



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Rachel Grand
LAW SCHOOL	American University Washington College of Law
ORGANIZATION	Human Trafficking Legal Center

Update 1: After a rewarding first year at American University Washington College of Law, I am excited to announce that I am now a Summer Legal Fellow at The Human Trafficking Legal Center. HTLC plays a crucial role in connecting trafficking survivors with pro bono legal representation, facilitating access to justice. They employ strategic litigation, survivor-led advocacy, trade remedies policy, and data-driven research to drive systemic change.

During my time at HTLC, I will focus on several key areas, including forced labor trade policy, police misconduct research, criminal restitution advocacy, and immigration legal services for trafficking survivors. I look forward to engaging in meaningful projects that support survivors and their families, such as assisting with immigration applications, advocating for mandatory restitution for survivors following the conviction of their traffickers, and analyzing the impact of import bans on rates of forced labor.

My commitment to combating human trafficking spans nearly a decade. My journey began by researching trafficking prevention strategies as an undergraduate intern at Eden House, a recovery home for survivors. Following that experience, I spent a summer working for the Fair Labor Association. I then completed my graduate degree in the Netherlands, a hub for international justice, managed the human trafficking portfolio at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, and advised on survivor-centered, trauma-informed atrocity prevention policies at the State Department. Every survivor deserves skilled and dedicated legal representation, and I look forward to gaining experience in direct services and a deeper understanding of strategic litigation.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Thank you to the WCL Equal Justice Foundation and Equal Justice America for funding this opportunity and enabling law students like me to pursue similar public-interest experiences. EJA Fellowship recipients work with legal aid organizations across the country to protect the rights of individuals who are most at risk.

Update 2: I have really enjoyed my time at the Human Trafficking Legal Center so far. I appreciate the opportunity to meet with clients directly. I have worked previously more in the policy space and something that initially attracted me to law school was the experience to help people directly. Only one year into law school, it is exciting to be able to already do that through working building an immigration package for individuals impacted by human trafficking. Another aspect of the internship that I am enjoying is tracking forced labor import bans. Given the Supreme Court's overturning of the administration's IEEPA tariffs, they newly announced tariffs under Section 301, which is typically associated with import bans on forced labor. While in theory the U.S. encouraging other countries to crack down on forced labor is a welcome development, the way in which they are going about it is problematic because the threat of 10-12% tariffs does not allow countries to make meaningful changes to their laws and will likely lead to haphazard band-aid solutions.

I am also working on securing restitution for trafficking survivors, which is mandatory under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). We are seeing that oftentimes the prosecutors are unaware or not tracking this provision and therefore leaving money on the table. I drafted a letter to a U.S. Assistant Attorney about a case that hopefully will encourage them to take action. Finally, I am working on a police corruption report. It has been horrifying to see the rates at which police are abusing their power to sexually assault or traffic individuals. I am looking forward to working on this project more in the coming weeks.

Update 3: Now over halfway through my summer, I have built great relationships with my colleagues and gotten deeper into the work. I am learning a lot about the challenges with the immigration system that our clients face on a daily basis. Historically, many of our clients would apply for T visas, a form of immigration relief reserved for trafficking survivors. While the process has always been lengthy and bureaucratic, it is now even more so with 80% of cases completed within 31.5 months.

Over the past few weeks, I also helped with preparation for the Harriet Tubman Fellows visit. This year, the five-labor trafficking lived experience experts and survivor-leaders came to DC to meet with policymakers to advocate for Increasing prosecutions of labor trafficking cases, reducing the lengthy wait times for T visa, and addressing the devastating impact of recent federal funding cuts on organizations that provide critical legal and social services to trafficking survivors. The fellows are all receiving funding to pursue further educational opportunities, from



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Masters in Social Work to Masters in Business. It was inspiring to hear them speak about their aspirations.

I also continued to track the commitments from 60 countries on implementing forced labor import bans. This week I will watch the President of our organization speak at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on the proposal to impose tariffs on the 60 countries for failing to enact or effectively enforce import bans on goods made with forced labor. Our organization is supporting a phased approach that includes: building an effective import ban system takes time, capacity, and resources, forced labor import bans are a valuable tool against forced labor, but they work best alongside other reforms, not as a stand-alone fix, and the most durable import ban mechanisms are co-designed in partnership with those they are meant to protect: workers and independent unions in global supply chains.

As I continue on my strategic litigation preparation projects, I am energized by the many ways HTLC is making a difference for survivors globally!

Update 4: Last week I sent a request for restitution to an Assistant U.S. Attorney. The case involved corrupt officials, witness tampering, and sex trafficking. Despite being sentenced to federal prison, the sentencing did not include restitution. Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the U.S. Attorney's office has 90 days to request mandatory restitution. Despite this easy win this would be for the Department of Justice, this is unfortunately fairly common. So, I am hopeful that our letter will be well received and result in the office seeking our pro-bono assistance to calculate restitution for the many victims. This effort aligns with HTLC's goal to get money in survivors' hands.

Additionally, I submitted my first draft of a police corruption and human trafficking report. The cases were egregious and I felt like I captured the failings of the current legal system to prevent and hold accountable police who engage in human trafficking and other related sexual misconduct. However, my supervisor suggested I strengthen the advocacy language. Given my background, I am used to writing more objectively, so this was helpful advice on how to improve my writing for an audience looking for policy and legal suggestions.

I continue to learn and grow in this role. There are a lot of balls in the air, yet I am constantly impressed by the lawyers and colleagues I have met working in this space.

Final Reflection: This summer, support from the Equal Justice America enabled me to complete a legal fellowship at the Human Trafficking Legal Center, a nonprofit focused on expanding legal protections for trafficking survivors. Over ten weeks, I gained direct insight into the legal



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

challenges faced by survivors of forced labor, the policy impact of current tariff and immigration approaches, and developed stronger skills in practical legal research.

This experience significantly strengthened my commitment to supporting survivors of trafficking and violence. While my previous work focused on policy, this fellowship allowed me to provide direct legal assistance to survivors. My responsibilities included preparing immigration applications, advocating for mandatory restitution in criminal cases, monitoring enforcement of forced labor import bans, and drafting a report on the legal obstacles survivors face in seeking justice.

In addition to the legal work, this fellowship offered valuable insight into working at a small nonprofit with a broad mission. With a limited legal staff, the organization depends on every team member, both attorneys and non-attorneys, to contribute expertise and take on significant responsibility. My colleagues were generous with their knowledge and consistently demonstrated survivor-centered, trauma-informed lawyering that prioritized clients' needs and dignity.

This summer gave me a deeper understanding of direct legal services and renewed my sense of purpose in this field. I am deeply grateful to EJA for making this fellowship financially possible. Their support enables students to pursue meaningful public interest work without having to choose between their passion and financial obligations.