



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: This summer I have been given the exciting opportunity to intern at the American Gateways San Antonio office! The mission of the organization is to champion the dignity and human rights of immigrants, refugees and survivors of persecution, torture, conflict and human trafficking through exceptional immigration legal services at no or low cost. I am finishing up my second week at the office and I'm excited to have already learned so much during the beginning of my time here. So far, I have been able to gain insights into the processes of applying for asylum, permanent residency and naturalization, representing oneself before the San Antonio Immigration Court, and assisting with legal orientation and immigration workshops at the South Texas Detention Center in Pearsall, Texas. Given that those who are not citizens of the United States do not have a right to government-appointed counsel in immigration proceedings, this line of work is critical to helping ensure that everyone can receive a meaningful hearing and is well informed about the nature and status of their case. I am committed to expanding my knowledge and skills in the legal immigration field and look forward to the rest of my summer at American Gateways.

Update 2: I am grateful to share that I have had another engaging two weeks during my summer internship with American Gateways. It has been extremely eye-opening to see the complicated legal forms those in different stages of the immigration legal system are expected to understand and then complete. The complicated forms become increasingly difficult when individuals are required to fill out the forms in English, which is often not their native language. Therefore, it is incredibly important to provide translation and legal assistance in order to help individuals navigate and complete the forms accurately. Through American Gateways, I have been able to assist individuals with different forms including applications to renew a legal permanent resident card, a motion to reopen a case, motions to change one's address and venue, and applications for fee waivers in order to be exempted from filing fees. These experiences have highlighted the importance of ensuring that all individuals have access to the support necessary to successfully advocate for themselves at every stage of the legal immigration process. I have also been assisting individuals who are in the process of applying



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for asylum and have been gaining insight into the application process as well as the legal standards that must be met for a successful application. Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity to learn about the immigration legal system while also assisting those in need of different legal services.

Update 3: Hey y'all, I'm back with update #3/5. It's been another exciting two weeks at my summer internship with American Gateways. American Gateways recently hosted a TPS Clinic at our office in order to help others apply for Temporary Protected Status and Employment Authorization. Temporary Protected Status, otherwise known as TPS, establishes a Safe Haven in the United States for those who are nationals of a designated list of countries due to armed conflict, environmental disaster, an epidemic, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. During a designated period, individuals who are eligible for TPS are not removable from the United States and cannot be detained by DHS on the basis of his or her immigration status in the United States. While this type of protected status does not lead to permanent resident status, an individual can apply for employment authorization and travel authorization as a matter of discretion. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to assist in the workshop, where I gained valuable hands-on experience helping others submit their TPS applications. This included translating their responses while simultaneously filling out their paperwork and gathering all of their necessary personal documents to demonstrate a continuous physical presence in the United States since last July. Besides assisting during the workshop itself, I also had the opportunity to see the logistics that go into planning and organizing these free workshops. This involves reaching out to applicants to schedule their appointments, ensuring they will bring their necessary documentation, and finally confirming their attendance. While it takes a village to organize these workshops, I am thankful to contribute alongside a dedicated team that ensures each person we serve receives exceptional legal services.

Update 4: I have had another great two weeks at American Gateways, and this is some of what I've been working on.

I have had the great privilege of helping a community member fill out their application to apply for citizenship! This client is a long-time permanent resident who I had previously assisted in filling out their application to renew their green card, so assisting them in this next step was very exciting. Once my supervising attorney determined that the client was eligible to apply for citizenship, I scheduled an appointment with the client to fill out the application, otherwise known as the N-400. As I've mentioned before in a previous post, all legal forms submitted to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must be submitted in English, which can become another obstacle to overcome when it is not the applicant's native language. During the appointment, I asked the application questions in the client's native language and then recorded their responses in English. After filling out the application, my supervising attorney helped discuss next steps and what the client should expect in the future. After the forms are submitted, the next step is to have their biometric information taken by USCIS. We also spoke with them about what to expect in their future interview with USCIS, which includes questions about their application and background as well as a naturalization test and English and civics test. I am incredibly grateful to be able to assist in this life changing work at American Gateways and am sad the summer is quickly coming to a close.



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Update 5: I am sad my summer at American Gateways has come to an end, but I am incredibly grateful for my time here and all that I have learned about the immigration legal system.

American Gateways occasionally hosts an ICH Clinic, otherwise known as the Immigration Court Helpdesk in which those without legal representation and who are facing deportation proceedings are able to receive free legal assistance with certain aspects of their case. At these clinics, American Gateways provides a group legal orientation presentation with generalized information about one's rights and the structure of the immigration legal process. At the clinic I was able to assist with change of venue and change of address forms. If United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) does not have a respondent's correct address on file, it can be incredibly challenging if not impossible for that individual to know of any future court dates or possible updates about their case. If an individual misses their court date due to the court not having their correct address on file, they are then assumed to have taken a plea in absentia and an order for their deportation is put in place. Thus, it is vital that individuals in immigration proceedings have their correct address on file to ensure that they are aware of all of their court dates and possible status updates.

I have truly learned so much during my time at American Gateways this summer and am beyond grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow professionally and personally.