



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Sharon Du
LAW SCHOOL	Yale Law School
ORGANIZATION	ALCU of Southern California

Final Reflection:

I am writing to share about my summer fellowship experience, which I undertook with ACLU of Southern California's houselessness and economic justice litigation team. I am deeply grateful to Equal Justice America for making this work possible. Over the summer, I had the opportunity to work directly with clients, support litigation, and engage in advocacy that sought to defend the dignity and rights of unhoused Californians.

Much of my time was devoted to *Tyson v. City of San Bernardino*, a case challenging the City's policies and practices of conducting encampment sweeps that violate the rights of unhoused residents. Although the case has formally settled, the City has repeatedly failed to comply with the terms of the agreement, and we are now in the midst of enforcement. I helped collect declarations from clients whose property continues to be destroyed during sweeps – medications, mobility aids, work tools and irreplaceable sentimental items. One man, Guy Miller, described losing his cane and bicycle, and having to walk miles unaided to return to his camp. Another client, Amanda Schillero, described the devastation of losing her mother's ashes when her tent was thrown into a compactor truck. Listening to these stories and drafting declarations underscored for me both the cruelty of these practices and the resilience of the people subjected to them. What has stayed with me most is that many clients still expect – and hope – for law enforcement to treat them fairly, even in the face of repeated violations. This work reaffirmed for me that fighting for basic accountability and humane treatment is not just urgent, but a calling I can dedicate my career to.

I also worked on *Utzman v. County of Orange*, a class action challenging unlawful arrests and abusive conditions in emergency shelters. The plaintiffs – Cyndi Utzman, Deborah Kraft, Wendy Powitzky, and others – have courageously come forward to challenge policies that criminalize



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

people for declining to enter shelters, while those very shelters expose residents to sexual harassment, invasive strip searches, unhealthy living conditions, and arbitrary punishment. It was eye-opening to see how litigation resources from a large firm could expand our capacity, and equally inspiring to witness clients speak up despite enormous personal risk.

Beyond litigation, I had the opportunity to contribute to broader advocacy efforts. I helped draft budget advocacy letters to the City of Bakersfield, urging investment in permanent housing solutions, rental protections, and eviction-prevention programs, rather than temporary congregate shelters. I also worked on evidence preservation letters to protect records of encampment removals in Bakersfield, and assisted in editing Know Your Rights materials for unhoused residents in Los Angeles County. In addition, I researched organizational standing doctrine after the Ninth Circuit's en banc decision in *Arizona Alliance for Retired Americans v. Mayes*, analyzing how organizations can successfully assert standing in federal court.

Throughout the summer, I was moved most by the courage of the clients I served. Whether fighting for the right to keep a family heirloom, to be free from sexual harassment, or simply to hold onto the tools they need to work, their resilience left a profound mark on me. It also made clear how essential legal advocacy is to securing dignity and justice for unhoused people.

This fellowship solidified my commitment to pursuing a career in public interest law focused on the rights of unhoused and low-income communities, and I'm happy to announce that next year, I will be returning to the ACLU of Southern California as a fellow. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for making this possible, and for investing in law students like me who are determined to carry this work forward.