



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: Summer is flying by, and I wanted to share an update on my incredible experience as a summer law clerk at Maryland Legal Aid's Frederick office! These past few weeks have been eye-opening and rewarding as I've had the chance to work on a variety of important legal issues affecting our community.

I'm proud to be serving as a summer fellow with Equal Justice America, an organization dedicated to creating opportunities for law students to work with legal aid organizations. This fellowship has allowed me to contribute to vital legal services.

One of the most impactful projects I've been involved with is the Tenants' Right to Counsel Program. This program aims to provide legal representation to low-income tenants facing eviction, helping to level the playing field in housing disputes. I've assisted in working with the local housing authority and in court with same-day representation for those facing eviction, tenant holdover, and wrongful detainer.

I've also had the opportunity to participate in our office's expungement clinic and senior center outreach program. It's been incredibly fulfilling to help individuals clear their records and provide legal assistance to seniors with their estate planning.

As a general practice office, I'm constantly learning about different areas of law – from family law to consumer protection to public benefits. The attorneys here are passionate about their work and always willing to explain complex legal concepts or involve me in interesting cases. This experience has solidified my commitment to public interest law and shown me the vital role that legal aid organizations play in ensuring access to justice for all. I'm grateful for the mentorship I've received and the opportunity to contribute to such meaningful work.



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To help support Equal Justice America and maintain these valuable opportunities for future law students, I've set up a fundraising page. Your contribution, no matter how small, can make a big difference in providing legal services to those who need them most.

If you're interested in learning more about Maryland Legal Aid, Equal Justice America, or supporting my fundraising efforts, please don't hesitate to reach out. Together, we can help ensure that everyone has access to quality legal representation, regardless of their financial situation.

Looking forward to what the rest of the summer brings!

Update 2: As we move into the latter part of the summer, I wanted to reflect on some of the key lessons and insights I've gained from this experience:

1. The importance of accessibility: Working on the Tenants' Right to Counsel Program has highlighted how crucial it is to make legal representation accessible to all, especially in cases where basic needs like housing are at stake.
2. The power of community outreach: Participating in expungement clinics and senior center programs has shown me how legal aid can directly impact individuals' lives when we meet them where they are.
3. The value of versatility: Being exposed to various areas of law in a general practice office has emphasized the importance of adaptability and continuous learning in the legal profession.
4. The impact of mentorship: The guidance and support from experienced attorneys have been invaluable in shaping my understanding of public interest law and its practical applications.
5. The ongoing need for support: While we're making a difference, there's always more work to be done. The fundraising efforts for Equal Justice America are crucial for ensuring these opportunities continue for future law students and the communities they serve.

One particularly impactful case I worked on involved collaborating closely with one of our attorneys and the local housing authority to assist a client whose medical condition had affected their ability to work. Mrs. Johnson (name changed for privacy) had been relying on a rental assistance voucher, but her reduced income due to her medical situation put her at risk of losing her housing.

Working hands-on with Mrs. Johnson, I helped gather and organize her medical documentation and financial records. During several meetings, we explained the process and ensured she understood each step. Together with the supervising attorney, I advocated on her behalf to the housing authority, presenting a compelling case for readjusting her voucher to reflect her new circumstances.



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After weeks of persistent effort, we successfully secured a readjustment of Mrs. Johnson's voucher, ensuring she could maintain stable housing while focusing on her health. This hands-on experience reinforced my commitment to this field.

This case exemplified the critical intersection of health, housing, and legal advocacy. It highlighted the importance of treating each client with empathy and respect, and taking the time to understand their unique situation and needs. The experience has deepened my appreciation for the complexities of public benefits law and the vital role legal aid plays in navigating these systems for our clients.

This summer has solidified my commitment to ensuring access to justice for all. I'm grateful for the mentorship received and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully.

Update 3: As my summer clerkship with Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) enters its final weeks, I'm reflecting on the eye-opening experience I've had, particularly in expungements. This summer has deepened my understanding of how criminal records intersect with civil legal issues, creating complex barriers for many Marylanders.

Governor Wes Moore's recent pardon of about 200,000 marijuana charges highlighted a glaring injustice: while Maryland has legalized marijuana usage, countless individuals still bear the burden of past convictions. My work at MLA has shown me how these minor drug offenses create ripple effects, impacting people's ability to secure employment, housing, and education. The overlap between criminal and civil issues became increasingly clear as I assisted with expungement cases. A minor marijuana possession charge from years ago isn't just a mark on a criminal record - it's a barrier to renting an apartment, getting a job, or pursuing higher education. It's a civil legal issue disguised as a criminal one, perpetuating cycles of poverty and instability.

