



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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| NAME | Baird Johnson |
| LAW SCHOOL | Stanford Law School |
| ORGANIZATION | Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project |

Final Reflection:

Freeing the innocent from prison is something anyone can get behind. It is difficult to imagine a more significant personal injustice than false imprisonment, and the work to correct this error is both essential and appreciated. The headlines write themselves.

Less valued, but no less essential, is the protection of prisoners' civil rights whether they were correctly convicted or not. "Prison Doctor Forced to Make Referral to Outside Specialist" just doesn't have the same ring to it. To someone suffering from severe physical or mental ailments, however, receiving proper medical care is of paramount importance. As is the ability to report sexual assaults without fear of retaliatory placement in solitary confinement, receive injury-preventing accommodations for disabilities, and avoid punishment for symptoms of mental illness. I am delighted to report that I spent the summer helping secure these rights, and I am immensely grateful to the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project, Equal Justice America, and Stanford Law School for making this possible.

My internship with PILP was everything I hoped for. While I long for a world where there is no need to fight for the basic constitutional rights of incarcerated people, I was honored to play a small role in alleviating the unacceptable conditions in our prisons. I cannot think of a more rewarding way to learn the practical realities of law which elude classroom instruction. These experiences cannot be overstated. PILP allowed me my first-ever interactions with clients—both in conversations determining whether or not we would take on a case (we did) and following successful case outcomes.

Perhaps most importantly, I was able to integrate the factual record into legal research and argument. In law school, facts appear in one of two ways: somewhat ridiculous chains of events which manage to test understanding of an entire subject area on an exam and carefully curated documents to facilitate short legal writing assignments. Actual litigation, however, almost always turns on often unwieldy records developed through discovery. I was able to spend weeks



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drafting an enormous brief replete with references to a record thousands of pages long, including expert reports, deposition transcripts, documents obtained from defendants during discovery, and prison grievances. This experience is invaluable; so is sitting in on depositions, participating in meetings about joint projects with other public interest organizations and law firms, discussing strategy for reply briefs, and listening to my supervisor resolve discovery disputes with opposing counsel on calls with the judge.

Beyond this crucial logistical experience, my internship also allowed me to learn a great deal about substantive law. I plan a career in constitutional law, and I was able to research and write about litigation regarding the First, Fourth, Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments. Civil Procedure was my favorite course in law school, and I helped with a reply brief about the summary judgement standard, responses to motions to dismiss, and I drafted a brief in support of class certification. I struggle to imagine a better fit with my interests and goals or a more rewarding way to spend my 1L summer. Thank you all for your support.