



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Leah Bishop

Law School: UCLA School of Law

Organization: Los Angeles LGBT Center

Update 1: I am four weeks into my summer internship with the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Immigration Law Project, and I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for helping make this experience possible. The LA LGBT Center is a non-profit that serves the holistic needs of Los Angeles' LGBTQIA+ community. The Immigration Law Project provides free representation to LGBTQIA+ immigrants in removal proceedings and before USCIS. Because the LGBTQIA+ community is often targeted for hate-motivated violence and abuse, both abroad and in the United States, the Immigration Law Project primarily assists noncitizens in applying for survivor-based relief such as asylum, U visas—a form of relief for survivors of crimes in the United States—and VAWA—a form of relief for survivors of domestic violence. Assisting in this work has been very meaningful.

As a queer woman, working in a space that centers queer people has been a breath of fresh air. I am grateful to share a foundational identity with many of the people I work with, while using my relative privilege within the LGBTQIA+ community to support others who experience more marginalization.

Update 2: My internship with the LA LGBT Center continues to be an incredible experience. The past couple of weeks have been very busy. I've been assigned new cases, met new clients, conducted research, and helped prepare applications. Now that the summer is more than halfway over, I'm eager to finalize applications so that we can file them before I leave.

Throughout my summer, I have been very appreciative of the safe space that the LGBT Center creates for clients. In most spaces, many queer people must constantly assess whether it is safe to be open about their identities. The fact that clients are safe here is implicit in the LGBT Center's name. This fact is reiterated in the way that the office is decorated, the people who work here, and the language that staff use. This environment has created a notable difference in my relationships with clients, with whom I feel I can develop mutual trust



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

and respect very quickly. This experience has made me think a lot about how I can change the spaces in which I work—even if they are not queer organizations—in order to signal to clients that they are safe with me.

Update 3: With only a few weeks left in my summer internship, I am trying hard to complete as much work as possible before I leave the LGBT Center. I feel lucky to have been assigned a number of projects that are pushing me to grow as an advocate—improving my legal research and writing skills, introducing me to forms of relief and complex issues I have not worked on before, and learning to balance a caseload rather than working on one case at a time. This week, I have been studying bars to asylum protection and strategies for obtaining fear-based immigration relief despite statutory ineligibility for asylum. I continue to be grateful to EJA for making my work this summer possible.

Update 4: This is the last week of my internship with the Los Angeles LGBT Center. One of the projects I am working to wrap up is an application for a VAWA self-petitioner. VAWA is a protection for survivors of domestic violence inflicted by a US citizen or lawful permanent resident. VAWA allows survivors to “self-petition” for a green card rather than being forced to rely on their abusive partner for immigration status.

Working on this case, I have been reflecting on how little domestic violence is discussed in the context of queer relationships. At the beginning of my internship, the Center provided a training on working with DV survivors. In my experience, most conversation or education about domestic violence relies on a heteronormative, patriarchal conception of relationships. Though I’ve attended domestic violence trainings in the past, this is the only training that I’ve ever attended that discussed queer people. Beyond that, this training taught me about the unique ways that abusers can exploit power in a queer relationship and the unique barriers that queer survivors face when seeking help. The LGBT Center’s understanding of, education about, and advocacy against domestic violence in queer relationships makes me extremely grateful that the Center exists.

Update 5: Now that my internship with the Los Angeles LGBT Center has concluded, I have been reflecting on my experience this summer. Working for the Center’s Immigration Law Project allowed me to grow as a future legal practitioner, an advocate for queer people, and an ally. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for helping to support my legal education and my career in legal aid.

The substantive work I did this summer provided me with a broad education on various forms of immigration options for noncitizens, including relief from removal and affirmative applications for legal status. I went to law school with the intention of becoming a better immigration advocate. I have years of experience in removal defense. Though I felt knowledgeable about asylum law, I had relatively little experience with any other type of immigration law. At the Center, I worked on cases involving many different types of immigration relief, including U visas, T visas, VAWA petitions, asylum adjustment of status, and withholding of removal. I also conducted intakes involving complicated immigration situations and did research on complex issues that our



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

clients faced. I learned about other topics, including access to public benefits for noncitizens, the new deferred action program for workers involved in labor disputes, and community resources available for clients.

The internship's structure also worked very well for where I'm at in my legal education. My supervisor was very thoughtful about the cases and tasks she assigned to me. She always wanted to hear what topics I was interested in learning about and what I felt I needed to grow as a practitioner. She had me working directly with clients from day one, and she assigned me a few cases where I was the client's primary contact and advocate, at least for the summer. She trusted my judgment on cases but was always ready and available to provide feedback on different ways I could approach challenges.

Finally, this summer made me reflect on the role of identity in advocacy. I think a lot about my identity as a white person and my role as an ally in the fight for immigrant rights. This summer, I have noticed how important it feels to share a queer identity with many of my clients. This is something I will continue to reflect on as I think about my career, allyship, and advocacy.