



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: My time at the City Bar Justice Center’s Immigrant Justice Project has gotten off to a great start! On June 6, we held a clinic for immigrant youth to conduct legal screenings to see if they might be eligible for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), or other forms of immigration relief. Most of the youth were French speaking from African countries, and we served approximately 15 youth. The clinic gave me an opportunity to dust off my high school French. Although my French is a bit rusty, it was great to be able to communicate with these youth in their language and they were very gracious and patient with me. In addition, I have assisted with some intake screenings for several clients to assess whether they are eligible for humanitarian protection including SIJS and visas for survivors of trafficking. I also filed an I-131 application for one asylee client who is seeking a Refugee Travel Document for permission to travel outside of the United States. I have really enjoyed getting the opportunity to work directly with many different clients on a variety of immigration legal matters.

I am grateful to be supporting CBJC’s work in providing pro bono legal services to immigrants who cannot afford a lawyer and be one of Cornell Law School’s EJA Fellows this summer.

Update 2: I’ve been working with a client, M, to apply for her permanent green card based on the abuse she suffered at the hands of her U.S. citizen spouse. Non-citizen spouses suffering domestic violence at the hands of their U.S. citizen or LPR spouse may feel pressured to stay in their abusive relationship due to their immigration status. Thankfully, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) protects these victims by providing them with a way to file independent applications for lawful status.

M was initially granted a two year-conditional green card after applying for residency through her U.S. citizen husband. When someone applies for lawful permanent residency based on a marriage that hasn’t yet reached 2 years, USCIS issues a conditional green card. The couple then has to file together to remove those conditions during the 90-day period prior to the card’s initial expiration date. However, as M approached the filing deadline, her relationship was



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becoming untenable. M's husband had started to emotionally abuse her, control her finances, and threaten her and her family. M no longer felt safe in her marriage. M's husband also refused to cooperate with the renewal application, using M's immigration status as a point of leverage.

M came to the City Bar Justice Center for help with her green card, and I am glad to be able to help her file a waiver petition so that she can receive a green card independently of her spouse. I have met with M twice to interview her and am writing her affidavit to explain her story of how she entered her marriage in good faith but has since suffered abuse at the hands of her spouse. I am also helping M to gather evidence in support of her application, such as photos and texts documenting her relationship and its deterioration.

Update 3: This week I've had the opportunity to visit two different courts in New York City as part of my internship with the City Bar Justice Center. On Wednesday, I went to the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn, NY with my other fellow interns at the City Bar Justice Center. We met the Honorable Magistrate Judge Taryn A. Merkl, observed some criminal arraignments and the end of a jury trial, and met one of the U.S. Marshals. I also got to learn more about CBJC's Federal Pro Se Legal Assistance project, which provides free limited scope legal services to pro se litigants with cases in the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of New York.

On Thursday, I volunteered with the Immigrant ARC's Friend of the Court Program at the Immigration Court at 290 Broadway, New York, NY. The Friend of the Court Program assists pro se respondents with change of address forms, provides basic legal information including know your rights presentations, and may appear with pro se respondents during their initial hearing to assist them with communicating with the immigration judge. I assisted French-speaking immigrants with filling out their change of address forms to inform the court of their new address for their immigration proceedings. I also had the opportunity to observe master calendar hearings for several French and Wolof speaking immigrants.

I am grateful for both of these opportunities to be able to observe court proceedings and provide some assistance to pro se respondents in immigration court.

Update 4: The past couple of weeks with the City Bar Justice Center, I've continued to work on exciting projects and am wrapping up some of my major assignments.

This past Wednesday, I filed an I-751 Battered Spouse Waiver Petition with USCIS! I discussed this petition in detail in my second EJA update. It is exciting to see this application to the finish line. In addition to this filing, I am working on another green card application for a derivative asylee who is seeking to adjust her status. I plan to file her application this week.

Throughout my internship, I have been writing a memo predicting whether a New York criminal possession of a firearm conviction is a particularly serious crime barring asylum. The client facing this charge has suffered significant past trauma and abuse and has mental health challenges. My memo involved intensive research into the Fifth Circuit and Board of Immigration Appeals decisions on particularly serious crimes, as our client currently is in immigration proceedings in



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Texas. This writing assignment has allowed me to learn more about the intersection between criminal and immigration law. Based on my research, I am hopeful that the conviction will not be deemed a particularly serious crime by the court.

I also had the opportunity to visit the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in the Eastern District of New York and the Federal Reserve Bank of New York with my fellow interns. I've included some pictures of both visits.

Update 5: This is my final update to conclude my internship with the City Bar Justice Center. During my internship, I've provided direct legal services to asylees, asylum seekers, victims of crimes and domestic violence, and unaccompanied minors on a variety of immigration issues. I wanted to share some overall reflections about my internship and some takeaways.

The immigration process is very unpredictable. While some cases get adjudicated quickly, others can remain in limbo for years. Even small errors in your initial application can mean that your application gets kicked back and you have to refile, adding to the length of time to get a final decision.

Differences in the timing of an immigrant's arrival to the U.S. in comparison to their family members, even if it is only a few months, can mean the difference between a timely decision, or a painful wait for several years with no certainty. Which judge or adjudicator reviews an immigrant's case can also greatly impact how it is decided and whether relief will be granted. Doing immigration legal services requires patience, attention to detail, and multiple contingency plans.

Facing this reality, a major part of the role of being a lawyer is helping to give your client dignity in a difficult and uncertain process. While you can't always guarantee your client will get the outcome they want, the process of hearing your client's story, preparing their application, and presenting it to the adjudicator or the court increases the odds that they will obtain a favorable outcome. I've enjoyed playing a role in ensuring immigrants have a fair chance to obtain legal relief in the United States.

Thank you so much to Jennifer Kim and Caitlin Miner-Le Grand, the Project Directors of the Immigrant Justice Project, and the whole IJP team for giving me so much support and guidance! I learned so much from you and will apply what I've learned moving forward in my legal career.

Thank you to the City Bar Justice Center, Cornell Law School, and Equal Justice America for your support for this amazing opportunity this summer.