



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Zoë Fleishaker
LAW SCHOOL	University of Chicago Law School
ORGANIZATION	The Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic - Exoneration Project Clinic

Final Reflection:

This past summer, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work at the Exoneration Project through my school's summer clinic. I would not have been able to pursue this opportunity without the support of Equal Justice America, and I am so grateful to have had the organization's support in doing so.

During my time with the Exoneration Project, I worked on several cases at the postconviction litigation stage. Exoneration Project takes cases involving individuals claiming actual innocence, many of whom have spent decades incarcerated for crimes that they did not commit. I spent a good amount of my time conducting intake, which entailed reviewing letters from clients, identifying possible constitutional claims, and assessing the legal and factual bases for postconviction relief. The intake I spent the most time on involved Brady violations, an actual innocence claim, and a pattern and practice of police misconduct, all of which warranted further investigation by the Exoneration Project.

One of the most impactful cases I worked on involved a client whose post-indictment confession had been improperly elicited by a jailhouse informant without counsel present. My research focused on whether a Sixth Amendment violation of this kind would require a showing of prejudice for our client to be entitled to a new trial. This legal question, though seemingly narrow, carried profound implications for our client's ability to secure relief. I also helped build out an evidentiary analysis of the informant's broader involvement in similar cases from around the same time. Through that work, I uncovered key evidence of prosecutorial and law enforcement misconduct, shedding light on new patterns of behavior that undeniably tainted our client's conviction. Toward the end of the summer, I also began drafting a motion for



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fingerprint and DNA testing in a separate case involving a car robbery—it was truly meaningful to be able to further develop my research and writing skills through real-life, impactful, client-focused experiences like these.

Working alongside Exoneration Project attorneys and support staff alike, this summer was enriching in ways I cannot put into words. Both personally and professionally, my time at Exoneration Project was transformative. It pushed me to think critically about evidence, ethical responsibility, and my role in the legal system more broadly. Most importantly, it only strengthened my commitment to a career in public interest law; I'm excited to share that this experience reaffirmed my passion for working to better the lives of criminal defendants, and that I've accepted a position with Brooklyn Defender Services for the upcoming summer.

In providing me with additional financial support over the past summer, Equal Justice America truly made a difference in shaping my career path toward this kind of work. I am profoundly grateful to have had your support, and to have had the opportunity to contribute to this critical work in the ways that I did.