



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## SUMMER 2024

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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<b>LAW SCHOOL</b>	GW Law School
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Legal Aid DC – Immigration Project

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#### Update 1:

I am excited to be working with Legal Aid DC this summer as a legal intern with the organization's immigration project! Legal Aid DC is a non-profit organization serving the DC community by providing direct legal services to low-income individuals in need of legal assistance with issues related to immigration status, accessing public benefits, housing disputes, and record sealing. I am honored to spend my summer learning from excellent attorneys at Legal Aid DC who have a passion for public interest work and advocate zealously for their clients. I will have the opportunity to work with clients, conduct legal research and writing, and engage with my community here in DC.

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#### Update 2:

This week at Legal Aid DC I have had the chance to continue gaining experience and knowledge from the incredible lawyers who work to assist clients with legal problems regarding residency status. I had the opportunity to accompany one of the staff attorneys working with the Family Law Unit to attend a hearing at DC Superior Court. The hearing concerned issues of custody and special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS). The Legal Aid Staff attorney leading the case confidently represented the client with expertise and care.

I am continually impressed by the quality of work done at Legal Aid DC, but also by the commitment shown to treating clients with the utmost respect and kindness. The Legal Aid DC community demonstrates a genuine desire to assist and support those in DC who could not otherwise afford legal representation. I am excited to continue working alongside these amazing attorneys and staff this summer.



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**Update 3:** As the summer progresses, I am continuing to learn more with each week spent working at Legal Aid DC. It has been a rewarding experience to assist with cases within the organization's Immigration Project and Family Law unit. This has included conducting research, drafting court orders, reaching out to clients, and preparing for upcoming hearings.

This week I also attended a brown bag lunch hosted by the Office of Consumer Protection (OCP) at the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). Interns from OCP and Legal Aid DC spent the time hearing from attorneys working on issues of consumer law from both the non-profit and government perspectives. It is always insightful to better understand the scope of Legal Aid's work beyond the cases I assist with each day. Legal Aid DC truly contemplates how to address a broad range of immediate, pressing legal needs of those in the DC community with expertise and care.

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**Update 4:** It is hard to believe that there are only two weeks left in my summer internship with Legal Aid DC. As the end of my summer with Legal Aid DC draws nearer, I have been reflecting more about the skills I have developed this summer, the legal processes I have observed, and the relationships I have built.

One of the opportunities I have had working with Legal Aid DC this summer is the chance to use Spanish to work more closely with clients. For example, I have assisted with informal interpretation so that clients better understand their legal options or the forms they must fill out when applying for certain visas and benefits. Clients seeking immigration status in the U.S. face a complex path to obtaining lawful status. By observing lawyers who work in the immigration space, I recognize how clear communication with clients is critical. Being able to speak with a client in his or her first language can facilitate trust between clients and attorneys. For clients who have often faced harsh realities, language serves as tool with which to tell their stories. This can go beyond the fields filled out in a form and filed with USCIS. I am grateful to see so many steps in these often long legal processes, but working with clients has been one of the best parts of this summer.

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**Update 5:** I have just completed my summer internship working with the Immigration Project at Legal Aid DC and I feel incredibly grateful for the experience. I had so many opportunities to see each step of the process in assisting DC residents as they seek to establish residency status in the United States. I want to say a big thank you to all of the dedicated and adept lawyers and staff at the organization. Seeing the commitment and heart that you pour into the work you do each day is admirable. Thank you for not only welcoming the summer interns, but for offering invaluable advice and guidance throughout the summer. I want to especially thank my supervisor Wendy W. Cheng as well as the other attorneys who make the Immigration Project a



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growing practice at Legal Aid DC: Jennifer Kelso, Deepa Bijpuria, and Jillean Workman. Finally, a big thank you to Candis Scippio for keeping the entire intern program running smoothly!

Over the course of ten weeks, I engaged with varied types of immigration cases. My work involved legal research and writing, court observation opportunities, and client meetings. I came to see the importance of truly understanding a client's story. Working in the immigration space means understanding what paths are available to clients to petition for residency and access to benefits. Whether hoping to obtain a work permit or a green card, the client's own experiences shape the process. Many clients wait for years hoping to receive approval of their petitions. The Legal Aid attorneys understand this complex system not only with legal expertise, but by helping clients navigate the waiting. I have learned the importance of explaining to the client why an attorney advises a client to take certain actions, and the equal importance of assuring these difficult choices remain the clients' decisions to make.

I end this summer feeling grateful for the rewarding work that Legal Aid does for the DC community and appreciative that I could participate in that meaningful work. Thank you to Equal Justice America (EJA) for making this summer possible by providing funding for law students working in public interest positions. Thank you to everyone who has generously donated to EJA. Your contributions help students like me to find wonderful summer opportunities!