



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Lindsay Nicholas
LAW SCHOOL	Loyola University Chicago School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Ascend Justice

Update 1: To everyone who supported me in my first year at Loyola Chicago School of Law (directly or from afar), thank you! I learned so much in my general classes and am excited to take courses next year that explore different practice areas. Some highlights of my 1L year:

- Taking the Education Lab course, which allowed me to work with student attorneys to provide advice and representation to families needing assistance with special education plans and school suspension/expulsion. I enjoyed this work so much that I'll be on the board of SUFEO (the student organization that leads this work) next year, serving as the Advocacy Chair
- Studying abroad in Rome this summer for 2 weeks (I already miss Italy!)
- Receiving the highest grade in my Legal Writing I class
- Participating in great coffee talks and events with my fellow ChildLaw Fellows
- Becoming involved with the Loyola Defense Coalition, a group dedicated to criminal defense and abolition
- And meeting amazing new friends!

This summer, I'm interning at Ascend Justice, a legal aid that helps survivors of gender-based violence. I'm working with the Family Defense team and Incarcerated Survivors Project, which provides support to families facing investigations by DCFS and incarcerated survivors who seek family law assistance. I've only been at Ascend for 2 weeks, but I have already seen the impact that they have on clients who cannot access legal assistance otherwise and am inspired by our client's resiliency. I'm learning so much every day and am gaining invaluable experience that prepares me for a career in defense or post-conviction advocacy.

I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for providing me with funding so that I can participate in Ascend Justice's important work. EJA makes it possible for law students to pursue



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

opportunities with free legal services providers. If you'd like to support the work I'm doing with Ascend and EJA's fellowship program, I encourage you to donate.

Update 2: I'm happy to share my next EJA Fellow update! In my first month at Ascend Justice, I have attended client calls with incarcerated survivors at Logan and Decatur prisons and drafted mitigation letters. I am learning so much every day, thanks to the mentorship of Ascend's talented attorneys. I am excited for more opportunities to write and conduct legal research and interface with clients.

Update 3: I am working at Ascend Justice this summer, assisting families who are being investigated by child welfare services as well as helping to provide family law services to individuals at Illinois' women's prisons. Recently, I have been able to draft motions to exclude evidence at upcoming hearings, prepare mitigation documents based on interviews with our clients, and draft pro se advice letters. I also was able to attend a summit for policy solutions to Illinois' family regulation system. This opportunity enriched my understanding of the multiple ways that the government surveils poor and minority families and intervene in ways that harm, not help, children. This Saturday, I will be participating in the Reunification Rides program, which buses families down to a women's prison so that individuals in custody can see their children. I am very excited for this, as I have worked with many individuals in IDOC but have never visited a prison. I anticipate this experience being bittersweet: I'll get to see families reunited, but it will be in the backdrop of a punishing and harmful environment.

Update 4: The most noteworthy experience I had with Ascend Justice these last two weeks was my trip to Logan Correctional Facility, the largest women's prison in Illinois. I participated in the Reunification Rides program, which provides a bus to take children and families from the Chicago area downstate to visit loved ones at Logan. I got to see families reunited and reconnecting, which was amazing. The program is designed to give families a more lax environment: the prison gym was set up so that incarcerated women could have unlimited physical contact with their loved ones and could wander and play games. We brought food to supplement the prison's lunch, and the strawberries and guacamole were a HUGE hit. I assisted by taking candid and staged photos of the families, which we will print out and send to the incarcerated women. It was a positive experience for all, but our departure was a reminder of the impact of family separation on the kids and incarcerated family members. The prison environment is inhumanely punishing, and our planned day was just a short respite from that. This experience motivated me to seek opportunities to assist those who are incarcerated and to do what I can to keep families out of the prison system altogether.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Update 5: I am so fortunate to have worked at Ascend Justice this summer. In my last few weeks, I was trusted to draft pro se advice letters to clients who Ascend could not represent directly. These letters allowed me to apply my analysis from reading 100+ page investigative files to propose arguments that the client could make at their hearing. I loved the creative nature of these projects, and they allowed me to hone my legal writing and client-facing skills. I was also able to attend my first DCFS indication appeal hearing. I was exposed to basic evidentiary principles, which I will be studying next semester in school. I hope to apply these concepts I learn to better understand what I observed this summer. Overall, I feel that I have grown as an advocate, and I have become deeply invested in an area of the law that was unfamiliar to me before. I am looking forward to returning to Ascend in the spring, when I will have my 711 license and can represent clients with supervision from an attorney. Thank you to EJA for making this experience possible!