



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Legal Services of Eastern Michigan

Update 1: Hello friends and family,

I am writing to give an update on my legal career. I have chosen to work at Legal Services of Eastern Michigan this summer where I will be gaining experience in housing law for low-income individuals in the Flint, MI area. Along with this internship, I have been selected as an Equal Justice America Summer Fellow. This fellowship supports the work I am doing in the public interest field so that students like me can choose to provide assistance to those who most need it.

Update 2: Hey Everyone,

This is the second of four updates that I will be making this summer in accordance with my Equal Justice America Fellowship.

My work in the housing department at Legal Services of Eastern Michigan has been both rewarding and informative so far. We deal mostly in eviction defense and a decent percentage of our clients receive housing assistance from a government program. My work with LSEM has brought to light the large gap between housing policy enacted at both the state and the federal level and how that policy actually plays out in the lives of individuals. An example of this is the emergency funding from programs such as CERA or SER that provide emergency housing funds. These funds can only be accessed after some type of judgement has been entered in housing court to give a definitive amount that needs to be paid. The problem lies in that any Section 8 benefits that someone receives are terminated upon any judgement being entered. Since the average wait time to receive the subsidy again after reapplying is close to two years, this leaves a large number of people without the financial help that would allow them to obtain stable housing, stable employment and a better environment any



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dependents they may have. This often results in a progression of negative events when a person experiences an unforeseen emergency that those fortunate enough to have obtained financial stability are able to manage.

Update 3: Hello Everyone,

This will be my third [EJA Fellow Update](#). I am nearing the end of my summer internship with Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and I have really appreciated my experience working in the housing department. I was really able to see what it would be like to work as a housing attorney in the public interest field. There is indeed a high volume of cases that come through and there are a lot of tough situations that have to be managed, but the support structure and knowledge of the attorneys at Legal Services of Eastern Michigan allowed me to adequately handle these challenges. I have not decided what I will pursue as a career in law, but I know that I will not forget this wonderful experience helping those who are fighting to stay in their homes alongside some wonderful people who made it possible for me to contribute to this work.

Update 4: Hi everyone,

This is my last [EJA Fellow Update](#) for the summer of 2023.

I have very much enjoyed my time working for Legal Services of Eastern Michigan and being able to take part in work that had a direct impact on people's lives in Genesee County Michigan. During my time at LSEM under the supervision of housing attorneys, I was able to provide guidance, advice, and legal services to clients on a variety of property issues from eviction defense to land contracts. My time at Legal Services has highlighted the importance of legal aid lawyers because of the sheer volume of citizens that are in need of their services. Many of the clients I have represented are often times hard-working, honest people who just need the guidance of someone who understands the law in order to give them direction to avoid being in court. These services not only protect the interest of the citizens of the county, but also the money of taxpayers. The more cases that end up in court means more resources spent by the government. I see increasing awareness and funding of legal aid as a way to be proactive about solving social issues that in turn benefits everyone in our society.

Update 5: Hello Friends and Family,

I am writing my summer reflection for my Equal Justice America Summer Fellowship. As an intern at Legal Services of Eastern Michigan, I had the opportunity to work in the housing division where primarily helped clients with eviction defense. In Genesee County alone, where we offered our services to those who qualified, hundreds of individuals appeared in court every week to fight evictions or raise other housing concerns.

After a summer of working in this field, I am far from an expert on what might help the function of legal services or the lives of those we represent, but I do have some takeaways. I will caveat this with the disclaimer that I do not represent the ideals, beliefs, or agenda of Legal Services of Eastern Michigan or of Equal Justice America. I also do not make these comments with any political undertones. They are simply observations.

The first observation was that a little patience goes a long way. This was something I got to witness firsthand



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from the attorneys at LSEM. Even though you might be having a bad day, the person you are giving advice to might be having one of the scariest days of their life as they face the possibility of losing their home. It is a hard concept to put into perspective for those of us that have been fortunate enough to always have a roof over our heads.

Additionally, I learned that one of the most important parts of being a legal advocate is that your clients understand you are there with them to assist and support them in achieving their goals in any court case. This is particularly important in legal aid when someone's home is on the line. It is incredibly personal, and you can't always understand how your client feels, but you can always let them know that you are there to help.

The second observation was that the allocation of government resources can be better managed in order to avoid unnecessary waste. A fair amount of our clients during my time at LSEM received some sort of government subsidy to assist with the cost of housing. Many of these clients had complaints or issues with the quality of housing that their landlords kept the properties in and many of these issues were not insignificant. Although there is some oversight, it is no secret government assisted housing is often times not the best option and in my opinion through my short time within this field, more oversight of entities that receive the monetary compensation of individuals' government housing assistance would result in better living conditions and an ultimately lower bill for the government. Granted there is a lot more nuance to this observation than I am writing, but since it is a brief reflection, I will keep it to the short and sweet version.

All in all, I had a wonderful summer at LSEM doing work that I felt good about. Thank you to Equal Justice America for helping to fund my work this summer and a big thank you to all the attorneys at LSEM for all their help and guidance.