

Dan Ruben  
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Equal Justice America  
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Dear Dan,

This summer I interned at the Election Law Clinic (ELC) at Harvard Law School. ELC students have the opportunity to do hands-on litigation and advocacy work across a range of election law areas, with an initial focus on redistricting and vote suppression cases. During my summer at the Clinic, I got direct exposure to trial preparation, researching complex civil procedure questions, and doing voting rights advocacy work on a statewide level.

While voting rights work directly contributes to the strengthening of our, targeting voter suppression upholds civil liberties more broadly. The struggle for voting rights has been, and will continue to be, a struggle for racial justice. I got to be a part of this fight firsthand this summer by working on active litigation cases for Section 2 Voting Rights Claims. Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) states that you cannot implement voting rights procedures or policies that discriminate on the basis of race or color. Many of the cases I worked on were fighting against racial gerrymandering, with the main claim of the case being that due do the way voting districts are drawn up, minority communities are unable to get their preferred candidate of color into office, thereby diluting their vote. I had the opportunity to work on cases across a variety of jurisdictions, including within New York, Colorado, Louisiana, and California.

In addition to litigation work, I spent most of my summer doing advocacy work. Due to the state of our current federal VRA, many states have taken steps to ensure voting rights are codified on the state level by enacting a state VRA. I worked with a coalition of organizers from a variety of voting rights groups in Maine to create a list of provisions that could go into a Maine VRA. Engaging with people on the ground who have been working in voting rights, from tribal voting rights protections to youth voter access work, was one of the most fulfilling parts of my summer.

Overall, this summer I got to work with organizers, non-profits, and voters from minority populations – all of whom had the same goal: protecting voting rights and ensuring access to all for free and fair elections. My experiences working with our clients showed me that communities across the country are impacted when voters don't have complete access to vote. From federal elections to local school board elections, the lack of access to voting is one of the many ways that minority communities in this country are disenfranchised. Given the divisive nature of electoral politics today, it is essential to ensure that marginalized communities feel empowered to shape their own futures.

The relationships I formed and the subject matter expertise I gained this summer will carry forward with me throughout my legal career. I am incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for supporting my work this summer.

Zainab Dossaji, University of Michigan Law School