



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Philadelphia Legal Assistance Medical Legal Community Partnership

Update 1: Two weeks ago, I started my 1L summer internship at Philadelphia Legal Assistance's Medical Legal Community Partnership. Because the MLCP is a generalist practice and attempts to help patients at our health care partners with all of their diverse legal needs, I've undergone detailed training provided by PLA staff and acquired useful knowledge across various areas of public benefits, family, tax, and housing law. Topics covered have included Medicaid, Domestic Relations Proceedings, Landlord-Tenant, and Mortgage/Property Tax Foreclosure. It was interesting to learn about the various laws and assistance programs protecting low-income Philadelphians. I've also been shadowing at MLCP sites, observing how my teammates interact with clients and medical professionals to ensure patients access the legal services they need. I also presented my first case note during our weekly "Group Soup" meeting. I'm excited to begin taking on my own clients and bringing back what I learn this summer to the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

Update 2: Over the past two weeks, I have continued to settle in at the Philadelphia Legal Assistance's Medical Legal Community Partnership. I have begun to regularly work at the MLCP location at Temple Liberty Square in North Philly and Public Health Centers 3 and 4 in West Philly. I have also started working on my own cases in close collaboration with MLCP attorneys. My caseload now includes a child SSI case, 2 public benefits cases, and a public utilities case. In one of those cases, I was able to help a client receive a tablet and high-speed internet to replace his broken computer through the American Connectivity Program. I am also learning a lot about how to communicate effectively with clients, especially on the phone, and how to take case notes in our Legal Server.

Last Friday, I had the amazing opportunity to attend Community Legal Services's annual summer intern community bus tour. Through the tour, I got to visit Project HOME, Share Food Program, Las Parcelas Community Garden, Open Kitchen Sculpture Garden, and Asian Americans United. At Project HOME I heard an incredibly moving speech by one of their supportive housing residents. His remarks about his journey from homelessness to housing reminded me of why I had been drawn to civil legal aid. The sense of community



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care I felt at all the locations also reaffirmed why I had chosen to come and live in Philly, which truly lives up to its “Brotherly Love” reputation.

Update 3: Like the July weather, things at Philadelphia Legal Assistance Medical Legal Community Partnership have been heating up. So far, I have helped over a dozen clients with various legal issues. Just today, I was able to help set two clients up to reduce their utility debt significantly. I also helped a client apply for an Owner Occupied Payment Agreement (OOPA; the most fun acronym in Philly law) to reduce their property tax payments to ZERO. I've also taken up the challenge of helping connect more patients with our legal services by creating flyers in Bengali and French and creating a plan to hand them out in the lobby for a few hours a week. I'm looking forward to finishing out the rest of my summer then hitting the books again University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

Update 4: I've been chugging along here at Philadelphia Legal Assistance Medical Legal Community Partnership. I've seen several new referrals and continue to work on my existing caseload. Last week, I was able to close 6 cases for 4 clients. I also helped a client of mine appeal a SNAP denial and am working on a brief to support a client in an SSI appeal. I've also gained a new appreciation for the importance of utility law. When the weather gets as hot as it has been in Philly recently, having your electricity shut off is tantamount to becoming homeless. Civil legal aid is crucial to help advocate with utility companies and apply for available assistance programs.

While we don't do our work for the thanks, it is always nice to hear that clients appreciate our advocacy. Just today I ran into a client that expressed a great deal of gratitude for advocating with the manager of her housing complex about a habitability issue.

My internship may be wrapping up this week, but I look forward to continuing to volunteer during my 2L year at University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

Update 5: During my time at the Philadelphia Legal Assistance's Medical Legal Community Partnership in North and West Philadelphia, I had the remarkable opportunity to assist 21 patients with various legal needs. This experience has been both enriching and eye-opening, allowing me to apply my legal knowledge in the service of helping low-income Philadelphians.

One memorable case involved an elderly couple burdened by nearly \$20,000 in debt encompassing utility bills, property taxes, and medical expenses. While they were not facing active collection, that could change at any minute. Through the various trainings PLA offered its interns, I was able to quickly identify debt-reduction programs offered by the city, state, and utility companies that could help them reduce their debt. I helped them apply for these various programs, immediately cutting down their debt by \$7,000 and putting them on a path to reduce their debt to \$0.



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I also helped 2 clients faced imminent utility shut offs, an urgent crisis. I diligently and patiently guided them through the process of getting their service restored and helped them enroll in programs to prevent future shut-offs. The sense of relief and gratitude they expressed reminded me of the vital role legal aid plays in preserving the dignity and well-being of individuals.

My dedication to serving my clients motivated me to communicate in spite of language barriers. Using my rudimentary understanding of Spanish grammar to enhance outputs from translation software allowed me to bridge the gap and communicate over texts. Similarly, I translated an informational flyer into French, underscoring the significance of accessibility in making legal information available to diverse communities.

At the MLCP, I also had the opportunity to view proceedings in the Fair Housing Commission and Landlord-Tenant Court. These experiences offered me a firsthand understanding of the legal intricacies involved in housing disputes. Witnessing tenants come before these bodies without legal representation was a stark reminder of the access to justice crisis.

As I reflect on this experience, I am filled with a deep sense of purpose and gratitude. Each case, each interaction, and each victory remind me that the pursuit of justice is a worthwhile endeavor. I look forward to continuing to work with the MLCP this fall when I return to the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School. Thank you to Equal Justice America for helping fund this experience. Please support EJA's mission to support new civil legal aid lawyers. There is an access to justice crisis in the United States and we need more folks like those that EJA supports!