



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: In my first few weeks at Legal Aid Chicago, I have been lucky enough to work with many clients facing an array of issues. This work has reinforced that public interest consumer work comes in many different forms. I am helping clients with student loan discharge applications, victims of consumer fraud, and assisting attorneys anywhere I can. In my short time as an EJA Fellow, I have already been able to speak with clients, draft motions, and do extensive legal research. I have spoken with clients for updates, fact gathering, or to tell them that Legal Aid Chicago has accepted their case. I have presented multiple cases to the practice group to decide if we should accept them or not. I am also assisting clients who have called Legal Aid's Bankruptcy Help Desk, providing them with resources or scheduling them with volunteer attorneys. Overall, my time at Legal Aid Chicago has been informative, fruitful, and provided me with plenty of opportunities to directly assist clients in need. It has also reaffirmed the importance of legal aid, as many clients who reach out to us have nowhere else to turn for their civil legal needs.

Update 2: Back on here to provide my second update for my time as an EJA Fellow. These past two weeks have been much more research-intensive, which has been a different challenge and one that I've enjoyed. While this means less time communicating with clients, which I am used to from my work before law school, it is arguably just as important for them. I have done research on specific defenses to predatory debt collection as well as specific applications of Illinois' consumer protection laws. This work has given me greater appreciation for what goes on behind the scenes of cases, and shows that this important work comes in many forms. Additionally, I have made even more calls via the Bankruptcy Help Desk, getting more independent with these calls as the weeks go on. These last two weeks have shown me that civil legal aid work can come in many different forms, and public interest attorneys need to be able to wear many different



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hats to do the job most effectively. Assisting clients as effectively as possible requires good information gathered from research, as well as strong communication with the clients to maintain trust. The last two weeks have re-affirmed that, as well as the overall importance of civil legal aid.

Update 3: These past two weeks have been an incredible opportunity to build on the past several weeks of my time as an Equal Justice America Fellow at Legal Aid Chicago. On top of performing all the tasks I had been handling previously, I also was able to do my own intakes for clients who had called our Client Screening Unit with various legal issues. While this was intimidating, as these are usually calls handled by attorneys, I was given great guidance and supervision. As a result, these calls went well. I was able to assist clients considering bankruptcy, dealing with utilities issues, and problems with home improvement contractors. I was able to handle these calls well due to the consumer law knowledge gained and abundant opportunities to speak with clients that I have gotten over the course of this internship. Additionally, I have also worked on several writing assignments. Namely, I am drafting a complaint and a subpoena in two separate cases. This wide variety of experiences have been immensely valuable and has cemented my desire to pursue public interest law. It has also reaffirmed the immense importance of EJA's work, and civil legal aid in general.

Update 4: Hi all, posting my fourth update regarding my time as an EJA Fellow. These last two weeks have been an amazing experience, providing a wide variety of experiences showing me the breadth of work public interest attorneys do. I handled direct client contact through the bankruptcy help desk, pairing clients with volunteer attorneys or giving them advice when appropriate. I compiled research regarding the right to appeal before a final judgment, and if our attorneys could appeal certain motion rulings before the case concluded. I also worked on drafting complaints and motions for various matters for multiple attorneys. Additionally, I used the Cook County Property Tax Portal and the Recorder of Deeds to track down long term housing outcomes for former Legal Aid Chicago clients whose homes were at risk. This work has shown me that public interest attorneys, like all attorneys, need to be prepared to perform any number of tasks at any time for their clients. This work can be for short-term or long-term goals, and directly or indirectly help clients. It also reaffirmed how vital the work done by civil legal aid organizations is, as well as organizations that support their work like Equal Justice America are.

Final Reflection: I am writing this final update as my EJA Fellowship comes to an end this week. I have been reflecting on how this experience and the opportunity provided by EJA has shaped me. I have been lucky enough to serve clients facing a wide variety of issues.

This experience has made me understand the wide variety of issues that face consumers, and how organizations like Legal Aid Chicago can assist them. One of the biggest challenges I faced



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was giving clients bad news. That they had been scammed, that an asset likely cannot be saved through bankruptcy, or that they cannot recover a certain asset. It is our obligation to be truthful to clients, and I always was, but giving people potentially life-altering news is never easy and something that I had to learn to do. The other side, however, is giving clients good news. Telling clients that we had accepted their case or that they would likely be able to keep their home are some of the best moments this work has to offer.

This Summer was an incredible combination of learning and also assisting clients. While the core of the work is always client-centered, it was incredibly informative to learn about consumer law in Illinois through hands-on experience, trainings, and conversations with my supervisor and other attorneys. Consumer law is so valuable, as a working knowledge of the area can be useful in almost any facet of civil legal aid work. Even during my previous work in housing, many clients had questions about how bankruptcy would impact their situation and I was simply unable to answer. Excessive debt and other consumer issues have a cascading effect on many aspects of one's life, and resolving these issues can do so much to improve one's situation.

While I am not certain that I want to be a consumer attorney, I am certainly much more open to it than I was at the beginning of the Summer. I understand what such work would entail, and the outsized impact it has on the lives of clients. This summer work made me realize that there are many paths one can take in civil legal aid, but consumer advocacy is among the most impactful. This personal and professional development would not have been possible without EJA, and I am immensely thankful for their assistance. Civil legal aid attorneys are desperately needed in society, especially in times like these. Organizations like EJA are the reason that civil legal aid is a viable path for so many future lawyers, and I am grateful for their work and mission.