



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Neighborhood Defender Services

Final Reflection:

This summer, I had the privilege of serving as a legal intern with Neighborhood Defender Services, an experience that has been both challenging and deeply affirming. It reinforced the reason I came to law school: to fight for people too often left navigating systems stacked against them. Through my Equal Justice America fellowship, I was able to support clients confronting police misconduct, housing instability, and employment discrimination. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work alongside tireless advocates and resilient clients, and this summer has only deepened my commitment to pursuing public interest law.

One of the highlights of my internship was participating in our weekly community legal intake, where I provided on-the-fly advice to clients under the supervision of an attorney. These sessions covered everything from small claims disputes to criminal record sealing, tenant rights, and catching up on late rent payments. It was a fast-paced and energizing space that taught me to listen deeply, ask the right questions, and trust the client's own expertise. I learned that many clients already have a strong understanding of their circumstances and what needs to happen next. A big part of being an effective advocate is affirming that knowledge, helping to sharpen it, and bringing out the tools they already possess to move forward.

Each case I touched gave me a deeper understanding of how profoundly the legal system affects people's daily lives. I worked on several police misconduct cases involving young clients targeted by the criminal justice system. For instance, in drafting a Notice of for a former youth defense client who had just turned 19, I reviewed interrogation room and body-worn camera footage from over a dozen officers. His case involved claims of false arrest, excessive force, emotional distress, and more. This work taught me how to translate a traumatic experience into



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a legal document that preserves a young person's right to seek justice—and the gravity of ensuring it's done thoroughly and compassionately.

Housing work was also a cornerstone of my internship. I assisted one a tenant facing a nonpayment case, by drafting potential defenses including financial hardship, partial payments, and his best efforts to work through the bureaucratic barriers issues that delayed his payments. I also helped draft and research legal defenses in housing court matters where we explored mental health defenses in a holdover proceeding. Working with these clients underscored the fragile line between housing stability and homelessness, and how legal advocacy can play a critical role in keeping families housed.

Employment matters further illustrated how legal burdens disproportionately fall on the most vulnerable. One of my most rewarding moments came in single mother's license case, where I helped draft opening and closing statements for a hearing before the Taxi & Limousine Commission. We were able to get her case dismissed by contextualizing a domestic incident from her past, explaining her clean record and personal growth. It was a powerful reminder that, with the right support, people can be more than their worst moments.

Perhaps the most memorable case was representing a grandfather and a long-time driver facing license suspension based on a recent arrest. I prepared him and his character witnesses for testimony, challenged the strength of the city's evidence, and delivered opening, motion-to-dismiss, and closing arguments at the hearing. I am one of the only law students I know that argued before a judge as a rising 2L. Following a favorable recommendation by the administrative law judge, I independently wrote a persuasive letter to the Commissioner, the final decisionmaker, clarifying the legal obligations to affirm the Judge's recommendation and lift the suspension. Seeing the case resolved in his favor after hours of research and collaboration was incredibly moving—and showed me how advocacy rooted in dignity and detail can change outcomes.

This internship confirmed that systemic change happens client by client. It also reminded me how critical legal aid is in leveling the playing field for those facing powerful institutions. I'm incredibly thankful to Equal Justice America for making this summer possible and for investing in students like me who are dedicated to public interest work.