



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Andrew Allard

**Law School:** University of Virginia School of Law

**Organization:** New Hampshire Legal Assistance

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**Update 1:** This summer, I am back in my home state of New Hampshire to advocate for fellow Granite Staters. I am thrilled to be working as an intern at New Hampshire Legal Assistance and to have the support of Equal Justice America as an EJA Summer Fellow.

I count myself among the many who are proud to call New Hampshire home. But too many in the state are at risk of losing their homes. With a statewide rental vacancy rate well under 1%, the services that NHLA provides to clients facing homelessness are critical. If our clients are evicted, there is almost literally nowhere to go. Over the past two weeks, I have had the pleasure of working alongside NHLA's housing attorneys. I am grateful to be learning from such supportive colleagues, and I look forward to applying what I've learned to help our clients remain in their homes.

Equal Justice America is a non-profit organization and a national leader in providing opportunities for law students to work with organizations that deliver civil legal services to those most in need. Through its work, EJA enables future lawyers to meet the urgent need for pro bono assistance for our most vulnerable citizens.

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**Update 2:** In a week with legal news repeatedly taking up the headlines, it's easy to get discouraged and lose sight of what you're fighting for. Working as a young lawyer, justice often feels remote, and the path to it seems laden with obstacles. And let's face it—going up against real estate companies and commercial landlords with aggressive legal teams is a daunting task. For our clients, faced with the risk of homelessness and financial ruin if they lose, it is all the more frightening. That makes every victory, even the small ones, all the more meaningful. In recent weeks, I've been lucky to help deliver some of those victories. Working with New Hampshire Legal Assistance attorneys at an eviction clinic in Nashua, we secured deals to keep our clients housed. And I helped deliver a big win for housing clients in my first ever motion in New Hampshire superior court.

Many of these cases will continue long after my summer at NHLA is over. But each motion counts and can



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

mean the difference between safety and destitution for our clients. A small win today means waking up in your own home tomorrow.

With such high stakes, I've got to keep up the fight.

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## **Update 3:**

I am now a little more than halfway through my ten-week internship at New Hampshire Legal Assistance. With just three weeks left before I have to say goodbye to NH and return to Charlottesville, I'll take a brief moment to offer some reflections.

1. Our clients are very kind. Despite being faced with situations that are frightening and unfair, every client I have worked with has been friendly and very appreciative of the work we are doing for them.
2. The troubles don't stop. While we are fortunate that New Hampshire law provides many tools to help clients facing homelessness, the work of keeping our clients housed is a constant uphill battle. No sooner than we have closed a housing case, five more have come in for case review. And with limited resources, it is a sad reality that we cannot help everyone.
3. The work that NHLA attorneys do gives meaning to equal justice. New Hampshire's Bill of Rights contains a provision recognizing the right of all citizens "to obtain right and justice freely, without being obliged to purchase it." Despite this, New Hampshire, like most states, recognizes only a narrow right to counsel in civil cases. As a result, many are denied justice precisely because they are unable to purchase it.
4. Indifference is a scary thing. While the right to counsel in the United States is generally limited to criminal cases, any lawyer knows the havoc that a civil suit can wreak on a person's life. Without a civil right to counsel, poor folks facing unjust evictions, housing discrimination, and predatory business practices are left out to dry. I am proud to offer what help I can, but I shudder to think of what becomes of those we cannot help.

That's all for now. Three more weeks to go. Let's make them count.

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## **Update 4:**

With just another week left in my summer internship, this will be my second-to-last EJA update. A co-worker recently asked me how I hoped to use what I've learned this summer in my future career. I thought it might be helpful to share my response for those interested in an internship at New Hampshire Legal Assistance or in legal aid generally.

The most rewarding aspect of this job has been the direct interactions I've had and relationships I've developed with my clients. Because NHLA is a small organization serving a large area, there's no busy work to be heard of. Interns are asked to get closely involved in the cases they work on. So, I've not only learned client management and communication skills, but I've also had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know our clients.

One client with whom I have worked closely warmly reassured me that he would still like me, even if I didn't win his case. Another expressed his hope that I would attend a meeting with his landlord, given my familiarity



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

with his case. I was sad to have to tell him I'd likely finish my internship before then.

If you enjoy personal interactions, seeing the impact of your work, and are looking to get a leg up on developing client management skills, legal aid is a great place to start.

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## **Update 5:**

I wrapped up my internship at New Hampshire Legal Assistance a couple weeks ago and have had some time to reflect on this summer. Now comes the bittersweet task of sharing my final EJA Fellow Update.

I was first introduced to the legal aid world as a volunteer at 603 Legal Aid last winter. I met and worked with like-minded individuals dedicated to, among other things, keeping people housed. To use an apt expression, I felt at home there.

So, it was an easy decision to return to New Hampshire and continue my work on housing cases. During just ten weeks at NHLA, I worked on eviction cases, reasonable accommodation requests, property tax assistance, title disputes, and more. The rapid pace of legal aid and the responsibility for such important matters can be stressful. But it allowed me to learn a lot in just ten weeks, and I was fortunate to have the support and mentorship of many talented colleagues.

Beyond developing my skills as a lawyer, the work I did this summer was greatly fulfilling. I used my skills as a researcher and writer to convince a judge that our clients were the true owners of their home. I negotiated with town governments to secure tax relief for our clients. I returned to my home state to help people remain in their homes. These wins are among my proudest achievements since I began law school.

Wherever my legal career takes me, I know I will bring with me the skills and values that I developed in my time at NHLA. I hope to continue the fight for equal justice and for a more caring and forgiving world.

Thank you to New Hampshire Legal Assistance for welcoming me and teaching me so much over the course of just ten weeks. Thank you to Equal Justice America for sponsoring me and so many other lawyers who are doing this important work. And finally, a big thank you to everyone who has been so kind as to read these reflections.

Wishing you all a great rest of the summer, and to my classmates, I look forward to seeing you in Charlottesville soon!