



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: This summer, I am interning at the Legal Action Center, engaging in community-informed policy advocacy on issues affecting justice-involved individuals. During my second year of law school, I delved into America's criminal justice system, examining its disproportionate impact on communities of color. I worked closely with clients and communities devastated by the systemic racism embedded in our criminal justice system. After spending my second year directly working with clients at my school's Decarceration and Re-entry Clinic and Public Defender Services, I am excited to shift my focus to policy work. I am eager to use what I have learned in the field to help develop work products that can better serve and represent our clients.

Update 2: I am almost a month into my internship at the Legal Action Center, and I am humbled and thrilled by the incredible experiences I've had so far. My first assignment involved assisting our health policy team with a comment submission for a newly proposed HUD rule aimed at reducing barriers for justice-involved individuals seeking affordable housing (you can read more about the rule here <https://lnkd.in/g9H3sYZZ>). This task was eye-opening and made me realize three important things:

1) I enjoy working on projects that allow me to bring my diverse experiences and skills to the table, especially when addressing intersectional issues like housing and criminal justice. This assignment allowed me to draw on my background in public health, my training in community-informed policy advocacy, and my experience working with incarcerated individuals and those preparing to re-enter society. I was able to frame housing access as a public health and community well-being issue, highlighting its critical importance during the initial months after re-entry, based on my work at the Decarceration and Re-entry Clinic.

2) I deeply appreciate having a supervisor who provides the space and opportunity for me to utilize my creative and intellectual skills to develop meaningful work products.



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3) Being part of a team that acknowledges and values the support I provide and the work I produce is truly amazing.

Update 3: This summer has been full of learning and growth. As an organizer and community builder, the experience of losing certain battles is one that I am familiar with. I always understood losing to be part of the process, but I never thought about how even the battles we lose can impact the trajectory of the issues we are organizing around. Today, I had the opportunity to meet the Director and President of the Legal Action Center and asked him if there had been any times during his tenure at LAC when, despite losing a case or a policy issue, they were able to change the trajectory of things in the long run. He shared two cases that LAC lost at the Supreme Court. Despite losing at that level, they were able to work with state-level organizations and agencies to mitigate the damage and develop solutions.

Using this approach of turning our losses into wins, I wrote an op-ed piece on a HUD rule that has the capacity to mitigate some of the damage caused by the recent Supreme Court decision allowing states to criminalize homelessness (for the full opinion, see here <https://lnkd.in/g3bu-Axs>). In that piece, I argued that while the HUD rule was not directly related to the Supreme Court case or the ruling, it could mitigate some of the heightened risk of homelessness among justice-involved individuals. The HUD rule can do this by strengthening some of its provisions, such as shifting the burden to housing providers in cases of application denials and imposing a stricter and shorter look-back period for past involvements in the system.

As I continue into the second half of my internship at LAC, I am excited to work on more impact-focused policy memos.

Update 4:

As I near the end of my time at Legal Action Center, I want to reflect on a key project I've worked on this summer. After discussing my interests, I was tasked with researching Medicaid 1115 waivers, which allow states to request federal funding for healthcare services for incarcerated individuals before up to 90 days before they are released from prison. This is a relatively new waiver, with nine states approved and others pending. I analyzed the waivers to identify trends in the services states want to cover and for which populations. We hope the information hub I am creating and the brief I am writing will aid other states in submitting their applications.

These waivers are crucial because individuals leaving incarceration often have higher medical, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment needs but face barriers to care. Reentry into society can be a particularly difficult and dangerous time, with a high risk of overdose, especially in the first two weeks after release. Ensuring access to healthcare during this transition is vital, as it can reduce these risks and improve overall outcomes. I'm excited to finalize this work and provide a valuable resource for agencies, community organizations, and service providers.



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Update 5: I completed my internship at the Legal Action Center, and it was an incredibly enriching summer filled with learning, growth, and inspiration. One of the most impactful aspects of the experience was LAC's weekly intern debrief sessions, where we had the opportunity to meet the entire staff and ask questions. These meetings provided me with a broader perspective on how different teams—both legal and non-legal—work together to provide comprehensive support to clients. Seeing how the legal services were supported by the work of policy experts, communications staff, and other professionals gave me valuable insight into the collaborative nature of advocacy work. It helped me understand that successful legal representation is often part of a larger effort that involves addressing broader systemic issues affecting our clients.

In addition to these debrief sessions, I had weekly supervision meetings with my supervisor, where I could discuss questions, share reflections, and track my progress. My supervisor was always available for additional guidance, fostering a supportive learning environment that allowed me to grow confidently throughout the summer. Beyond these formal meetings, I also had the chance to connect with other LAC staff members through individual conversations that gave me deeper insights into their work. These interactions helped me see how the policy projects I worked on this summer complemented the direct client services LAC provides, reinforcing my understanding of how advocacy, policy, and legal representation work hand-in-hand to advance justice for marginalized communities.