



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: During the first few weeks of my internship, one of my primary responsibilities was assisting clients seeking uncontested divorces. This work introduced me to the many procedural steps involved in helping clients navigate the court system, from gathering necessary information to preparing and reviewing legal documents. As I became more familiar with the process, I noticed that the interns would benefit from having a centralized resource explaining each stage of an uncontested divorce matter. I therefore took the initiative to create a step-by-step guidance document for the entire intern team. Developing the guide required me to consolidate information from our training materials, court forms, and practical experience into an accessible format. This project strengthened my own understanding while also helping other interns approach their assignments more efficiently and confidently. It reinforced the value of taking initiative and creating resources that support a broader team. Most importantly, working with divorce clients showed me how clear communication and careful attention to detail can make an intimidating legal process feel more manageable.

Update 2: As the internship progressed, I had the opportunity to work on a presentation explaining the path to naturalization. My work included researching eligibility requirements, outlining the application and interview process, and presenting complicated legal information in a way that would be understandable to community members without legal backgrounds. This experience highlighted the importance of outreach as a central part of legal aid work. Many people may be eligible for immigration benefits but lack access to reliable information about their rights, the requirements they must satisfy, or the resources available to assist them. Outreach programs can help close that information gap and allow legal services organizations to reach individuals who might not otherwise seek assistance. The project also reminded me how important it is for attorneys and advocates to remain informed about changes in statutes, regulations, agency policies, and procedures. Immigration law can change quickly, and even a



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well-designed presentation may become outdated. Providing effective legal assistance therefore requires both clear public education and a continuing commitment to monitoring legal developments.

Update 3: Recently, as I have become familiar with working on uncontested divorces, I expanded my responsibilities by training to work with clients seeking assistance with wills and estate planning. I appreciated the opportunity to learn a new area of law and to work with a client population that differed significantly from the uncontested divorce clients I had previously assisted. Many of the wills and estates clients approached their matters with different priorities, concerns, and communication styles. While divorce clients were often navigating an immediate and emotionally difficult transition, estate-planning clients were generally focused on preparing for the future and ensuring that their wishes would be respected. These differences required me to adapt how I asked questions, explained legal concepts, and guided conversations. I particularly enjoyed hearing clients describe their families, property, and goals, because those details helped us understand what they hoped to accomplish through their estate plans. This experience demonstrated that effective client communication is not one-size-fits-all. Legal advocates must adjust their approach to each client's circumstances while remaining patient, attentive, and respectful throughout the process.

Update 4: As my internship is coming to an end, I have continued working on wills and estates matters while also completing several related legal research projects. These assignments have allowed me to examine procedural questions that arise when helping clients plan their estates or interact with the Surrogate's Court. I have enjoyed researching statutes, court rules, and administrative procedures and then considering how those authorities affect the practical options available to clients. The projects have strengthened my ability to identify controlling legal questions, assess areas of uncertainty, and communicate my conclusions clearly and usefully. I have particularly appreciated that my internship combines direct client service with legal research. Speaking with clients provides important context for understanding why a legal question matters, while research helps ensure that the guidance and services we provide are accurate and well supported. Experiencing both sides of legal aid practice has made the summer especially valuable. It has helped me develop stronger research and writing skills while gaining a deeper understanding of how careful legal analysis can directly improve client service.

Final Reflection: Over the course of my fellowship with the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, I progressed from learning unfamiliar procedures to taking greater ownership of client matters, research assignments, and resources that could support the broader intern team. The experience gave me a fuller understanding of legal aid practice by allowing me to combine direct client service, community education, and legal research.



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During the first several weeks, I primarily assisted clients seeking uncontested divorces. I gathered information, prepared and reviewed legal documents, and helped clients understand the procedural steps required to move their cases forward. Many clients were navigating a difficult and emotional transition while also confronting a court system that could feel confusing and inaccessible. I learned that even when a matter is legally “uncontested,” it may still be deeply complicated for the people involved. Clear explanations, patience, and careful attention to detail could help clients feel more confident and supported. As I became familiar with the process, I created a step-by-step guidance document for the intern team. Developing this resource was a meaningful success because it strengthened my own knowledge while helping other interns approach their assignments more efficiently.

I later worked on a presentation explaining the path to naturalization. Translating complicated eligibility requirements and procedures into accessible language reinforced the importance of outreach. Legal rights and benefits have limited value when community members do not know that they exist or cannot understand how to access them. This project also challenged me to consider how rapidly laws and agency policies can change and demonstrated the professional responsibility to provide information that is both understandable and current.

As the fellowship continued, I trained to assist clients with wills and estate planning. These clients often shared stories about their families, property, relationships, and hopes for the future. Helping them think through how they wanted their belongings distributed or whom they trusted to carry out their wishes made estate planning feel personal rather than merely procedural. Compared with divorce clients, who were often responding to an immediate crisis or transition, estate-planning clients generally approached us with longer-term concerns. Learning to adapt my communication style to these different needs was both challenging and rewarding. Finally, my wills and estates research allowed me to examine procedural issues involving Surrogate’s Court and the practical options available to clients.

The fellowship strengthened my legal research, writing, interviewing, and client-counseling skills. More importantly, it taught me that effective advocacy requires both rigorous legal analysis and an understanding of the individual whose life is affected by that analysis. I leave the fellowship more confident in my abilities, more adaptable in my communication, and more committed to making legal processes understandable and accessible to the people they are meant to serve.