



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	The Second Look Project

Update 1:

I am excited to share that I will be serving as a Law Clerk with The Second Look Project (SLP). SLP is a non-profit with a mission to provide legal representation for incarcerated individuals seeking relief from extreme sentences. I am excited for my first experiences in direct client representation as I engage in sentence review proceedings under IRAA and D.C.'s Compassionate Release law, a relatively new field of practice within the District of Columbia and a premiere model law. With my interests in policy, it will also be insightful to witness how institutional advocacy can influence litigation as SLP works to advance the interests of their client population.

My first day consisted of witnessing and supporting a motion for relief from a life sentence. Sitting with the defendant's family as we listened to our attorney argue for the petition was deeply moving. An opportunity to engage in the fruits of criminal justice reform has caused me to reflect on the lived experiences that inspired me to become a law student. Thank you to Equal Justice America for supporting my efforts this summer.

Update 2:

As I continue my internship with the Second Look Project (SLP), I have become more familiar with the art of client-based advocacy. Our attorneys handle emotionally dense caseloads with ease. I am learning a lot as they engage in mitigation, work with our client's families, and navigate representing clients who are currently incarcerated. As a clerk, I have supported the office by tracking developments in IRAA hearings and conducting research supporting mitigation. Reflecting on the impact of mitigation has been eye-opening. Working on these efforts has grown my empathy for juvenile offenders as I recognize the harsh impact of a difficult childhood. An overwhelming majority of juvenile offenders have experienced trauma as a child before they were charged, including witnessing violence in the home, witnessing weekly violence in their neighborhood, and experiencing physical and sexual abuse. I am glad for the



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opportunity to support SLP's post-conviction release work as we seek to fight the consequences of mass incarceration.

Update 3:

This week, I had the opportunity to engage in my first client call. I was initially nervous due to the unfortunate procedural posture of this particular IRAA petition. However, the client was a joy to speak with and was quite lighthearted as he balanced discussing highlights in his life, in addition to some traumatic experiences he faced while incarcerated. The experience taught me an important lesson not to project any anxieties I may have over a case onto the client. It also demonstrated the resilience of our client population and how much we can learn from them. For the upcoming week, I look forward to working with another client to gather letters of support from his family and begin to draft his petition.

Update 4:

Yesterday evening, the Second Look Project hosted its first-ever Welcome Reception, recognizing our new Executive Director and fellowshiping with the Project's supporters. It was such a fulfilling evening to share a space with SLP's former clients, community partners, board members, and public interest professionals interested in addressing issues in the criminal legal system. As a Law Clerk, I had the opportunity to serve on the planning committee and collaborate with Baker McKenzie and a local judge on this event. It was a journey to balance my workload, summer case assignment, and this responsibility. However, several lessons were learned about the strain of resources within the public interest space. As such, being a dynamic leader and lawyer is critical to ensure progression in our mission to advocate for our client population.

In addition to the reception, I have also continued to work with my client and their family to prepare drafting the IRAA petition for release. It can be challenging to learn about the intimate consequences of a harsh sentence and how a person's incarceration harms families. However, it is a joy to engage with client families and learn more about what it means if we can fulfill our goal of release.

I look forward to the second half of my clerkship experience with SLP.

Update 5:

This week marks the end of my experience with the Second Look Project. Through the summer, I have supported the Project's mission to provide advocacy and legal support for individuals seeking relief from extreme sentences in the District of Columbia. Namely, this was my first experience supporting the direct representation of clients. My efforts mostly advanced our representation of clients seeking release under DC's Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (IRAA), a model law that provides juvenile offenders who received extreme sentences an opportunity for release. It has been deeply rewarding to personally engage with this mechanism as it is the result of the DC council's swift response to a group of cases, including *Montgomery v. Louisiana* (2016), holding that life sentences for juvenile offenders violates the Eighth Amendment prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. IRAA and its developments have



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expanded my understanding of which legal considerations are necessary when drafting legislation and investigating policy effectiveness.

In a field that values mitigation, I have learned how variable legal writing can be. In an effort to advocate for our clients, mitigation is necessary to reduce the effects of aggravating factors through telling the story of our clients. The surgical approach to legal writing commonly taught in law school does not permit advocates to leverage the power of storytelling. Furthermore, our current legal system and culture of our society neglects to consider a person's story prior to their crime and after their crime. As I reflect on the reasons for punishment, I am mindful on the injustices that our American legal and prison system cause by failing to meaningfully ensure rehabilitation. In the fight against mass incarceration, the legal system must be reformed to acknowledge and support the opportunity for one's reform and rehabilitation.

In addition to strengthening my legal skills, I have also built meaningful connections with our staff. I thank our staff attorneys and re-entry coordinator for mentoring me through client interviews, mitigation research, and trial procedure. It is always a joy to learn from them. I am grateful to know that they are working diligently for a client population that is often ignored. Additionally, I thank our director, Erin Pinder, for her warm welcome and support through my internship experience. I am glad to have served during her onboarding and look forward to seeing her stewardship of the organization. Finally, I thank all of our clients and their families to nurturing and expanding my abolitionist principles. I have built sincere relationships that I will always cherish.