



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Maya Avelino
LAW SCHOOL	Fordham University School of Law
ORGANIZATION	American Friends Service Committee

Final Reflection: This summer I worked with the Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative at the American Friends Service Committee in New Jersey, representing clients in ICE detention. My commitment to immigrant rights work comes from a deep belief in unconditional love and dignity for all, or what Quakers call seeing the Light in everyone. I'm grateful I had the chance to support attorneys fighting to free people from detention and to learn what values-driven lawyering really looks like in practice.

Over the course of the summer, I supported two asylum cases from start to finish: meeting with detained clients, drafting witness statements, and conducting legal research to support their claims. I also had the opportunity to represent a client at their bond hearing. Preparing required not only legal research and writing, but also emotional preparation—for myself, my client, and their family. Even when last-minute motions and delays got in the way, I learned to grieve the setbacks and then return to the work with determination.

There were victories, too. One client's pending charge was dropped and expunged, a small but meaningful step that opened a path towards freedom. I also saw the incredible generosity of bond funds, who mobilize in minutes to post bond for detained clients. These moments reminded me of both the fragility and the resilience of justice in practice.

This summer taught me that immigrant defense isn't just about one case or one hearing. It's about showing up for clients as whole people and holding space for their humanity. I admire the attorneys at AFSC for modeling collaborative, holistic lawyering, and I am grateful to the Stein Scholars Program in Public Interest Law & Ethics -Fordham Law and to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible.

Today is also my first day of classes. As I start my 2L year, I'm carrying with me sharper legal writing, more confidence in my advocacy, and resilience I didn't have before this summer.