



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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ORGANIZATION	Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Thank you for supporting my internship this summer at the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). I had an amazing experience learning about community lawyering on a national scale. I had the opportunity to work on national litigation, like writing a legal memo about Alien Land Laws and proposed bills in the US targeting non-citizens from certain countries from buying land in the US. I also had the chance to support research and legal strategy on TPS litigation that AALDEF led for Burma and Yemen. At the same time, I learned about centering the community amongst legal work – the first AALDEF Justice In Action Conference brought together lawyers and advocates across the country who spoke to the most effective ways of pushing movements forward and supporting the organizers and people who are at the center of the issues and solutions. This is the type of lawyer I now aspire to become: one who is a partner to the community's needs, rather than a solo advocate.

Later in the summer, I was involved in work that gave me a glimpse into how this works. I worked on a pardon application for a Vietnamese client from my own community in order for him to seek citizenship. Given my background and passion for criminal justice reform, and my personal connection to this client's culture and community, the work was extremely meaningful and gave me broader perspective into the role I might play as a lawyer supporting movements and communities with the needs they have now, rather than staying close-minded to all the legal topics that fell outside my supposed "interests." The work we were conducting was part legal and part advocacy, but it was also contributing to a bigger campaign through the Asian American Resource Workshop's (AARW) Protect & PARDON Campaign for Southeast Asians immigrants and refugees. To experience how client work can be integrated into an even larger and strategic structure of impactful advocacy was extremely eye-opening.



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I also helped research for the Voting Rights team, supporting their case preparation and strategy. It gave me a lot of insight into how lawsuits are formed, and the ways in which many people and organizations sometimes have to work together over time to develop a clear case. The law is limited, and it was amazing to witness how there is creativity in the process of being a lawyer and trying to find a way to use the courts and the law to seek justice for people when it may be unclear exactly what path to best take. I used to believe that lawyers just wanted to win cases, but this summer, I was introduced to the concepts of taking steps toward progress and impacting movements, whether or not that means victory in the courts.

Overall, I had an amazing experience at AALDEF. I had the chance to not only work with Asian American lawyers passionate about racial justice, but I also got to meet advocates, union leaders, and the community. I presented two Know Your Rights trainings with the Anti-Asian Violence team to elders about preparing for ICE and federal agent contacts, and I attended a NY Taxi Workers Alliance rally against Uber/Lyft deactivations without cause. I gained a lot of insight into what community work means from an advocacy and civil rights perspective.

This experience has left a lasting impression on the type of public interest work I aspire to pursue in the future.