



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Alexandra Kurland
LAW SCHOOL	University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School
ORGANIZATION	Legal Aid at Work

Update 1: This summer, I am honored to be clerking at Legal Aid at Work, a nonprofit organization that provides pro bono legal services to low-income Californians facing employment law issues. Legal Aid at Work provides assistance on issues ranging from wage protection and unemployment insurance to workplace discrimination and paid family leave. Legal Aid at Work has been assisting working families for more than 100 years through direct services, litigation, policy advocacy, and education.

This summer, I will be working in the Gender Equity and LGBTQ Rights Program. The Program staffs two helplines, the Workplace Sexual Harassment Helpline and Central Valley Workers' Rights Project Helpline, where low-income workers can call in to receive legal information, advice, and resources tailored to their circumstances and needs. The Program also engages in individual representation, as well as impact litigation. In one recent case, Legal Aid at Work partnered with other organizations to file a lawsuit on behalf of LGBTQ+ veterans who were dishonorably discharged under the now-repealed, discriminatory Don't Ask, Don't Tell law. In another, Legal Aid at Work represented a female truckdriver who faced sexual assault and gender discrimination on the job.

Legal Aid at Work does not have the funds to pay their summer clerks. I was fortunate to be awarded a fellowship from Equal Justice America and funding from my law school so that I can afford to participate in the summer clerkship program. Without these funds, I would not have been able to accept this position.

I am immensely grateful for my EJA fellowship, and I look forward to continuing to provide updates as the summer unfolds.

Update 2: Happy Pride! This month, I am excited to share more of the amazing work being done by Legal Aid at Work to advance the rights of LGBTQ+ workers. A group of brave LGBTQ+ veterans who were dishonorably discharged under the now repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

are fighting to have their discharges systematically upgraded in a lawsuit brought by Legal Aid at Work, the Impact Fund, and King & Spalding. A dishonorable discharge can prevent veterans from re-enlisting, finding other employment, and obtaining veterans' benefits. Moreover, LGBTQ+ veterans are outed when they have to show their discharged papers to prove their veteran status in the process of, for example, buying a house. Additionally, the process of correcting the illegal dishonorable discharge is burdensome. Under the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy, more than 35,000 vets were dishonorably discharged from the military based on sexual orientation.

As reported on by Bloomberg Law and other news outlets, last Friday, the judge in the case denied the government's motion to dismiss the lawsuit. This news especially welcome during Pride Month, when so many LGBTQ+ people are celebrating the progress that has been made and fighting to demand justice and end the oppression of LGBTQ+ people.

Update 3: As a law clerk in Legal Aid at Work's Gender Equity and LGBTQ Rights Program, one of my main responsibilities has been staffing our Workplace Sexual Harassment Helpline. The Helpline is an amazing resource for low-income workers experiencing sexual harassment, gender and/or sexual orientation discrimination, and other forms of gender-based in the workplace. Callers receive legal advice tailored to their situation, information about their legal rights, and guidance on next steps they can take.

These calls are often challenging and emotionally heavy, requiring a trauma-informed approach to ensure that clients feel safe, supported, and affirmed as they share their stories. Time and time again, I am impressed by clients' strength and resilience in advocating for themselves and their fellow workers. We often refer clients to the California Civil Rights Department or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as filing a complaint with one of these agencies is typically the first step in getting justice for harassment or discrimination when the issue cannot be resolved within the workplace. I am grateful to be able to recommend Legal Aid at Work's Workplace Sexual Harassment Toolkit to clients, as this excellent resource provides detailed information that clients can refer back to as they navigate the agency filing process. From empathetic attorneys and staff to self-help resources like the Toolkit, Legal Aid at Work does a fantastic job of supporting survivors of sexual harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence in the workplace.

Update 4: I can't believe there are only two weeks left in my summer clerkship! My time at Legal Aid at Work has been so valuable. During my summer, I have not only had incredible opportunities to engage in meaningful work that makes a measurable difference in the lives of low-income people but have also gotten to participate in a number of excellent learning opportunities. For example, on Tuesday, my fellow clerks and I had the opportunity to attend a presentation hosted by ChangeLawyers on Mindfulness for Lawyers. The event explored how lawyers and legal advocates can use mindfulness practices to improve our well-being and resilience, fight implicit bias, and foster social change. The presentation included mindfulness exercises where we could put what we were learning into practice.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

The event was a great reminder of the importance of self-care in what can often be a high stress, emotionally draining profession. As a soon-to-be lawyer, I am so grateful that my chosen profession has begun to grow aware of the toll that our work can take on our well-being and to explore ways that we can address this individually and systemically. At Legal Aid at Work, I have felt fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn about practices such as mindfulness that will help me become a more resilient, capable, and thoughtful advocate.

Update 5: As my summer internship draws to a close, I have been reflecting on all of the incredible experiences that I have had during my time with Legal Aid at Work. As an aspiring legal aid attorney, I have felt so fortunate to have had so many opportunities to hone my direct services skills by assisting clients through Legal Aid at Work's Workplace Sexual Harassment Helpline and Renters' Rights Clinic. I also gained exposure to a wide range of legal advocacy skills that were completely new to me, including helping prepare for and participating in a mediation with the California Civil Rights Department and a conciliation with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Along the way, I have learned from and mentored by many sharp, compassionate, tenacious attorneys and advocates in Legal Aid at Work's Gender Equity and LGBTQ Rights Program and throughout the organization. And I have had the great joy of assisting low-income workers in California, my home state, as they fight to secure their workplace rights.

This summer has also opened my eyes to the wide range of challenges that persist for low-income workers, from the high legal standards that can prevent workers who have experienced harassment or discrimination from securing justice, to the understaffing and under-resourcing at many administrative agencies that forces workers to wait months or even years before they can recover their unpaid wages or have their harassment complaint investigated. For these reasons, I am so grateful for organizations like Legal Aid at Work that are able to both provide on-the-ground legal services and fight for systemic change through litigation and advocacy. As I enter into my last year of law school, I look forward to cheering on Legal Aid at Work as they continue to fight for worker justice, and I eagerly await the day when I will be able to join this fight as an attorney.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for the generous financial support that they have provided me this summer. Equal Justice America has made it possible for me and so many other students to get valuable experiences at and provide meaningful assistance to public interest legal organizations across the country as they pursue justice for low-income people and communities.