component. As a young professional, this experience proved invaluable and elevated my networking skills. Plus, it didn't hurt that everyone I met this summer at Legal Aid Chicago was wonderful.

Most of my time consisted of working on a Social Security Continuing Disability Review case from almost start to finish. My administrative law course came to life this summer. In preparing to help my client keep their Social Security disability benefits, I had to learn an entirely new regulatory framework. And then needed to build a successful case for the administrative law judge. This involved requesting and reviewing thousands of pages of medical records. I gained experience in discussing sensitive information with my client and practiced having hard discussions.

As I employed my legal skills, my greatest challenge this summer was learning to adjust to the responsibility that comes with representation. As my most significant level of representation, I struggled with fear about losing the case and the subsequent repeal of all of my client's income. Thankfully, I had great supervising staff that helped me realize the value I can add as a representative and the reality that the responsibility that comes with a lawyer never goes away. And the fear may not either. Instead, I realized I'd rather use my feelings to push my arguments and preparation than let it slow me down.

I don't know if I will ever stop worrying about the consequences of losing cases. This summer none of my fears came true - my client won his case with a judgment on the record.

I think that my concerns may indicate the genuine care I have for my clients and the reason that I should be pursuing a public interest career in the first place. In a lot of ways, I hope I never lose sight of the gravity of these legal decisions in my clients' lives.

Special thanks to Legal Aid Chicago, Equal Justice America, and University of Chicago Law School for making this summer possible.