



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## SUMMER 2024

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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**Update 1:** I cannot believe it is already week 3 of my internship with Education Law Center Philadelphia! The first two weeks have been packed with training, meeting the staff, and getting to know the other interns in the office. The office has been very welcoming and supporting us as we have transitioned into our summer positions. I have enjoyed getting to know the other interns, as the office makes it a point to do "fun Thursdays" to build a great community!

I am excited, I have already attended my first IEP meeting along with a supervising attorney and drafted a document to ensure the student receives compensatory education as the school has failed to provide the student with the necessary education.

The office has done a wonderful job of equipping us with the necessary training to be prepared for the summer. My favorite training so far has been about centering race in our fact sheet assignment. I found this training very useful as it is important to our office's mission to ensure we are properly representing underserved communities by including their perspective in the fact sheets for the public to read.

I have met with my mentor attorney already as she has assigned me projects to work on these past few weeks. This includes "right to know" research and carefully going through Right To Know appeals to ensure the office has all the documentation to look for practices that are harmful to students, especially, the disciplinary practices that are harming students of color

Very excited for the rest of the summer!

**Update 2:** Wow, this summer is flying by, I can't believe we are already at the end of June. I have already learned so much here at the Education Law Center-Pa. I have been working on a Factsheet to provide families regarding parents' rights when children transition from early intervention services into school-age program services. The Factsheets are important for ELC to



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empower families to be able to advocate for themselves and have the necessary resources and information to be able to know their rights.

I have continued to work on intakes where I get to have one on one client interactions. Through the intakes, I have learned about summary citations and how harmful they can be for students.

I have had the opportunity to work on compensatory demand letters which serves as a main remedy when a child is denied an education. I have found that writing comp. Ed letters has been a great learning experience as it has enhanced my writing abilities and also learning how to ensure students receive the necessary funds to make up for lost education.

Additionally, I toured a hospital to learn more about how students in psychiatric care are receiving an education. This was an eye-opening experience as I have never thought about student's education rights while being hospitalized. I learned that school districts are still required to provide students in inpatient care facilities with a proper education.

Excited for what comes next.

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**Update 3:** To believe that there is less than a month left at ELC is hard to believe. I have been working on awesome projects thus far. I have been writing compensatory demand letters, which are ways to ensure children are getting the necessary resources to make up for the loss of education. I have been surprised to learn how school districts still need to implement the required services for children, especially in early intervention settings, to ensure children are thriving and provided with adequate and equitable education. I have learned through my research while developing a factsheet that oftentimes times children who are transitioning from early intervention settings to a school program setting often lose the required services that they continue to need to make progress. The factsheet that I have developed for ELC will be a wonderful resource for families to ensure that children who are transitioning from early intervention to school programs have a smooth and effective transition.

Additionally, I am excited to begin a deep dive into how schools are failing to provide an adequate education for multilanguage students. This is a topic that I am especially interested in as my former experience as a teacher evidenced the lack of ESL programming for multilanguage students. Through this research, we can see the gaps and how the Equal Opportunity Act applies to students who are ELLs and ensure schools are appropriately programming to meet their needs.

I am excited for the next few weeks and sad that it will be coming to an end shortly!

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**Update 4:** As the last 2 weeks approach the conclusion of my fellowship, I have continued to gain the knowledge and experience to help me in my own pursuit of one day becoming an education law attorney. Through ELC I have conducted intakes, which allow us to provide direct services to clients needing support when navigating school issues. The intakes have been my favorite part of the summer because I get to interact directly with clients one-on-one and be a listening ear for what they need. Through the intakes I have learned about client's issues ranging



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from school discipline, obtaining compensatory funds, and unfair treatment within the school setting. It has been a rewarding experience being able to support clients by providing them with essential resources so they can self-advocate, learn, and resolve legal matters.

I have also been a part of the Right to Know process, which I learned to be something similar to a FOIA request. Through this, I have attended mediation and ensured school districts are providing the requested documentation we need to learn about the school's policies and practices. I have been combing through the documents and collecting data. I have learned from the data the realities Black and Brown students face, which are that they are being disproportionately excluded from the school setting either by suspension or expulsion. Hopefully, through the Right to Know process, ELC can support and contribute to guiding schools to amend their school policies to ensure Black and Brown students are not being pushed out of school, but instead remaining in school to receive an education.

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**Update 5:** I am shocked at how fast the summer flew; it was a remarkable summer at the Education Law Center in Philly. It was a great experience working with various attorneys here at ELC. I enjoyed making connections with the other interns and we all worked together and worked alongside each other throughout the summer. I believe one of the most shocking revelations that became apparent to me while working at ELC was children not receiving an education while they were placed in residential settings. This issue came to light while working at ELC as I never thought of this issue before. I enjoyed touring a residential hospital and seeing how the hospital is making best efforts to afford children an education while being placed at the hospital. This issue was novel for me, and it really opened my eyes to see how far education issues stretch and how kids, especially in foster care, need to continue to have advocacy to obtain an adequate education.

Another issue that came to light during my time with ELC was children not receiving services as they transitioned from preschool to kindergarten. Meaning, that once a child reached kindergarten their early intervention services did not continue. This meant kids were entering kindergarten without the necessary tools, resources, and supports to be successful. I learned about this issue through intake calls, doing comp ed letters, and working alongside another attorney.

I am truly grateful for my time at ELC and this opportunity was wonderful in supporting me to expand my knowledge on systemic educational issues students are facing.