



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Equip for Equality

Update 1: I have the privilege of returning to Equip for Equality as a 2024 Summer Intern thanks to the generous support of Equal Justice America.

I am honored to continue to develop my legal advocacy skills at Equip for Equality because I am constantly learning about the legal system across different areas of law. In addition, working at Equip for Equality means working with a supportive team of interns and staff that are all invested in your success and well-being. I am thrilled to be able to continue working with former clients, build onto research projects I worked on in the Spring, and for new clients and projects this summer.

Thanks to the continuous funding from EJA, I have been able to build up my knowledge of Special Education Law to provide trainings to different communities and other youth service providers. Most notably, I got to join my supervisor and deliver a plenary address at the Loyola-Cicero Community School Mental Health Partnership Summer Institute. At this event, my supervisor and I provided a training titled, "Understanding the Educational Rights of Recent Newcomers: Legal, Ethical, and Practice Considerations." During the presentation, I was able to incorporate my prior legal experience working with immigrations in immigration law, and my own lived experiences as an immigrant to discuss how to work with the newcomer migrant community in Chicago and the Chicagoland area.

Update 2: This past week, I had the opportunity to take lead of an Individual Education Program (IEP) eligibility meeting for a client I have been working with for several months. I was responsible for reviewing the client's evaluations, reviewing the draft IEP, and preparing suggestions that I would believe would improve the IEP of my client. Further, I also had to discuss the meeting with the client beforehand. What made this case unique was the client's



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preferred language is Spanish. As such, this case involved enforcing the legal rights afforded to English Language Learners while also those for students with disabilities.

The support I received from my supervisor was critical for me to feel confident to lead the meeting. One skill I was hoping to target and develop during this summer internship was my self-confidence in oral advocacy. Thanks to the preparation I received from my supervisor, I felt confident going into the meeting and overcame initial nerves once the meeting was underway.

Update 3: This past week I had the privilege to work on an assignment where I learned from constituents of the organization what they believed are the greatest needs for people with disabilities in the state of Illinois. By synthesizing data that constituents submitted via a conference call, surveys, and emails, I summarized the data for the organization to use in their priorities setting meeting. This process is what determines what the different departments within the organization allocate most of their resources towards. What was powerful about this assignment was hearing directly from impacted community members who spoke to issues that went beyond the work that I do within the Special Education Clinic.

Through this assignment, I learned there is a great need for allocating employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Reading direct testimonies that detailed how people got discriminated against when they applied for jobs magnified the extent that people with disabilities are seen as a liability in the workplace. Further, I also learned that there is a greater need for the government to provide benefits for children with disabilities.

Update 4: This past week, I visited one of my clients at the juvenile temporary detention center (JTDC). What prompted this visit was my client allegedly signed away their education rights when visited by staff at the JTDC. What confused me when I learned of this is the fact that my client is a minor, and he was asked whether he wants an IEP without a guardian or his attorneys present. This simply situation magnified the reason why there is a need for legal representation to be provided to all youth that are detained, and that they cannot be asked to sign anything without an attorney present.

Fortunately, upon meeting with my client, I was able to explain to him and clarify what the staff at JTDC had asked him to do. Upon understanding the impact of waiving his right to an IEP, he retracted on having signed the document and will want to proceed with finishing the IEP process.

It is frustrating to grasp that youth are still being taken advantage of for how easily they can be influenced, especially youth with disabilities. I am glad I was able to visit my client and course-correct this situation.



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Update 5: My experience at Equip for Equality (EFE) has been full of great opportunities to develop as a legal professional. From working with clients, providing community trainings, and engaging with a supportive team of attorneys, this internship was a tremendously rewarding experience.

One of the highlights to this summer was the opportunity to continue working on a case that I worked on in the fall of 2024. What was noteworthy of continuing this case was getting to support a client through the remaining steps of the special education process and finishing that process with them. While in the fall I conducted the intake and, in the spring, I supported the family through mediation, this summer, I advocated for the family through the evaluations, advocated to get the student an IEP, and secured a proper placement for the student. Not only was I pleased to be able to support the family, but I am also glad I got to work on an entire case from start to finish. This case helped me better understand the different roles and steps to getting a student with disabilities the proper school supports they need. It magnified the importance of building relationships and being collaborative with school teams, and being strategic with the approach one takes in legal advocacy to foster these relationships.

Beyond the skills I learned from my own casework, I also got to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues impacting people with disabilities. During one of my assignments, I got to read many testimonials of people with disabilities and what advocacy efforts they would like to see EFE work on. I consider myself privileged to have gotten to read their narratives, and to better understand the legal advocacy that is needed to improve the support provided to people with disabilities.

With the end of this internship, I am taking from it an appreciation for working directly with clients. It is really fulfilling to have been able to work with clients in their native language, and get to provide them support that will equip them to advocate for their children. My internship has solidified my commitment to seek a career in direct legal services, and hopefully, where I can continue to provide support to families and students in school.