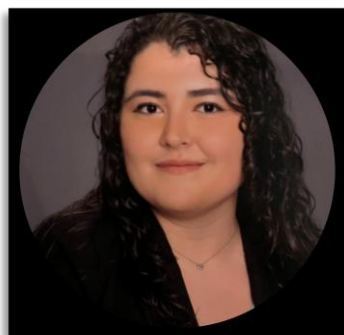




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Final Reflection:

End of my Internship at Rutgers Law's Immigrant Rights Clinic!

I'm thrilled to share that I've just completed my 10-week-long internship with the Rutgers Law School Immigrant Rights Clinic in Newark, NJ! I was explicitly part of the Detention and Deportation Defense Initiative, a crucial, state-funded program providing free legal representation to New Jersey residents and immigrants facing removal proceedings.

In this reflection, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Leena Khandwhala, for her exceptional guidance during my internship. Leena played a crucial role in building my self-confidence, providing constructive and insightful criticism, and assigning me projects that aligned with the interests we discussed in our initial meeting.

While my time serving this vulnerable community was incredibly rewarding, it also gave me a profound understanding of the urgent need for legal reforms in our immigration policies. We need lawmakers who have firsthand experience with the desperation that drives people to leave everything behind for a more promising future.

While interning at this clinic, I was able to meet various clients who are currently detained, including a young man who had been arrested at the age of 17. He has been detained now for 5 months, and because of this detention, he was unable to graduate from high school, pursue his dreams of obtaining a bachelor's degree, see his family members, and access the psychological treatment he needs. As the weeks passed, I witnessed how his hope of leaving the detention center slowly died in his eyes and how his mental health deteriorated.



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This experience highlighted how we often take fundamental liberties for granted, such as the freedom to seek better employment, to walk without fear of separation from loved ones, and to access essential medical care. While most of us enter courtrooms without fear, these immigrants live in a constant state of anxiety, afraid of not being able to make a single mistake. They live their lives avoiding confrontation, making them more vulnerable to all types of abuses, such as human trafficking or abuse in the workplace.

Although our asylum system is indeed overwhelmed with millions of pending asylum cases that are backlogged, instead of hiring more judges to resolve these cases, our current administration proposed adjudicating asylum cases, meaning denying applications without a proper hearing. This violates our 5th amendment right to due process, the Immigration and Nationality Act, and binding precedent. Our current administration has also drastically increased the fees needed to apply for different immigration reliefs, making it impossible for many to seek the relief they may be entitled to. Previously, a new asylum application was free to file; now it costs \$1,000. Once detained, immigrants are uncertain when they will be allowed to leave these facilities, as bond is being denied much more now than ever before.

For low-income community members, seeking justice has become an impossible challenge with deadlines coming up quicker and fees becoming more expensive. This experience confirmed my belief that our immigration policies are not about making immigrants conform to the law, but about keeping them vulnerable so that they can continue to be exploited and ripped away from their humanity. All I ask is that you all continue to fight for justice in the public sector and provide legal aid to those who cannot afford it. My biggest takeaway from this internship is that I cannot solve these issues alone. To transform our political system and laws, people with my firsthand experience must continue to enter spaces where vital decisions are being made about our society. We have the privilege to pursue a JD; thus, I ask that you consider using it to advocate for the voices that are being silenced.