



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024 EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Community Legal Services

Update 1: Today marks the end of week three as a legal intern with Community Legal Services in their Employment/Youth Justice Project unit. CLS's dedication to not only direct client work but broader systemic advocacy is one of the many reasons I was eager for an opportunity to intern here this summer. Within these first few weeks, I had the opportunity to see their systemic advocacy come to fruition. I observed oral argument pertaining to the Private Detectives Act, which creates lifetime barriers to employment in the security industry for individuals with criminal records, and we celebrated the implementation of PA's Clean Slate 3.0, which expands the eligibility for both automatic and by petition sealing and shortens the waiting period for sealing of certain convictions. CLS has played and continues to play a crucial role in eliminating barriers to employment, housing, and education for individuals across the Commonwealth and I feel lucky to spend my summer surrounded by so many talented and passionate advocates!

This week I also had the opportunity to draft expungement petitions for clients whose juvenile and adult criminal records have caused significant barriers to accessing employment and education opportunities. I will be attending an upcoming expungement clinic in the community, where we will work with people to identify if their record is eligible for sealing or expungement and connect them with CLS or other resources to proceed through the process.

I'm looking forward to the rest of my time with CLS! I'm grateful to Equal Justice America for supporting my work this summer and Rutgers Law School for the preparation and confidence necessary to have this wonderful opportunity!

Update 2: As my first month as a legal intern at Community Legal Services comes to a close, it's time for my second EJA Fellow update. I am continuing to learn so much not only about the function of employment law, but about how important advocacy in this sector is to fight the cycle of poverty.

This week I observed a CLS staff attorney represent clients in their record clearing fee waiver



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hearings. To provide some context, when an individual who is seeking a criminal record expungement has outstanding court costs on their case, such costs must be paid prior to moving forward with the expungement process. For many clients, these costs are a substantial barrier to seeking an expungement and often individuals who are pursuing this process are doing so to expand their access to higher paying employment opportunities. Therefore, this requirement has an inevitable impact on low-income communities by keeping them out of certain higher paying jobs of their choice. A fee waiver, which can be granted at the discretion of the judge, allows for the applicant to argue that he/she/they cannot afford to pay the outstanding fees and that their situation meets the statutory requirements (public assistance, has a disability, has dependents, etc.). Luckily, in these specific cases the waivers were granted with CLS's zealous advocacy!

These observations reaffirmed my belief that financial barriers should not limit one's ability to access quality legal assistance and I'm grateful to be spending my summer at an organization that works daily to deliver the quality legal services every individual deserves.

Update 3: This summer has been full of new opportunities for learning and growth! It's hard to believe that in just a few short weeks I will be wrapping up my summer with Community Legal Services. One of my favorite experiences this summer was visiting numerous North Philadelphia organizations with other legal services summer interns. The organizations, Project Home, Share Food Program, Las Parcelas Community Garden, Open Kitchen Sculpture Garden, and the Chinatown Clinic at the Church of the Holy Redeemer were gracious enough to invite us to learn about their history in Philadelphia serving different communities and any legal barriers that they face throughout their work.

Thank you to CLS for organizing such a wonderful day and the organizations for sharing your wisdom with us. This was an important reminder that being an effective lawyer is not always about mastering the intricacies within the law but about taking time to listen to and connect with the communities you serve.

Update 4: As I head into my final week as an intern with Community Legal Services, it's time for my fourth EJA Fellow update. Since my last update I have had the opportunity to assist with preparation for an employment discrimination and a wage theft case. These cases involved many new legal concepts and processes that I had not been exposed to during my first year of law school. I was involved in numerous client meetings and interviews to collect facts and documentation, reviewed and summarized the details of the clients' claims, and drafted demand letters to be sent to the employers involved. These cases have not only opened me up to a new area of the legal system but have allowed me to build my client interaction and legal writing skills in a new and engaging way. I'm extremely grateful for this 10-week experience and the support I've received from Community Legal Services and Equal Justice America.

Update 5: Throughout my 10-week experience as an intern with Community Legal Services, I gained invaluable knowledge about the intricacies of employment law and broadened my skills on how to effectively serve clients. I began my time at CLS with minimal knowledge about the systems that comprise employment law and just how many communities face barriers to fair and



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sustainable employment opportunities. This summer I assisted clients with various legal issues such as employment discrimination, wage theft, and criminal records clearing. My tasks included client interviewing, documentation review, drafting demand letters to employers, and drafting motions/petitions for expungement or sealing of criminal records. This summer was an incredible opportunity to dive into an area of law that was new to me while surrounded by a talented and passionate group of advocates. I'm inspired by the group of attorneys and paralegals that I interacted with this summer. Their drive and motivation to serve the community has reaffirmed to me all the reasons I feel so strongly about spending my future career as a public-interest attorney. As I enter my second year of law school next week, I feel rejuvenated and inspired by the work I was given the opportunity to experience this summer. This internship would not have been possible without the generous contribution from EJA and the guidance and support from CLS! Thank you both for making my public-interest goals attainable.