



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| NAME | Gabriel Murillo |
| LAW SCHOOL | University of Texas School of Law |
| ORGANIZATION | Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide |

Update 1: This summer, I was chosen as an Equal Justice America Fellow, where, with their support, I will be working at Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide (TRLA) over the summer.

TRLA is a legal aid organization dedicated to providing free civil legal assistance to communities along the Rio Grande and beyond. They help seasonal farm workers advocate for their rights and individuals in the community facing legal strife. Unlike criminal cases, there is no right to legal representation in civil cases, and many people go without legal assistance. Organizations like TRLA are key to ensuring more people have legal assistance when facing legal trouble, from unlawful termination to divorce proceedings to eviction. I am very excited to participate and assist in TRLA's work.

In my first two weeks at TRLA, I have had many hands-on experiences and learned so much. I have drafted causes of action and documents for discovery, among many other tasks. There have not been many moments when I have not been working on a project or assisting a client with their legal troubles. My time at TRLA has not been long, and I am excited about the work I will be doing over the summer.

Update 2: As I reach the one-month mark of my internship at Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide (TRLA), I continue gaining valuable experience and learning something new daily. I have been involved in many cases, from assisting individuals facing wrongful eviction to helping people transfer power of attorney to a relative. The variety demonstrates the diverse legal needs of individuals and the importance of organizations like TRLA.

I have really enjoyed the challenges of researching legal issues to help clients and navigating how to draft petitions and other documents I have never drafted before. It is rewarding to learn new things about the legal profession while helping people solve their often complex and dire legal issues. I also enjoy talking to the clients who come to TRLA for assistance and listening to their frequently heartbreaking and inspiring stories. People like having casual conversations, and



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

it's fun hearing about people's lives, stories, and families that often have nothing to do with the legal issue they came to us with.

I am excited to continue working at TRLA and look forward to whatever I will be doing next.

Update 3: I am now six weeks into my Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide clerkship, and time has been flying by. I still have not quite settled into the pattern of meeting clients, drafting documents, and doing legal research. This is because the work is so varied that I can never quite get comfortable, and I am enjoying it so far. As I continue the process of learning how to do research properly and draft documents, I am also learning more about and exploring Eagle Pass and the other people working in the office.

The staff at the office took me to a Pulga where I had the best elote I think I will ever have. They have also shown me all the different foods Eagle Pass offers, and the variety of flavors has been surprising. They also quickly took me across the border to Piedras, where many of the clients have family or where they work. The first few weeks were about learning more about the legal profession and what legal work looks like. It was about connecting with clients and trying to meet their needs. The past couple of weeks have been learning about Eagle Pass and the environment and city the clients live in.

Update 4: I only have two weeks left of my internship at Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide, and I have been reflecting on all that I have learned and experienced while I have been here. I think the most important thing I have learned and have had the most experiences with during my time at Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid is how to handle client interactions and interviews. I have learned over time how to get the information the attorneys need from the clients and how not to overpromise or give advice. As a paralegal, I am not allowed to give legal advice, but many people come into the office with pressing issues. Most people want immediate answers to know if there is a case or what next steps they can take while waiting. I am often unable to give those answers right away, and I have learned how to tell people just that. I have learned how to tell people what I can tell them while balancing that with what people want and need to hear.

Update 5: I have just finished my Texas Rio Grande Legal Aide (TRLA) internship. I will soon return to law school to begin my second year at the University of Texas School of Law. My time at TRLA has been a ton of fun and insightful. I had some of the best food during my stay here, and the people at TRLA's Eagle Pass office helped me navigate my first time with legal work. They guided me through client interactions and taught me how to manage expectations while still providing help properly. From figuring out where to start a research project to helping me navigate the drafting of documents, the Eagle Pass attorneys and staff guided me every step of the way. This allowed me to fully immerse myself in the work I was given and helping the clients receive the relief they need.

Seeing the results of my work was a gratifying experience. Watching a client leave the office being one step closer to having their problem solved or feeling heard for the first time in a while. It showed that the work that I am doing and planning on doing will positively impact people. Even when my work was not client-related, it was nice to take something off the



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

attorney's plate or research an item that could help further a case. In each of these instances, I could see the difference I was making, which made the experience extremely valuable.

Through this awesome experience, my legal education has taken on a greater meaning as I have seen many of the legal principles I learned in class in practice. For example, I worked on a case involving adverse possession, a concept I had just learned in my property class. I am excited to take this practical experience with me to law school. I believe it will add more depth to my classes and help me understand the practical implications of the legal principles I am learning in class. I will be taking all the lessons I have learned during this experience and applying them to school and my future career.