



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Mariam Hassan
LAW SCHOOL	Northeastern University
ORGANIZATION	Prisoners' Legal Services

Final Reflection:

During my internship with Prisoners' Legal Services (PLS), I had the privilege of engaging directly with clients whose experiences illuminated the profound challenges faced by incarcerated individuals. My work primarily focused on medical advocacy, documenting brutality, and analyzing the use of surveillance within correctional facilities. Each day, I navigated a balance between the technical demands of legal work and the human dimension of supporting clients through deeply personal and often traumatic experiences.

A significant portion of my work involved medical advocacy. I met with clients, reviewed their medical records, and, when necessary, spoke with physicians to ensure that the medical needs of clients were accurately represented and addressed. This work was not only legally critical but deeply human. For many of these clients who have spent decades in jail, they start to lose sense of their humanity, almost internalizing the neglect and abuse they face as a representation of their worth. Helping clients gain access to the care they deserve and ensuring that their health conditions were properly documented in their cases was a way of re-empowering them. Each medical record, consultation, and note became a tool to advocate for the dignity and well-being of the people I worked with.

Alongside medical advocacy, I sat in on brutality intakes, documenting firsthand accounts of mistreatment or excessive force. This sometimes involved screening the DOC footage, which requires attentiveness, empathy, and a careful balance of realism (is the case worth PLS taking given the limited resources we have or are there other ways that would lead to the same advocacy?). I also authored a memo analyzing how correctional officers use such footage, and the constitutional right of incarcerated individuals to the footage, which is instrumental for legal strategy.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

One of the most profound aspects of this work was the emotional labor involved. Supporting clients who have endured trauma, violence, and systemic neglect requires both empathy and focus. I found myself constantly balancing the immediate emotional needs of clients with the practical necessity of moving cases forward, helping clients tell their stories while recentering the conversation on actionable next steps. This balance is delicate, as the emotional intensity of these interactions can create secondary trauma, the effects of which often surface only after stepping away from the work. Processing these experiences thoughtfully became an essential part of sustaining my engagement and ensuring that I could continue advocating effectively.

Through this internship, I gained not only practical skills in client advocacy, research, and documentation but also a deeper understanding of the resilience and patience required to serve vulnerable populations. I learned how to listen with care, analyze complex medical and legal information, and navigate the emotional challenges inherent in public interest work. The experience reinforced my commitment to advocating for incarcerated individuals, particularly in cases where their medical needs, safety, and human rights intersect with the law.

Overall, my time at PLS was transformative. I was able to contribute meaningfully to the organization's mission while gaining insight into both the technical and human dimensions of legal advocacy. This work affirmed the importance of centering clients' experiences, maintaining empathy while focusing on actionable outcomes, and continually reflecting on the emotional and ethical responsibilities of public interest law.