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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Pursuing Justice Through Legal Aid: My Summer Internship with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

This summer I had the profound privilege of clerking with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA), an experience that both reaffirmed and deepened my commitment to serve my community through public interest law. This summer I was assigned to work with TRLA's Labor and Employment Group, a team of dedicated attorneys working on behalf of low-wage workers in southwest Texas who have experienced violations such as wage theft, retaliation, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Labor and employment law was what initially drew me to the legal profession, and returning to it in this capacity was deeply fulfilling.

Over the course of ten weeks, I learned how TRLA works every day to close the justice gap for low-income Texans. From shadowing attorneys during their day-to-day practice, to conducting legal research, to participating in community outreach, I developed both my practical legal skills and my broader understanding of what it means to advocate for economic justice. This clerkship not only shaped my professional goals but also reminded me of why I pursued a legal career in the first place.

One of the most powerful aspects of this summer's experience was its personal significance. A few years ago, before law school, I encountered the work of TRLA and the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ) when they filed a lawsuit against a farm in Mississippi participating in the H-2A visa program. The lawsuit alleged that the farm had hired foreign workers at higher wages, while simultaneously displacing and underpaying local Black farmworkers who had worked the land for generations.



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This was the moment I realized that lawyers could challenge systemic injustice through courageous and strategic advocacy. The attorneys involved, including those from TRLA's Southern Migrant Legal Services, showed me that the law could be a powerful vehicle for economic and racial justice. That moment set me on the path to law school. Clerking for the very organization that inspired me to pursue this profession felt as though I came full circle in my journey. The attorneys I worked with this summer inspire me with their dedication, humility, and fierce advocacy.

In the first several weeks of my clerkship, I immersed myself in the legal process by shadowing client conversations, attending hearings, and listening in on external strategy calls. These opportunities provided me with a front-row seat to observe how experienced advocates engage clients, craft legal arguments, and make strategic decisions under pressure. I also contributed by conducting legal research on a broad range of topics and drafting motions, learning to think critically, and communicate clearly through writing. Through these experiences, I gained technical skills and, more importantly, a more nuanced understanding of how labor law directly affects individuals' lives and livelihoods.

TRLA's work is rooted in the belief that access to justice should not depend on income, and I witnessed that principle in action every day. Legal aid is not just about resolving disputes; it is about increasing stability, dignity, and the ability for individuals to access their rights under the law in a community. Seeing how the law can be used as a tool for empowerment and protection has reinforced my commitment to using my legal education in service of equity and fairness.

Although my primary focus was labor and employment, TRLA encourages clerks to explore other areas of law as part of its holistic approach to advocacy. One particularly memorable experience was observing a housing mediation session with TRLA's Housing Group. This process, where both parties work with a neutral mediator to reach a resolution, underscored the value of preparation, negotiation, and creative problem-solving.

The housing attorneys approached mediation with preparation: researching relevant case law, developing persuasive arguments, and identifying practical solutions that would best serve their client. In this case, the client was at risk of losing their home, and the TRLA team's efforts exemplified how legal aid can prevent devastating outcomes for vulnerable individuals. Through this observation, I saw the interconnectedness of economic justice across different legal issues, from the workplace to housing, and gained a greater appreciation for the breadth of TRLA's impact.

Another highlight of my internship was participating in community outreach efforts in South Texas. During one week, I joined the TRLA team at La Union Del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) to distribute materials about TRLA's services and answer community members' questions. Later in



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the week, we attended a lotería hosted by the Raymondville Family Crisis Center, where we engaged attendees in conversations about workers' rights in Texas.

These events were more than just informational sessions, but a chance to meet people where they are. For me, these moments illustrated that legal work doesn't only happen in courtrooms or law offices but also on the ground, in conversations, and in collective efforts to inform and empower.

None of these experiences would have been possible without the support of the Texas Access to Justice Commission, Baylor University School of Law, and Equal Justice America. Their commitment to supporting public interest law and funding summer fellowships makes a real difference in ensuring that future attorneys can explore careers in legal aid and public service.

As I move forward in my legal education, I will carry with me the lessons I learned at TRLA. The most important lesson this summer was not about legal research or motion drafting, but about what it means to serve your community with compassion, integrity, and purpose. I've seen how the law can be used to protect workers' rights, preserve housing stability, and build stronger, more just communities. And I've seen how committed advocates can make that vision a reality, one client at a time.

This summer has been a reaffirmation of my purpose and a reminder that the law, when used wisely and ethically, can be a powerful force for good.