



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Yulisa Ortiz
LAW SCHOOL	Fordham Law
ORGANIZATION	Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services

Final Reflection:

This summer, I had the privilege of serving as a legal intern with the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services in Chicago, where I immersed myself in meaningful, hands-on work within the field of immigration law. The experience was both professionally formative and personally fulfilling, as it allowed me to develop legal skills while also reconnecting with the community that shaped me.

My responsibilities throughout the internship were varied and impactful, shaped by the immediate needs of my supervising attorney and the clients we served. I attended immigration walk-in clinics, drafted USCIS forms, corresponded with clients, sent supplement requests to police stations, conducted intake interviews, and attended immigration court hearings. Each of these tasks taught me how to navigate sensitive, client-centered situations with care, precision, and professionalism. I was given real responsibility and felt like an integral part of the team, which strengthened my confidence and solidified my interest in pursuing a career in public interest law.

In addition to daily assignments, I also had the opportunity to take part in enriching educational events. I attended "lunch and learn" sessions hosted at the downtown Chicago office, which exposed me to a wide range of legal topics and provided practical guidance for building a career in law. I also joined intake meetings with the Immigrant Rights and Social Justice Clinic, where I observed attorneys and advocates working collaboratively to address the diverse and complex legal issues affecting immigrant communities. These experiences provided important context for my work and helped me see how individual efforts fit into the larger mission of legal advocacy and community empowerment.

At the beginning of the summer, I set clear goals for myself: to gain practical experience in immigration law, improve my communication and client-interaction skills, and better



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

understand how legal aid organizations operate. I am proud to say that I not only achieved these goals but surpassed them. I grew more confident with each assignment and began challenging myself to go beyond the tasks at hand, asking deeper questions, taking initiative, and reflecting more critically on my role as an advocate in training. I discovered that the most powerful lessons came not only from mastering legal processes but also from learning how to listen deeply to clients and understand their stories.

One of the most unique aspects of this experience was how different it felt from law school's classroom-based learning. While doctrinal courses tend to focus on abstract theories and appellate cases, my internship was centered on people and their immediate needs. I learned by doing, receiving direct mentorship and individualized feedback from my supervisor, who guided me through complex tasks while encouraging my professional growth. This mentorship, combined with the responsibility I was entrusted with, made the internship an invaluable experience.

On a personal level, this internship allowed me to reconnect with my Chicago community in a meaningful way. Working directly with clients reminded me why I came to law school in the first place: to use my skills in service of others, particularly those who face systemic barriers to justice. Many of the clients we served reminded me of my own family, neighbors, and community members, which made the work feel especially significant. I left each day feeling proud to contribute to an organization that provides dignity and support to individuals during some of the most challenging moments of their lives.

As a first-generation law student, opportunities like this are especially important to me. The Equal Justice America Fellowship made it possible for me to pursue this position without the heavy financial burden that often limits students' ability to accept public interest internships. Without this support, I would not have been able to dedicate my summer fully to public service. For that, I am deeply grateful. This fellowship is not only an investment in my education and career, it is an investment in the communities I aim to serve throughout my legal career.

This summer reaffirmed my passion for public interest law and strengthened my commitment to pursuing a career dedicated to advocacy and access to justice. The need for committed immigration lawyers is urgent and ongoing, and I feel prepared and motivated to meet that need. I leave this internship with greater clarity, confidence, and conviction in my path forward, and I am thankful to Equal Justice America for making this dream a reality.