



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1:

I'm two weeks into my legal internship with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) in Edinburg, Texas, and it's been a blast! I had the opportunity to do know your rights outreach to farm workers yesterday and share important information about H-2A wage rates and farmworker resources. The H-2A visa program is a temporary work visa for agricultural workers, and a number of job positions with the H-2A program have a new mandatory minimum wage (or AEWR). This change was implemented in the past year and many employers are still paying workers at the old (lower) rate. TRLA advocates for farmworkers across the state of Texas, so we went out to share that important information with workers. We drove about an hour into the countryside looking for H-2A housing, and eventually were able to talk to three workers! Although employers are required to list the address of the housing, it's often hard to find. So, finding three workers meant that our outreach trip was a success!

I've also been doing legal research on ADA and FLSA claims and learning more about the types of employment cases that TRLA takes. So excited for the next couple of months and grateful to [Equal Justice America](#) for making this summer possible!

Update 2:

I'm already almost a month into my internship with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid—hard to believe! Last week I got to see the settlement negotiation process up close. It was very interesting to learn about the interpersonal skills that are required to try to get two opposing sides to meet in the middle.

I've also been working on a know your rights presentation about deferred action for workers that experience labor abuse. This process, known as "DALE", was introduced last year and still isn't widely known. It allows workers who experience labor abuse and report the abuse to a labor enforcement agency to apply for a work permit and protection from deportation. Although it only provides temporary relief (the work permit is valid for two years), it is a much



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

faster process than other forms of immigration relief and can be hugely beneficial. I'll be going to Laredo to present to a group of community members about this new process and how they can protect their rights at work. I'm really excited to travel to a new area in South Texas and share this very important information! I have been learning so much and am very grateful to Equal Justice America for giving me this opportunity!

Update 3:

Last week I joined other law clerks from organizations across the Rio Grande Valley at a brunch hosted by the American Bar Association's South Texas Pro Bono Asylum Representation Project (ProBAR). It was great to meet other law clerks from around the country and learn more about the organizations working together to improve access to legal services in the Rio Grande Valley. ProBAR provides representation to unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers transiting through or settling in the Rio Grande Valley. They also recently began to hold work permit clinics for asylum seekers who are paroled into the United States. ProBAR and the Young Center work closely with TRLA to ensure that as many people as possible are able to obtain quality legal representation. These organizations face a high demand for their services—the Rio Grande Valley contains some of the country's busiest ports of entries and is a common border crossing location for many asylum seekers and other immigrants. Many people arriving to the United States also end up settling in the Rio Grande Valley, especially if their immigration status prevents them from traveling through the checkpoints located around the RGV. It has been inspiring to see the tremendous impact that TRLA and organizations like ProBAR have in the RGV.

Update 4:

Last Wednesday I went to Laredo, Texas (about three hours from Edinburg) to give two presentations on DALE-Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement. DALE is a temporary form of immigration relief that provides a work permit and protection from deportation to immigrant workers who report workplace abuses to labor agencies. It's a new process that is still evolving—the day before we left for Laredo, DHS announced that deferred action grants through DALE would be extended from two years to four years, strengthening protections for immigrant workers. Many undocumented workers fear speaking up about workplace exploitation due to their immigration status, and DALE provides crucial protections to immigrant workers to ensure that they feel comfortable coming forward to report these abuses.

A grassroots immigrant rights group in Laredo, the Laredo Immigrant Alliance (LIA) invited TRLA to present on this important new process to their members. My fellow legal intern Bianca and I were so excited to represent TRLA and spread the word about DALE! LIA invited us to give two presentations: one to Laredo organizers in the afternoon and another to their members in the evening. Bianca and I have spent the past month designing and refining the presentation (with a lot of input from TRLA attorneys) and we were so please with how well it went! The presentations provided information about the history of DALE, what it is, workplace rights, and how to identify and make labor complaints. Most of the audience members had never heard of DALE and were very interested to learn more. The information was well-received and it was great to see the audience members putting what they had learned into practice in case study



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

discussions. I hope that learning about DALE empowers workers in Laredo to fight back against workplace exploitation and take advantage of these important protections.

Update 5:

I wrapped up my summer internship at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) last week. I can't believe how much I learned in only 10 weeks! TRLA serves low-income clients throughout Southwest Texas, covering practice areas such as family law, immigration, employment, and civil rights. I was based with the employment team in the Edinburg office. I was able to work on a variety of different cases and projects this summer, which gave me a sense of the many ways TRLA supports low-income community members in its service area.

In the first half of my internship, I worked on a case involving a community member who was fired after taking leave at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The community member had brought claims under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (EPSLA) (2020 statute governing leave relating to COVID-19). I conducted research on one of the affirmative defenses brought by the defendant, helped draft a motion for summary judgment, and assisted in writing a response to one of the defendant's motions for summary judgment. It was an amazing learning experience to put my legal research and writing skills into practice on a real case. It was also interesting to read all of the court cases involving EPSLA claims—since the EPSLA was only enacted in 2020, and sunsetted at the end of that year, I read pretty much every court decision when conducting research for our motion!

I spent the second half of my internship working on Deferred Action for Labor Enforcement (DALE) cases. DALE is a new program whereby victims or witnesses of labor exploitation who report the abuse to a labor agency can apply for deferred action—protection from deportation and a work permit. I conducted immigration intakes with clients all over the Rio Grande Valley and helped prepare complaints to OSHA, the Wage and Hour Division, and the Equal Employment Commission. I also traveled to Laredo to present about DALE to community members and advocates at trainings organized by the Laredo Immigrant Alliance.

I was so appreciative that I had the opportunity to help with more “academic” legal work, like legal research and writing, and client-facing work, including intakes and advice calls. It was also amazing to see firsthand the huge impact TRLA's work has on community members in South Texas—a settlement in an employment case or a work permit can change a community member's life. I am so grateful for the [Equal Justice America](#) grant which enabled me to pursue my internship with TRLA this summer, and I can't wait to use the skills and knowledge I gained in this internship in the future.