



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

SUMMER 2024

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Maryn Rolfson Taylor
LAW SCHOOL	The University of Texas School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Texas RioGrande Legal Aid and Kids In Need of Defense

Update 1: As I approach one month at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, it's due time for me to shout out my incredible team and the charity that makes my internship possible: Equal Justice America.

On the Asylum Defense Project, we work with asylum seekers in immigration detention. Limited access to healthy living conditions, medical care, and attorney communication are sobering issues that our clients face. Texas leads the nation in the number of ICE detainees at over 13,000 in 2024 - more than double the runner-up. (TRAC Immigration, May 13, 2024). I'm very grateful to encounter the realities of detention, and I hope that this experience makes me a more empathetic advocate.

I want to thank Allison Herre, Anna Roberson, Sandra Bernal, Caya Simonsen, and Kayla Walker for providing me with opportunities to draft motions, prepare appellate briefs, moot witnesses, observe hearings, and prepare evidence packets/applications. I'm struck by the attention and care that each client receives on this team. The ADP team seeks out legal challenges and pursues every outcome for their clients.

I'm immensely grateful to Equal Justice America for making this work possible. Their support for legal aid initiatives has allowed me to focus on standing up for vulnerable individuals.

Update 2: My internship at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid has come to a close! I want to express my gratitude to my amazing team, my law school The University of Texas School of Law, and to Equal Justice America for making this a fulfilling experience.

During my time with the Asylum Defense Project, I've had the opportunity to work with asylum seekers in immigration detention. I was moved by the stories of asylum seekers from across the world, including El Salvador, Venezuela, Iran, and Russia. Some highlights of my internship



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included attending individual merits asylum hearings and meeting with migrants at the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, TX.

A big thank you to the ADP team for giving me the chance to draft motions, prepare appellate briefs, moot witnesses, observe hearings, and prepare evidence packets/applications. The dedication and care that each client receives from this team are truly inspiring. The ADP team tackles legal challenges head-on and explores every possible outcome for their clients. I'm incredibly thankful to Equal Justice America for their support, which has enabled me to focus on advocating for vulnerable individuals.

Update 3: I'm grateful to be splitting my summer between two wonderful organizations. I've started my second internship at Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)'s Seattle office. I want to thank The University of Texas School of Law and Equal Justice America for helping make this opportunity possible.

KIND works with unaccompanied migrant children, helping them not only with their legal cases, but providing social services and specialized programs for subsets of youth across the globe. A common form of relief for these kiddos is called Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, which involves state court proceedings, immigration court proceedings, and immigration agency applications.

Huge shout out to my supervisor, Soledad Mendoza! She has advocated for me to have a plethora of experiences during my six weeks with KIND. I feel so comfortable in the office and excited to come to work every day, and in large part she is to thank for that. I also want to shout out Carly Sessions for introducing me to KIND as a 1L and mentoring me throughout law school.

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So far, I've enjoyed working on USCIS applications, researching asylum law, creating legal trainings, meeting with clients, and getting to know KIND's incredible network. I'm most excited to appear on behalf of a client in immigration court next week. This will be a first for me, and I'm grateful to have KIND's wonderful staff and resources to help me prepare.

Update 5: I am grateful to Equal Justice America for the generous grant that allowed me to spend this summer working with two remarkable organizations—Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) in Austin, Texas, and Kids In Need of Defense (KIND) in Seattle, Washington. These



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experiences were not only crucial in shaping my legal career but also had a significant personal impact on me.

At Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, I spent six weeks working on defensive asylum cases for detained asylum seekers. This internship allowed me to engage directly with clients facing imminent deportation and the harrowing reality of returning to dangerous conditions in their home countries. My work included drafting legal briefs and collaborating on immigration appeals, which deepened my understanding of the complexities involved in asylum law. The experience was intense and emotionally challenging, but it reinforced my commitment to advocating for migrant voices.

The following six weeks at Kids In Need of Defense in Seattle offered a different, yet equally important, perspective on immigration law. At KIND, I advocated for unaccompanied migrant children who had arrived in the United States without a parent or guardian. The work involved appearing in immigration court for a Master Calendar Hearing, conducting client interviews, and collaborating with social workers and other professionals to ensure the children's best interests were represented. It was particularly rewarding to see how legal advocacy could provide a sense of stability and hope for children who had experienced unimaginable hardship.

Both internships were invaluable in shaping my understanding of the legal system and the importance of compassionate advocacy. The support from Equal Justice America made it possible for me to pursue these opportunities without financial burden, and for that, I am truly grateful. These experiences have affirmed my dedication to public interest law and strengthened my resolve to continue fighting for justice for migrant populations.