



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1:

Hello friends and colleagues!

It is my honor to share with you all that I recently began my internship with the Second Look Project this summer thanks to funding I have received from Equal Justice America.

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, our prison population has exploded by 700% over the last 50 years. Additionally, about 1.9 million people are currently locked up on any given day in the U.S. About half of those individuals are serving sentences of 10 years or longer. Despite evidence showing that lengthy sentences are ineffective methods to reduce crime, our country still hasn't fully redressed the harmful consequences of mass incarceration.

Upon entering law school, I wrote that I wanted to learn how to undo those effects with legal advocacy. Fortunately, I received an opportunity with Second Look Project to assist their attorneys with helping eligible clients a chance to reduce their lengthy sentences under DC's Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act.

To assist my attorneys with drafting our client's petitions, I have interviewed clients' family members, potential re-entry employers and resources for support, and I have conducted extensive research to contextualize my clients' backgrounds to amplify the mitigating factors behind their sentences. Additionally, I completed drafting my first Writ Mandamus regarding D.C. Superior Court's Civil and Criminal Procedures on Rule 60(b) and Rule 35(b) motions.

While undoing the impacts of mass incarceration and over policing will be a continued struggle, I am excited for the continued opportunities to serve clients in the D.C. area, and I am grateful for EJA's funding to help me continue to pursue my goals for my legal education.



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Update 2:

Hello friends and colleagues,

I've continued working with my attorneys to gather information to help our clients prepare their IRAA motions. Recently, I accompanied an attorney to interview our client in person at FCI Loretto in Pennsylvania.

I was honored to meet our client who relayed his story to us, mentioning painful moments of violence and instability exacerbated by systemic racism and government neglect. Our client gave us firsthand accounts of the consequences of over policing, disinvestment in Black communities, and generational trauma. However, our client gave us many positive stories about the ways in which he mentors others. Our client became a religious leader in his institution, he led classes on financial literacy, and he has dedicated his time to mentoring others in his institution. Our client exhibited determination and focus throughout his incarceration. Most importantly, our client showed us that hope is a powerful motivator.

IRAA gives clients hope that they can have a second chance to achieve their goals, rather than be victimized by a criminal justice and economic system designed to disenfranchise them. This week, city council members attempted to pass an amendment to the IRAA statute, making it harder for eligible clients to satisfy their burden under the legislation. During the hearing, I was touched to hear the testimonies of so many IRAA grantees that were given hope and have made transformative differences in their communities upon release. I am excited to continue this work, and to learn and amplify and triumph.

Update 3:

Hello friends and colleagues,

Since my last update, I recently met my primary client for the first time who has been incarcerated for the last 15 years since he was 16 years old. As I have continued my social history mitigation research and interviews, I have been have learned to try to build his theme while drafting the components for their motions. I learned that my client was a father figure to his siblings, kind spirited, light-hearted, and was always in service of others in his neighborhood while constantly being threatened by gang violence, being desensitized to death, and guided by unhealthy conceptions of masculinity by poor role models. However, he was still sentenced to spend his entire natural life growing up in the prison system as a child.

I've learned that many clients aren't able to tell their stories, and that they are reduced to the worst days of their lives. By working in service of my client, I understand the importance of centering their story in opportunity of this innovative resentencing law.



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Recently, I virtually attended an IRAA Motion Hearing filed by one of the Second Look Project Attorneys. The most powerful moment of this hearing was when our client gave an extraordinary heartfelt allocution and the reply from the impacted party. It gave both people a chance to humanize each other and go through the difficult process of restorative justice to strive towards just outcomes. Additionally, it was an honor to witness testimonies displaying hope from each of our client's witnesses who testified.

In continuing this theme of witnessing justice, my fellow interns and I toured the Supreme Court and each Justice's Chambers. I was honored to see Justice Ketanji Brown's chambers and hear more about her continued passion for justice from her lens of having been a public defender.

Update 4:

Hello friends and colleagues,

It is time for another EJA Fellows Update! Recently, I completed drafting social and institutional history sections to assist my attorneys in completing their IRAA motions. I enjoyed conducting the research and interviews for both of these motion components, and I was honored to receive valuable feedback to improve how I advocated for clients' and told their narratives.

In addition to writing, I have continued to collect letters of support to illustrate and create robust re-entry plans for clients. I enjoyed conducting interviews with family and community members who were willing to support our clients.

Also, I attended my first in-person IRAA motion hearing. The attorneys at SLP presented a case to release a client who had been incarcerated and separated from their family for over 20 years. The client had written a beautiful allocution, had supportive witnesses, and was surrounded by his support system in the observation benches. After a brief contentious hearing, the judge awarded our client with a modify sentence that effectuated his immediate release from prison. Our office was elated at this ruling, and our client's ability to be reunited with his children and fiancée. This hearing was indicative of the feeling that I've experienced since working at SLP – hope. This work has been extraordinarily rewarding and hopeful. I've been honored to have worked to actually contribute towards restoring justice for others this summer.

Update 5:

Hello friends and colleagues,

It is unbelievable that I am writing my final EJA Fellow Update! I thoroughly enjoyed the 10 weeks that I spent at the Second Look Project in DC. This summer, I partook in meaningful, hopeful work that had direct impacts on clients and a larger impact on redressing the criminal justice system's inherent inequalities. I drafted components of Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA) Motions for clients, researched D.C.



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Superior Court Criminal Procedures, drafted a Motion for an Indicative Ruling to maintain the appellate jurisdiction of client's Parole Sentence Challenge, and created clients' post-incarceration re-entry plans, which helped me develop strong legal research, writing, and investigation skills. I got to interview clients, client family members, and other community supports to help develop post-release re-entry plans.

My experiences this summer have shown me the powerful work that attorneys are doing to create a just world, and the successful IRAA hearings have shown that a just world is possible. While our work was just one step in the arduous fight to end the effects of mass incarceration, I was inspired to continue improving my legal skills in my courses and future career opportunities to prevent individuals from facing this harm. I am solidified in my goal to become a Public Defender, and I am excited to pursue opportunities next summer to improve my advocacy skills for future clients. IRAA is incredible restorative justice legislation, but it does not account for the millions of Americans who are subject to mass incarceration and its collateral consequences. The criterion for IRAA only includes a small number of incarcerated persons, and I realize that zealous representation is important to protect others from undergoing the harms of imprisonment. While I am sad to say goodbye to the clients and persons I met this summer, I am excited to use my time at the Second Look Project to continue to advocate against mass incarceration and protect others from the deprivation of their rights and freedoms as well.

Thanks to EJA's support, others and I were able to pursue this type of work! If you all have any money to spare, please consider donating.