



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Timothy St. Pierre
LAW SCHOOL	Boston College Law School
ORGANIZATION	Greater Boston Legal Services

Update 1:

For the past three weeks, I have been working with the Employment Law Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), assisting low-income clients with wage and hour violations, unemployment insurance, and immigration protections. It has felt incredibly gratifying to not just discuss law in the classroom, but actually apply it in the service of clients - meeting their real-world, material needs. I have had the chance to write research memos, draft demand letters and briefs, and directly engage with both clients and attorneys as we build cases, reinforcing my desire to engage in client-focused work throughout my career.

My fellow interns and I have also been observing a federal labor trafficking prosecution, in which five of the victims were GBLS clients who were able to gain T-Visa status despite the awful working conditions and threats of deportation they were made to suffer. It feels good to be back in a courtroom after a year of law school and to have the chance to apply what I've learned in ways that actually impact people's lives, especially those who would likely not otherwise be able to access legal assistance.

Update 2:

Over the past couple weeks, I've had a chance to delve further into some of the cases I've been covering, including a matter involving a gay couple who were terminated from their workplace once their employer discovered they lived together. As discouraging as it might be to see how frequent cases like this remain, even in 2024, it feels vindicating to know that I'm able to help other members of the LGBTQ community who might otherwise be left with no recourse and simply have to accept discrimination as an inevitable part of their lives.

Although discrimination and wrongful discharge cases are notoriously difficult to win, it feels empowering to do my best to put forward a powerful rebuttal on behalf of my clients. Even if the case is not ultimately successful, their employer is at the very least put on notice that



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

discrimination against marginalized employees isn't something that can be done with zero pushback

Update 3:

Over the past two weeks, I've had the further chance to work directly with clients on wage and hour matters and applications for deferred action, U-Visas, and T-Visas. I've learned that the day-to-day experience of legal work involves a lot of juggling cases while waiting for next steps - whether it's waiting for decisions from the Court or government agencies or waiting for the documentation you need from clients.

Very few of the clients we see come with only one legal problem - oftentimes someone facing a legal issue with their employer is also facing housing issues, medical issues, family issues. One client I was working with was unable to get documents to me for several weeks because she had been unexpectedly hospitalized, discovered she was pregnant, and was attempting to leave the room she had rented as housing from her former employer - the same adverse party in her employment matter who was paying her below the minimum wage and refusing to pay her for all hours worked. I'm glad that many legal aid organizations recognize this reality and the intersecting nature of many clients' legal troubles, so that they are able to internally refer clients to other units and address a client's needs holistically and comprehensively.

Update 4:

I've had a chance to dedicate the past few weeks to writing and perfecting a rebuttal for a case being heard before the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. It's been a really rewarding experience both subject-wise - having the chance to advocate on behalf of LGBTQ clients - and practice-wise - going from reading opposing counsel's position statement and wondering how we'd have any room to stand on, to engaging in deep, substantive research and argument-building, realizing that we actually have a very strong case. I've spent a lot of the past year feeling anxious about being in law school, worrying about how I compare to my peers who entered with attorneys as parents and substantial family wealth. But being able to take the work product of a barred and practicing attorney at a big firm and put forward my own work product feeling confident that my client has a very good chance of success, based on my own work, has felt extremely encouraging. Knowing that I'm able to do this work at no charge for clients who would otherwise be left with no legal recourse makes it even better.

Update 5:

Reflecting on my ten weeks with Greater Boston Legal Services, I have a renewed and affirmed interest in dedicating my career to client service. The legal system is an unnecessarily complicated, confusing, and often frightening experience for anyone. Frequently, clients may be experiencing one of the most difficult or stressful times of their life - and even if not, there's still a decent chance that their legal case is at least the most difficult or stressful part of their life at that given moment. This requires patience, empathy, and a recognition that clients oftentimes need support beyond a well-written memo or confirmation email. It also requires softer skills like knowing how to actively listen, how to responsively and sensitively react to client stressors, and how to be both professional and comforting at once.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

While with the Employment Unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, this took on an even more elevated significance. More often than not, our clients came to us with not just workplace complaints, but fears surrounding housing, immigration, family and community violence, and discrimination. I worked firsthand with clients being trafficked, facing housing loss, fleeing anti-gay persecution, or being forced to live with the very employers exploiting them. There was no set script to follow on how anyone "should" discuss their cases with them; instead, I had to approach each client as the individual they were, listen to the fears and anxieties they were expressing, and find solutions that responded to what they were sharing. This helped foster trust, helped make me a better advocate, and hopefully made the legal experience less daunting for them.

Going forward, I know that I want to maintain and further develop these skills working one-on-one with clients. There are many years ahead of me and I don't want to speculate on what particular niche of the law I may eventually end up occupying - but I know that I want to be somewhere where my work actually matters, where kindness and gentleness actually matter, and where I can make positive, material impacts in people's lives, especially when it feels like they might have nowhere else to turn.