



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** UChicago Immigrants' Rights

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**Update 1:** I am honored to announce that I am a recipient of Equal Justice America's summer fellowship, and as a result, I will be sharing my experiences during my internship at the University of Chicago Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic.

I am now mid-way through my second week, which felt like the perfect time for my first EJA Fellow Update! The clinic handles a wide variety of needs and cases for our immigrant clients, including everything from asylum applications to civil lawsuits in response to improper treatment by law enforcement while here in America. These first two weeks, I have been occupied drafting an opposition to a motion to dismiss one of our civil cases. It has been extremely rewarding to see the skills I developed in my 1L year, especially in Legal Research and Writing, being applied to real-world legal needs as I craft a brief for our client. In the background, I have been getting up to date on the other cases the clinic has that I will be involved with this summer, as well as interacting with other students and attorneys across the wide range of clinics hosted at UChicago.

Next week, I will get the opportunity to assist with our public clinic, providing critical legal services to immigrants in the greater Chicago area. I will be sure to share my experience in the next Fellow Update!

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**Update 2:** I am in the middle of my fourth week at the University of Chicago Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic, and excited to share another EJA Fellow Update. Last week, I had the opportunity to host our partnership clinic, engaging with members of the community to work through asylum and other immigration applications. Doing work like this quickly revealed to me how overly complicated and inequitable this process can be, especially for those that may not be able to afford legal help or even simple translation services. While our clinic and others attempt to facilitate this process for members of the community, there are undoubtedly people slipping through the cracks and unable to successfully navigate the immigration process due to its inaccessibility.



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The unfair treatment of people trying to immigrate to the U.S. is also apparent in our other cases, where we are working through civil claims for immigrants who have been mistreated by law enforcement even after achieving legal residency. But, in the midst of a system that can be very discouraging, the people involved continue to both inspire and remind me why immigration is so vital to American culture and identity. The perseverance and dedication of my clients as they continue to fight for both themselves and their families, even in the face of past application failures or injustices, continue to show why work like this is essential.

Please stay tuned for more summer updates!

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**Update 3:** Time for another EJA Fellow Update! This week, I have been working through an asylum application for a client who is seeking refuge for her and her family from violence in their home country. The U.S. asylum program offers an alternative to traditional residency and citizenship processes, in an attempt to make immigration more accessible to those in urgent need of relocation to the United States. While the asylum program has its benefits, it, like most immigration processes, is full of complexities and specific criteria that can make it inaccessible or difficult to succeed with an application. Many of the forms and questions would be extremely difficult to complete without legal help, which can be logistically and financially prohibitive.

The process involves an extensive interview with the client, as we seek to tell their story about why the conditions in their home country pose a danger if they were deported and forced to return to their native country. Applicants must fit into very specific boxes, related to their identity and the alleged source of danger, which while helpful and important for those who meet the specifications, nonetheless leaves many people in real danger without viable options.

I am excited to finish and file this application next week, to hopefully help this family stay here where they belong.

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**Update 4:** Excited to share more of my clinic work with this next EJA Fellow Update!

The past few weeks have been busy, as the team has been working to close cases in preparation for the break between summer and fall clinic staff. I had the opportunity to send in my first formal asylum application, truly beginning the process for our client to hopefully achieve permanent residency here in the States. Although much of the process has become virtual, I still had the opportunity to meet my client and their family in person and see exactly what we have been working so hard to achieve.

I was also able to run our public-facing clinic again. Through this work, I had another first-hand encounter with the tensions that run through our justice system for immigrants. Immigrants caught up in the justice system often find themselves facing unknown or unexpected deportation proceedings, as a result of prior plea deals that



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were unclear in their immigration consequences. Part of the work we do is trying to reverse these minor convictions that can result in the total upending of a client's life, for a mistake that may be years old. For many, these prior proceedings were rushed, or in a language they didn't understand, leading to plea decisions that would not have happened given sufficient time or legal resources.

Ensuring immigrants, like all Americans, are treated fairly within the justice system is an ideal often overlooked or ignored, but is as important as ever.

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**Update 5:** As my summer internship has come to an end, I have had a chance to reflect on my experiences through the University of Chicago Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic and share my final EJA Fellow Update!

This summer experience challenged not only my legal skills and knowledge, but also my perceptions and understandings of the justice system. As I and fellow law students continue to learn more about the complexities and inner-workings of the legal system, it can be easy to forget that many people face this institution as a black box. At some of the worst or most challenging times of their life, people are often faced with a system that if not purposefully confusing, at least appears to be so.

My work with the Immigrants' Rights Clinic drove this point home clearly. Whether it was briefing civil claims, filing asylum applications, or answering general citizenship questions at our weekly clinic, I saw how difficult it can be for any applicant, from any background, to navigate the system we have created to come and stay here in this country legally. It was also a privilege to see, in the midst of this often unfair and discouraging system, people with the passion and determination to fight through it with their families to achieve a better, safer life. Even in the middle of these challenges, through these people and this clinic, I was able to find an appreciation for the good side of the law, and the people who work every day to make these immigration applications possible and successful. The work of my clinic, and those like it, are an essential resource to would-be Americans all over the country.

This summer has underscored for me why public interest law students are and will continue to be vital to achieving widespread justice in the country. And I am extremely grateful for the support of Equal Justice America in making opportunities like this accessible.