



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1:

The first week of work at SEIU was focused on getting to know the organization and the work done at the legal department of the national labor union. The legal department covers a diverse group of workers represented by the union, ranging from healthcare workers and graduate research assistants to maintenance workers in many private buildings across the country. I was excited to see the palpable air of enthusiasm and sense of public service present in lawyers and fellow interns. Having been placed at the public service department of the legal team, I'm working with three brilliant lawyers representing public workers across the country. Our direct legal service aspect of the work is focused on representing the public workers in Northern Virginia. The public workers in the city of Richmond and Loudon County are unionized but facing a tough contract negotiation. Workers in Fairfax County are organizing for a union at this very moment. It is inspiring to see rank and file workers organize for a strong union that can vindicate their economic rights, and I hope to continue to work on this case throughout the summer.

Update 2:

The second half of June has been a deeply exciting time here at SEIU. I had a chance to engage in substantive research while working on an ongoing organizing campaign of large public sector workers in Virginia. This experience was topped off with a field trip to meet a federal circuit court judge in Baltimore, a former SEIU general counsel. Working on a memo concerning the federal budgetary process and the president's authority on it felt ever more relevant during an election season where stakes seem so high. On the other hand, working on unit determination and engaging in a legal review of the union card was a welcome distraction from tough political news and unfavorable Supreme Court cases. These questions were on my and fellow legal interns' minds when we were invited to visit Judge Nicole Berner's chamber in Baltimore. Among very few federal district judges and only federal circuit judges with a background in labor law, her insight into the federal judiciary and her new role as a judge was a reminder that there is still much work to be done at any point in your career, no matter where you end up.



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Update 3:

Midway through the internship here at SEIU, I had a chance to meet a diverse group, from fast food employees who I interviewed for a DoL complaint, to the board members of the NLRB. Earlier last week, I had a chance to talk with several different workers from a national fast-food chain. The testimonials from the workers were stark; they were involved in serious wage theft by paying non-tip workers a tipped worker minimum wage of \$2.93. They worked shifts in excess of 15 hours at times with less than 2 hours of tipped work despite being paid only tipped minimum wage. I was deeply moved by the young workers who eloquently expressed their situation in detail to us, and I hope the complaint that I helped draft will play some part in punishing businesses stealing from low-wage workers. Another major activity we engaged in was a visit to the NLRB. We had a chance to meet with board member David Prouty and General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo and hear them talk about the crucial role played by the NLRB in upholding worker's rights in the US. It was a chance to think about post-graduation career choices and consider how I can orient the rest of my studies in law school so I can serve the working people of the country more effectively. #EJAFellowUpdate

Update 4:

The last couple weeks of my 10-week internship program in SEIU has been focused on improving my legal writing skills. Submitting my legal research for a detailed review from my supervisor allowed me to think about how I approach legal writing and how I can be a better legal writer. My research memo on a relatively obscure federal budgetary law and its intersection with administrative law was a difficult research project. Reviewing the comments, I realized that my supervisors wouldn't necessarily want all the research flashed out on the memo, especially when they have little relevance to the topic. I am writing a memo for my reader, not for my intellectual edification. While I was proud of the depth I went into researching this topic, a large portion of the memo was simply not relevant to the question at hand. Writing things in simple, understandable English and not relying on jargon is another lesson I learned working here at SEIU. When your writing is accessible both to your busy supervisor and workers in the union, I would know I have succeeded in improving my legal writing skills. The internship has been a good experience in considering how I approach legal writing. #EJAFellowUpdate

Update 5:

Closing up the last 10 weeks of my internship at the Service Employees International Union, I had a chance to talk to labor leaders and litigators who led the Starbucks United campaign. One speaker in particular left me with many thoughts. Wilma Liebman is one of the longest-serving NLRB board members, serving for over a decade across three presidential administrations. Her insight into the future of the labor movements and labor law in particular left me with many questions. In a more and more precarious employment model in vogue, how does the union model fit into it? Is the sectoral bargaining model the future? How should the unions and union lawyers approach the gig economy and emerging technology issues? She encouraged creative thinking and multi-faceted strategy, like the one employed by Starbucks Workers United, that involved shopfloor organizing, corporate pressure campaigns, stockholder activism, and international litigation. It was fascinating to think about practicing labor law beyond the confines



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of “traditional” labor law, and how diverse aspects of law both in and out of the American courtroom can work to lead a successful campaign.

The work here at SEIU last 10 weeks has been a deeply invigorating and rewarding experience. I was challenged, learned a whole new area of law conducting research, and got to experience some hands-on work interviewing workers involved in struggles across the country. I had a chance to meet with luminaries across the labor movement and create a deep friendship with fellow clerks who share my passion for improving the lives of the working class of this country. I hope to continue my work in the field, and I want to thank the support from the EJA that allowed me to pursue an internship in DC over the summer.