



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Criminal and Juvenile Justice Clinic of the University of Chicago

Update 1:

My first few weeks working at the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Clinic at the University of Chicago have affirmed how essential legal aid is to the betterment of individuals and their communities. Our clinic is dedicated to rectifying some of the most unjust outcomes created by this nation's criminal justice system. We work directly with clients and their families to reduce sentences and allow for opportunities for incarcerated individuals to rebuild their lives. We take pride in our purpose of zealously advocating for the interests of our clients who benefit directly from the aid provided to our clinic. In terms of my individual experience, I have worked over the past few weeks to familiarize myself with the current state of the law surrounding motions for compassionate release and reduction in sentencing. The clinic has allowed me to gain a greater fluency with this complex area of law and has exposed me to the importance of building strong relationships with clients and their families. The intersection of criminal law and family law provides a great basis for my experiential learning, and I am looking forward to attending several court proceedings and drafting motions throughout the remainder of the summer.

Update 2:

My participation in the work of the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Clinic has continued to be personally impactful. Over the last few weeks, we have had several court appearances and have continued to draft motions on behalf of our clients. We continue to advocate for a justice system that is less punitive and fairer for all people. In particular, I have enjoyed working with my colleagues on drafting letters of support for our clients. We have been working to reach out to our clients' family members to be able to present their cases with the support of their loved ones. This aspect of our work has shown me the importance of advocacy. As I have also noted in the court proceedings I witnessed, judges are very influenced by the amount of support available to a formerly incarcerated person. With the writing of these letters, we are able to take part in the effort to help our clients strengthen their familial relationships while furthering the possibility of their release. I am excited to continue this work in the remaining weeks of the summer.



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Update 3:

Our clinic has continued its work to advocate for our clients. Over the last few weeks, we have continued working on drafting motions and formulating strategies for oral arguments. Personally, I have emphasized taking on a greater role in our client-facing work, starting to send my own emails out to clients and taking part in other correspondence. I had the chance to talk on the phone with one of our clients for the first time and was able to begin to create a positive relationship with him. I intend to continue working in the clinic throughout my time in law school, so it is my hope that my relationships with these clients continue to develop. I also was able to learn more about the community-based organizations in the nearby area in some outings that our clinic has had recently. I was very inspired to find that our clinic works directly with reentry organizations to help our clients succeed. It is clear to me that our work in the clinic continues long after the legal fight is over. We are committed to ensuring that the process of reentry goes as smoothly as possible, and this is an essential initiative that we take. I am excited to continue this work as I close out my internship.

Update 4:

In the closing weeks of my time at the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Clinic, our team worked to file a motion for a defendant we had worked with throughout the summer. We finalized our motion for compassionate release and gathered letters of support, expert reports, and worked with our client to finalize his letter of support to be submitted to the judge. I am grateful to have had the chance to experience a case from the very first interview with a client to filing. I was proud of how each member of our team contributed our efforts to make this filing a reality. We will continue to monitor the government's response and will prepare to file additional motions in reply. Overall, this summer has been an exercise in understanding what it means to advocate for justice for others within a team environment. I will have the chance to continue my work with the clinic during the school year, where I look forward to continuing to build strong relationships with clients and my fellow students. As we await some legal rulings to be handed down in the 7th Circuit, we will remain committed to advocating for our clients in every way we can.

Update 5:

My final few days at the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Clinic allowed me to continue to strengthen my relationships with our clients. We worked to ensure that our clients are successfully navigating their journey to reconnect with their families. We are now beginning to work with a new client, preparing ourselves to make new arguments and to create relationships with another family. I will be extending my time in the clinic throughout the remaining two years of my law school career.

I had the chance to experience first-hand how the weight of a felony conviction can forever change a person's life. The very process of navigating the criminal justice system is extremely taxing. Offering support and guidance to someone in this process is one of the most essential roles that a lawyer can take on. So many individuals are simply in need of advocacy. I understood how meaningful it was for many of our clients just to have someone looking into



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their case so that they could have even the slightest chance at a more positive outcome. I take this role very seriously and look forward to having more opportunities to do this kind of work.

In all, I appreciate the diversity of the work I got to do this summer. From volunteer work to one-on-one conversations with clients to collaborative drafting sessions, I know these experiences will serve me very well as I embark upon my legal career. I have become more passionate about criminal justice reform and will continue to be an advocate for more equitable treatment in the system. I will carry the lessons from this summer into the next phase of my education and thank EJA for their support this summer. I now have a much better idea of what kind of lawyer I would like to become. I want to be an attorney who zealously advocates for people's best interests. I want to be a source of support for them not only in making legal arguments but also advocating for their opportunities to have access to education, employment, and other essential resources. My time in the clinic has inspired me to create a legal career that I fully believe in.