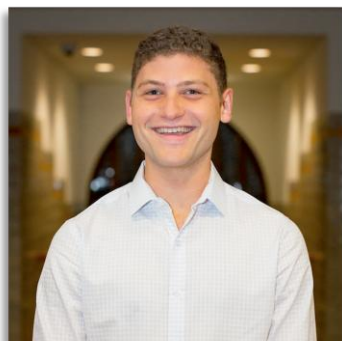




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Gabe Dell
LAW SCHOOL	University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School
ORGANIZATION	Community Legal Services

Final Reflection: This summer, I interned with Community Legal Services in Philadelphia, where I supported low-income clients in navigating consumer protection and debt collection issues. I was placed with the Homeownership and Consumer Rights Unit, a team that uses legal advocacy to push back against predatory practices and provide stability to clients facing financial hardship.

Debt collection lawsuits are one of the most common types of civil legal actions in the country, yet most defendants don't have a lawyer. There is generally no guaranteed right to counsel in civil cases even when the consequences can be life-altering. Many people facing these lawsuits never receive proper notice, don't understand what's happening, or feel powerless to respond. The process is high-volume, often opaque, and can feel more like a factory line than a forum for justice.

That's where scrappy legal aid attorneys come in. Over the summer, I saw how civil legal aid can disrupt this churn by challenging improper service, demanding proof of the debt, and making sure clients know their rights. CLS attorneys not only defend clients in court but also help them make sense of a confusing system, avoid default judgments, negotiate payment plans, or seek relief through bankruptcy. These interventions may seem small, but they often determine whether someone keeps their income, avoids a judgment, or prevents long-term financial harm.

Beyond legal outcomes, civil legal aid also plays a critical role in restoring trust. Many clients come in skeptical. They've been ignored, misled, or taken advantage of by institutions that promised to help. Legal aid attorneys work to change that narrative by showing up, listening with care, and fighting for their clients' rights. That kind of support can be transformative, both legally and personally.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible and for continuing to support the next generation of public interest lawyers. Please consider supporting EJA so that more students like me can stand with clients facing life-altering legal issues.