



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: As an Equal Justice America Fellow, I will be sharing some reflections on my summer internship experience with Education Law Center-PA!

I wanted to intern at ELC because of their stellar reputation in the youth-centered civil rights space. ELC’s dynamic model incorporates direct legal services, impact litigation, and policy advocacy on behalf of underserved public school children in Pennsylvania.

My first projects have included drafting demand letters to opposing counsel regarding students with disabilities who have likely been denied a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE), as well as letters of support for youth being subjected to exclusionary school discipline. I recently assisted in tracking anti-LGBTQ actions occurring at the school district level across Pennsylvania, such as anti-trans bathroom and sports policies, book bans, and refusing students’ preferred pronouns. I am also conducting and analyzing youth interviews for my mentor’s Equal Justice Works fellowship on “Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth” (AEDY) programs in Pennsylvania. Lastly, I am drafting a fact sheet on the 2024 Title IX amendments as they relate to pregnant and parenting students’ rights.

My work on each of these projects has been supported by fantastic training in every area of education law from ELC’s expert attorneys. ELC staff members’ kindness, abundant passion, and inclusion of interns whenever possible has made for a wonderful start to the summer. While these first few weeks have been a learning curve, I am finally connecting my K-12 experiences within a highly rural and under-resourced school district, years of work in education policy research, and 1L learnings to the law in practice.

In wrapping up my fourth week, I am most looking forward to supporting ELC’s efforts to



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dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. My commitment to abolitionist lawyering only deepens with each exposure to the juvenile justice and child welfare systems' harms.

Update 2: I am in disbelief that I only have four weeks left with ELC! Between my internship, completing research for Professor Dorothy Roberts, serving as an Associate Editor on The Regulatory Review, and finalizing applications for various 2L opportunities, this summer has flown by more quickly than expected.

Since my last update, I have completed two draft demand letters for students who are experiencing discrimination based on their disability status, alongside a letter of support for a child who is being unjustly funneled toward the criminal legal system. While supporting ELC's direct service efforts has been immensely fulfilling, speaking with caregivers about their children's negative educational experiences, whether surrounding disability discrimination, exclusionary school discipline, or other civil rights issues, is painful to process. Living in one of the world's wealthiest countries that boasts of "freedom" while so many human beings are intentionally prevented from living safe, fulfilling, and joyful lives is a reality that I refuse to accept. I feel more motivated than ever to pursue systemic legal reform that bolsters youth civil rights.

I look forward to completing the last weeks of my internship experience with ELC's fantastic staff and my wonderful co-interns!

Update 3: I have continued to enjoy my time with ELC and am embracing all that I've absorbed thus far. It's always a challenge to pick up a new skill, especially involving the issues of social justice that I'm so passionate about. Learning the language of the law and how to apply it is tricky, but I am committed to mastering the craft. I'm coming away from this summer internship with a new legal vocabulary regarding students' civil rights! In contemplating the language of the law, I've thought a lot about accessibility for underserved clients in civil legal aid. The job of a lawyer is not only to know the law and how it might apply to various factual circumstances, but also to convey such convoluted, exclusionary language to clients who have a diverse range of life experiences and educational backgrounds. Beyond communicating the law in a way that is meaningful to someone who might lack comparable education, public interest lawyers also have the task of active, empathetic listening – hearing a client's story and validating the struggles that brought them to you. It's truly been a joy to practice these skill sets with ELC this summer. I look forward to a public interest legal career rooted in compassionate advocacy!

Update 4: As my internship winds down and I reflect on my time with ELC, I am immensely grateful for the mentorship I have received from staff attorneys. They not only dedicated themselves to helping me improve my legal research, writing, and client-service skills, but they



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also consistently support each other in becoming more thoughtful, equitable advocates. We never achieve anything alone, and it is increasingly clear to me that public interest lawyering in particular requires much collaboration. Moreover, inherent to great advocacy is challenging the hyper individualism that plagues our society. I hope to mirror the collaborative efforts and intentional mentorship of ELC's staff going forward, both as a law student and as a future civil rights lawyer! Similarly, I am very grateful to have had such a kind and devoted group of co-interns to work alongside this summer. Each of my co-interns was ready and willing to share their personal tips, tricks, and learnings as we navigated new tasks together. It never felt competitive — only collegial. I will miss everyone I had the pleasure of meeting this summer and I certainly hope our paths cross again! During my final weeks, I am aiming to complete a large research task related to informed consent in the context of students waiving their due process rights within school discipline proceedings. Curbing exclusionary school discipline is a topic near and dear to me, and I look forward to better understanding the landscape of students' due process rights.

Update 5: My experience interning with ELC was nothing short of exceptional. I was able to work across all youth-centered issue areas that I am passionate about, from disability justice to supporting system-involved children. I learned so much about education law that was entirely foreign to me prior to this internship. I improved my legal research and writing skills while receiving constructive, substantive feedback from ELC attorneys. I became familiar with the lay of the land in terms of queer and transgender students' experiences across Pennsylvania, which, of course, differ radically by county. I grew comfortable fielding client intake calls, gathering crucial information from students' advocates in order to assess their legal issue(s) and present them with potential pathways forward.

I also witnessed how slowly litigation moves in comparison to how serious and immediate the needs of any given marginalized community are. This affirmed my belief that public interest lawyers are just one piece of the puzzle. We have a unique toolset with which to assist disenfranchised people in advocating for themselves. However, we are not saviors, nor do we create lasting change on our own. Public interest lawyers must work in tandem with community leaders, social workers, teachers, medical professionals, and other stakeholders to move the needle on issues of social injustice.

I could not have asked for a better 1L summer experience. I am grateful to every staff member at ELC for the essential work that they do, in addition to their thoughtful mentorship. I am also grateful to Equal Justice America for their gracious support as I entered the public interest legal field. It will be a summer to remember!