



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## SUMMER 2024

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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**Update 1:** I have had the pleasure of interning at HIAS PA's Youth Team for the past three weeks. Interning at HIAS PA has reinforced my passion for providing accessible legal services to migrants. Thus far, I have interpreted applications for asylum and juvenile visas, visited foster care shelters, and conducted client intakes. I have also been attending weekly virtual trainings hosted by various legal service organizations in Pennsylvania. These experiences have all reminded me of the importance of diversity and inclusion within the legal profession. I love having the opportunity to speak Spanish to clients and seeing the joy and comfort on their faces when they see someone who looks and talks like them walk into the room, especially through a process that can be so daunting and unknown. I also have the privilege of being an Equal Justice America Fellow. Equal Justice America is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting law students with the opportunity to work with organizations that deliver civil legal services to those most in need. Thanks to Equal Justice America for making civil legal aid internships more accessible to law students! I am excited to see how the rest of my internship goes!

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**Update 2:** I can't believe I am already halfway through my internship at HIAS Pennsylvania. I have had the pleasure of being able to visit the different foster shelters that unaccompanied minors get placed at in Pennsylvania and have gotten the opportunity to interact with some of the children there. It's so impactful to get the chance to talk with these children, some of whom have been in the United States for less than a week. I absolutely love having the opportunity to work with children and educate them about the immigration process. Having come to the United States as a child myself, I see a lot of myself in these children. I originally decided to go to law school because I wanted to help other immigrants. Knowing that I get to work every day and do exactly that is so fulfilling. Thank you so much Equal Justice America, for making civil legal aid internships more accessible to law students!



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**Update 3:** These last few weeks interning with HIAS Pennsylvania have flown by. I had the opportunity this week to interpret an asylum interview. The preparation and interview were emotionally and mentally draining for the client and me. Still, the reward of knowing we were one step closer to obtaining relief for a client who had been waiting for their interview for six years made it all worth it. It was interesting to learn the process of preparing for these interviews and witnessing how long the interview itself can be (almost four hours long!). Besides working with the youth team, I've also had the pleasure of working on the intake team, which handles incoming calls from potential clients seeking legal advice and support. The diversity of stories, backgrounds, and languages within these calls is overwhelming. I've heard a range of stories, from U.S. citizens seeking to petition for their family members to women fleeing domestic violence in their home countries. While we are unable to provide representation to every person who calls, everyone I have spoken to has been extremely grateful to at least have their story heard. With generous funding from Equal Justice America, I am grateful for the opportunity to support HIAS PA in this work.

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**Update 4:** I can't believe I am coming up on my last week at HIAS Pennsylvania. These past couple of weeks have flown by! I'm motivated each day by the possibility that my work could support immigration relief for children in my community. My work has stayed interesting and kept me busy. I have had ample opportunity to develop my skills working directly with clients. It's been interesting getting to speak with children from many different countries and hearing their individual stories of why they came to the United States. As I wrap up my time with HIAS Pennsylvania, I have been conducting client interviews to prepare declarations in support of their applications and spent countless minutes on calls explaining the immigration process and providing case updates. In addition to supporting clients in their immigration applications and learning more about immigration law, I also have had the benefit of attending weekly training sessions with staff and interns from a variety of Philadelphia area immigration organizations. These sessions have given me insight into the different areas of immigration law and given me exposure on the various immigration organizations in Philadelphia! All in all, I'm fortunate to have had this experience thanks to funding from Equal Justice America. Please consider donating to EJA.

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**Update 5:** For my last EJA Fellow update, I wanted to reflect on my time at HIAS PA.

In immigration matters, the disparity in outcomes between those who have legal representation and those who do not is tremendous. The majority of migrants are unaware of their legal rights and lack the financial means to afford legal representation. This forces them to navigate a complex legal system on their own, often in a language they do not understand. I am truly



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grateful to have had the opportunity to work for an organization that strives to provide free legal representation to these individuals.

While many of the clients I assisted will not receive decisions in their cases for several months or even years, I know that having an advocate who listens to their story and offers support makes the removal process less overwhelming. Over the past ten weeks, I've had the privilege of hearing the stories of migrants from all over the world while working alongside passionate, kind, and dedicated professionals. I hope to embody their work ethic, compassion, and knowledge as I continue working towards my future legal career.

I've learned a great deal about immigration law—not only through hands-on work but also through our weekly intern trainings. My work involved assisting with special immigrant juvenile status, asylum, and claims under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). It was deeply fulfilling to get to know my clients, understand how to best serve them, and apply my legal research and writing skills to support immigrants facing removal.

This summer has reaffirmed my passion for public interest work. I am proud of the contributions I made at HIAS Pennsylvania and am eager to apply the skills I've gained this summer while continuing to learn how to zealously advocate and fight for a just future for underrepresented groups. Thank you to Equal Justice America and HIAS Pennsylvania for your support this summer.

Please consider donating to Equal Justice America to support law students providing civil legal aid during the summer!