I've seen how a single charge can lead to a cascade of problems: loss of employment leading to eviction, leading to homelessness, and additional interactions with the criminal justice system. It's a vicious cycle that disproportionately affects low-income communities and people of color. Our work this summer extended beyond just filing expungement paperwork. We conducted outreach efforts, participated in expungement clinics, and collaborated with community organizations to spread awareness about the expungement process and the broader implications of criminal records.

One of the most striking realizations was the disconnect between current laws and past convictions. While Marylanders can now legally use marijuana, many still struggle with the



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consequences of old charges. This disparity underscores the urgent need for comprehensive expungement efforts and policy reforms.

As I prepare to enter my second year at the University of Baltimore School of Law, I take with me a deeper understanding of the complexities within our legal system and the critical importance of accessible legal aid. The work of organizations like MLA is crucial in addressing the intertwined nature of criminal and civil legal issues, particularly as we navigate changing laws and societal attitudes.

This summer has reinforced my commitment to public interest law and highlighted the ongoing need for advocacy, education, and reform in our justice system. As Maryland moves forward with marijuana legalization, it's crucial that we continue to address the lingering effects of past policies and work toward true justice and equity for all.

Update 4: I just completed my first trial with Maryland Legal Aid in landlord-tenant court, working under the Access to Counsel in Evictions (ACE) program and the Tenants' Right to Counsel Project (TRCP). As a student attorney under MD Business and Occupations Code 10-206(b)(2)(ii), this experience provided invaluable hands-on practice in courtroom procedures and advocacy.

In this case, we moved to dismiss based on a prematurely filed complaint. Preparing for this trial offered a practical opportunity to enhance my legal research skills and develop a compelling argument. More importantly, it served as a real-world test of my public speaking abilities in a formal legal setting.

Standing before the judge highlighted the importance of courtroom etiquette - from addressing the judge properly to presenting arguments concisely and respectfully. I practiced maintaining composure while responding to questions from the bench.

The successful outcome - our motion to dismiss was granted - was gratifying, but the true value was the learning process.

This trial also emphasized the importance of thorough preparation. The confidence that comes from deep familiarity with the case and relevant law is crucial for effective courtroom presentation.

I owe a huge thank you to the staff at the MLA Midwestern office. Their support in helping me prepare was invaluable. They took time to work with me on the relevant case law, statutes, and



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courtroom etiquette, ensuring I was well-equipped for this experience. Their guidance significantly contributed to my performance and the positive outcome of the case.

Working with Maryland Legal Aid through ACE and TRCP has provided a unique opportunity to apply classroom knowledge to real-world legal challenges. It reinforced the critical role of clear communication and professional conduct in legal advocacy.

As I continue my legal education, I will focus on further refining these essential skills. Each courtroom appearance is a chance to improve public speaking abilities and courtroom etiquette, which are fundamental to effective legal representation.

I look forward to more opportunities to hone these crucial professional skills while contributing to important work in housing rights access to counsel and working directly with our clients.

Update 5: As my Equal Justice America fellowship with Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) in Frederick comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on the incredible journey of the past few months. This experience has been nothing short of transformative, both professionally and personally. During my time at MLA, I've had the privilege of working alongside dedicated attorneys and staff who tirelessly advocate for those who often have nowhere else to turn. From assisting clients facing eviction to helping individuals navigate complex government benefit systems, every day brought new challenges and opportunities to make a real difference in people's lives. I've witnessed firsthand the critical role that legal aid organizations play in our communities. In a system where justice can sometimes feel out of reach for those without means, MLA stands as a beacon of hope, ensuring that everyone has access to quality legal representation regardless of their financial situation.

This fellowship has reinforced my commitment to public interest law and social justice. It has sharpened my legal skills, deepened my understanding of the issues facing low-income individuals and families, and strengthened my resolve to continue fighting for equal access to justice.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the attorneys, paralegals, and administrative staff of the MLA Frederick office. Your guidance, support, and mentorship have been invaluable to my growth as a future legal professional.

I'm also deeply thankful to the Law Career and Development Office at the University of Baltimore School of Law for their crucial role in helping me secure this summer position. A special thank you goes to Dean Billian of the LCDO for her unwavering support and guidance throughout this process.



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Of course, none of this would have been possible without the generous funding from Equal Justice America. Their commitment to supporting aspiring public interest lawyers like me is truly commendable and makes a significant impact in expanding access to justice.

As this chapter closes, I'm thrilled to announce that another is about to begin. I am deeply honored to share that I've been invited to return to Maryland Legal Aid this fall as a law clerk. In this role, I'll be focusing on the Tenants' Right to Counsel project, an initiative that aims to ensure legal representation for tenants facing eviction.

This opportunity to continue my work with MLA is both exciting and humbling. I look forward to building on the experiences and relationships I've formed during my fellowship, and to contributing to this vital project that has the potential to change lives and communities.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me on this journey. I'm excited for what lies ahead and remain committed to the pursuit of equal justice for all.