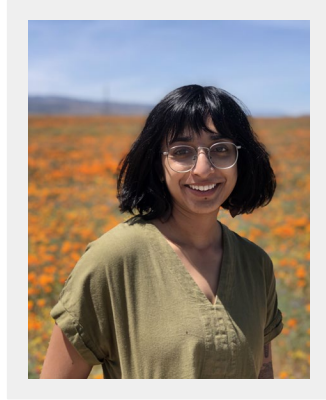




# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Sanjana Lakshmi

**Law School:** UCLA

**Organization:** Public Counsel

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### Update 1:

This summer, I'm fortunate and excited to receive a summer fellowship from Equal Justice America to support my work at Public Counsel in Los Angeles. I am working with Public Counsel's Children's Rights Program, specifically the Transition Age Youth (TAY) project. The TAY team supports system-impacted youth aged 16-24 with holistic legal services, from housing advocacy to family law to public benefits to traffic tickets—and more. The TAY team's work hopes to address collateral consequences of system involvement in a holistic way. I worked with foster youth last summer at the Children's Law Center, and am excited to continue working with a client base that I care deeply about and learn more about how the law can be used to support youth.

So far this summer, I have already gained a lot of knowledge on the types of legal issues that system-involved youth face when they are aging out of foster care or the juvenile justice system. I've been able to shadow members of my team on intakes, sit in on litigation meetings and client meetings, and assist in casework to support our clients in some of the toughest moments of their lives. I am excited to gain more responsibility over the next few weeks in supporting our clients and advocating for youth. The TAY team's work helps to remove barriers to access to legal services for a particularly vulnerable population, and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with this caring team and our amazing client base.

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### Update 2:



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My summer with Public Counsel's TAY team is already almost halfway over. I'm almost ending my fifth week here! Over the past few weeks, I've had the opportunity to get more involved in the TAY team's work. I've assisted in some research projects around questions of child support law and restraining orders, I've shadowed more intakes, and assisted with casework. The TAY team includes me in all their team meetings and as many client meetings and emails as possible so that I'm able to see the workings of a case from the inside out. I've also been able to draft emails with answers to questions for some of our clients.

Public Counsel and the TAY team has also provided me with many opportunities to participate in trainings to learn more about legal aid in general, and supporting youth through the law in particular. I've attended useful trainings on topics like extended foster care, name and gender changes for trans youth, and what civil legal aid looks like for system-impacted youth. The work that the TAY team does is so important, and the youth that I've been able to sit in on meetings with and learn about are incredibly strong people going through really tough moments in their lives. This experience so far has already allowed me to learn a lot more about the needs of a client base that I know I'm interested in working with. I'm excited for the rest of the summer to have more opportunities to support our clients.

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### **Update 3:**

I can't believe there are only a few more weeks left of my summer internship with Public Counsel's TAY Team. I've begun assisting the litigation team with records review for one of our clients. This process has helped me understand more about what kind of work goes into preparing for litigation and what information is necessary, and it's also helped me understand more about the different struggles and legal problems that many of our clients face. I'm constantly amazed by the strength and resilience of the youth that we work with as they deal with hurdles that shouldn't be placed in front of them over and over again. I've also delved deeper into some research questions for my team. I was able to help draft an email to one of our clients answering the questions he had about establishing parentage, and this also allowed me to learn more about the process for going about establishing parentage in California and how this process varies state by state.

I'm also continuing to work on a research project about the dependency court's authority over issuing restraining orders on behalf of a child under its care, which has been an interesting niche question that has a lot of practical applicability for a lot of our clients. I'm grateful to continue to work on these substantive issues and assist the TAY team at Public Counsel on behalf of our clients. This summer has been an excellent continuation of my work last summer at the Children's Law Center, as many Public Counsel TAY clients are current or former CLC clients. This summer has helped me understand a lot more about how civil legal aid can be used to assist the client base that I worked with last summer and about the many different ways that the law intersects in the lives of youth. I'm excited to finish out the summer with this amazing team and our amazing clients.

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### **Update 4:**



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I can't believe that my summer with Public Counsel is almost over. I've gained a lot more responsibility in the past few weeks and the experience has been amazing -- I've worked on some important research projects and I was able to go to Stanley Mosk for a status conference for one of our client's cases that I've been helping with. Being able to watch the status conference was a great way for me to learn more about what civil legal aid in California looks like in practice. I've only ever worked in criminal law and dependency in California, so I'm grateful that I've had the opportunity to explore this different aspect of California law this summer and see it in practice at the courthouse.

My research projects over the past few weeks have also taught me a lot more about what litigation looks like at Public Counsel and about the issues that affect transition age youth. I've also been able to shadow more intakes and am starting to perform intakes on my own, which is helping me hone my skills when it comes to interacting with youth clients. Finally, I'm working on drafting a motion to seal for one of our clients, through which I'm learning a lot about how restraining orders, juvenile records, and public records all interact. This is also helping me work on my legal research and writing skills. I'm so sad that this summer is almost over, but I am grateful for everything I've learned and the people I've met!

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## Update 5:

My summer with Public Counsel's TAY team is over, and I can confidently say that I learned a lot and am extremely grateful for my time there. My last few weeks at Public Counsel were eventful. I was finally able to start doing intakes on my own, and my last week, our intake coordinator was out, so I was in charge of all intakes. This experience really helped me with my client skills and helped me identify any differences there were in talking to our particular client base, rather than adults. I was able to assist with an emergency housing/eviction-related intake, which was a very meaningful experience. I was honored to work as part of the team enough to be able to assist with this emergency intake, as our client had very little time to get the assistance that they needed.

In addition, I completed a motion to seal draft for the TAY team during this week as well. This assignment helped me hone my legal research and writing skills; I researched and incorporated some case law into this motion and learned about how access to juvenile records works, how restraining orders work, and the interaction between different courts -- juvenile court and family court. This provided me with a larger-scale understanding of the way that different legal issues come into play with one another so often. This interaction was especially evident this summer, as the TAY team assisted foster youth with a wide variety of civil legal issues that affect them.

Overall, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to work with such a wonderful team and an incredible client base. The TAY team made a real effort to include me in all aspects of their work—from initial intakes and



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client meetings to litigation preparation to research and writing. I felt valued by the team and I'm amazed by the strength and resilience of our client base. I think this summer provided me with a very useful understanding of civil legal aid for a client base I'm really interested in working with, whether it's through dependency, delinquency, or civil legal aid like this. And of course, I am grateful to EJA for supporting this externship with the stipend. I'm excited to take what I have learned this summer into my future career.