



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1:

In the 1st few weeks of my summer internship I've learned so much about legal aid and how important it is to ensure our justice system works. I'm working on cases to seal old criminal records to remove employment barriers. I've been working with people who are denied employment for cases that happened 30+ years ago. Being able to remove that barrier is so important for reentry. Without legal aid, a lot of people wouldn't be able to have an attorney to work with on their cases. Hearing people's stories has been very impactful. Knowing that I played a small role in removing barriers is very meaningful. People don't realize how much legal aid actually does and what a difference it makes to have an attorney to make sure justice is served.

Update 2:

These past few weeks have been so great! I have been able to work on the reentry project which helps people seal their criminal record to reduce employment barriers. We have also started planning for Clean Slate. Clean Slate is a law going into effect in November in New York that will effectively seal the record of certain offenses of about a million people. We have been working on a multi city event that will raise awareness of the new law and help people seal their records. Aside from that, I have also been working on cases of employment discrimination against people with criminal records preparing for a hearing. I enjoyed my labor law classes so I have loved getting to help out with that. All this really shows how much we need legal aid for so much.

Update 3:

I have learned a lot this month. We have been working on finishing documents to seal cases for our clients. With that being almost done, we have shifted to a case about employment discrimination based on a criminal record at a university that asked about felonies for a class. It's heartbreaking to hear about people who have had to go through that. To build your life and



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work your way back up only to be out back in that position for a past mistake is awful. I think a lot about how without legal services, so many of these cases wouldn't be redressed. Access to justice is a huge problem, especially in rural areas. I'm so thankful work with an incredible organization that's addressing that issue. It has really shifted my perspective about the American legal system.

Update 4:

I have been slowly winding down on my internship for the summer. We have been focusing on finishing up our current cases as well as tying up loose ends for other projects. One thing I have thought about is sustainability for after all the interns leave over the summer. I know the attorneys are overworked, and I hate that we are only able to help for a short time. I haven't been able to see every case to completion, and I hope it isn't too much for permanent staff to handle. I started working on a new case about a person who needs a legal name change, but has encountered many barriers due to a past criminal record. I didn't even realize that having a criminal record affected something as simple as a name change. I won't be able to do much on that case before I am done, but I really do love working on all the different cases I have been assigned to. As it continues to wind down, I am reminded that this is still the work I want to do and I really cannot wait until this is my career. Only one more year of law school left!

Update 5:

What an incredible summer! I really did learn a lot this summer and I did things I never thought I would have the chance to do. I worked with Legal Assistance of Western New York's reentry project serving people with criminal records trying to reenter society. I never realized how much of an impact a criminal record has on almost every aspect of life. From employment to housing to public benefits to even getting a legal name change, having a criminal record presents a barrier to reentry in so many ways. It was an absolute honor to help people with criminal records get their record sealed so they could move on from their past and live their lives. I helped complete sealing applications for two clients, both of whom had one conviction from 20+ years ago still haunting them. I loved getting to talk to them and hear their stories and hopes for what their life could look like without a criminal record. I wasn't there long enough to hear how the court ruled in their cases, but I truly hope their cases succeed. I was also able to help LawNY start planning a week-long event for when the Clean Slate Act goes into effect in New York in November. This will be a series of events to help individuals take advantage of the new law to seal their records. I will take so much from my experience. I think I will mainly carry with me the feeling of injustice but knowing I can do something about it and channeling my anger into positive work on behalf of my clients. This helped reinforce my commitment to public interest law and helped me see that I want to continue to do public interest work, ideally with civil legal aid, for the rest of my life.