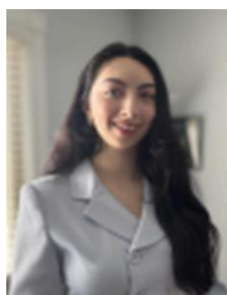




EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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LAW SCHOOL	DePaul University College of Law
ORGANIZATION	Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1: I am so happy to share that I am interning with Legal Aid Chicago this summer through the Equal Justice America Fellowship! I am working with the Veterans' Rights Project in the Public Benefits Practice Group!

The past two weeks I have learned a lot about how to interact with clients! A lot of people come to us during a time of great stress and hardship so it's important to know how to engage with them in a way that is comforting. I not only learned how to assist people with their legal issues but how to speak to them in a way that validates their emotions and experiences. Over the past couple of weeks, I learned that in legal aid not only knowing how to access and understand the law is important, but also how to actually talk and interact with people!

I am working with the Veterans' Rights project, so we deal with a lot of clients suffering from service-related conditions. A big condition most veterans suffer from is PTSD. This week I have had practice in engaging with veterans suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety. I even had one instance where a veteran broke down on the phone crying with me. I felt like I was properly able to validate his emotions and reassure him that we would do everything we can to advocate for him and hopefully make things easier for him. After my conversation with him, I connected him with our team's social worker. I really appreciate how in legal aid, legal assistance and social work go hand in hand.

Update 2: Going into Week 5 of my summer internship, I have finally mastered LegalServer!! I am also excited to share that I have been assigned some of my own cases to manage. I can't believe I'm already almost halfway through this internship!



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Over the past two weeks, I have gained a lot of experience and have started to work more independently. I have done a handful of intakes on my own and have already reached out to the same clients two or three times. I am getting to experience what it is like to be a lawyer managing multiple cases at the same time. Over the past couple of weeks, I was also able to utilize some of my legal research and writing class skills in a memo for my supervisor. I did some legal research and writing about how veterans can recover their service animals when they are taken or stolen. I have also learned a lot about different medical conditions and how they are connected to time in service. There are a lot of similar conditions among most of our clients from their time in the military.

Not only have I been able to practice lawyering skills like research and writing, but I have also been able to develop the interpersonal skills it takes to discuss sensitive issues and build trust with clients.

Update 3: I am excited to share that I have received my first writing assignments! I am learning how to use opinions from the Board of Veteran's Appeals and the federal code to write appeals for clients who have been denied access to benefits or who are hoping to increase their ratings for service-connected conditions that have worsened.

Last week I was assigned a specific section of a brief to work on. The section was specifically regarding the veteran's headache condition. My job was to make an argument that the veteran's headaches were secondary to his service-connected tinnitus and insomnia. I referenced previous VBA decisions and medical literature to demonstrate that these conditions are connected through the shared trigeminal system.

I have also been assigned a full brief to draft asserting that a veteran should be entitled to VA benefits despite his other than honorable discharge. My job is to argue that the insanity exception applies to his other than honorable discharge because he was clinically insane during time in service and therefore should not be barred from obtaining VA benefits. I must show that veteran was prescribed medication and diagnosed while in service in order to utilize this exception.

The writing assignments I am working on have the potential to actually make a significant difference in these veteran's lives. With some extra benefits they won't have to worry about how to pay the bills or whether they'll end up homeless—which is the least we can do for them!

Update 4: As my internship with Legal Aid Chicago is coming to an end, I feel so grateful to have had this opportunity! It has been amazing to work within an organization that provides legal assistance in so many different areas of law that oftentimes overlap. It has been a privilege



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to experience the intersection between legal aid and social work and the holistic approach to addressing a client's needs!

The past couple weeks I have been helping out following up with callers who called the Veteran's Rights Project hotline and opening full intakes or referring them to other attorneys/organizations. I have had a couple of cases which I completed the intakes for, presented about during case acceptance meetings, sent out and collected the intake documents for, for which I have already begun doing research for claims and appeals! It is incredible to have experienced each phase of these cases since the beginning of my internship almost two months ago!

The past week I have mostly focused on preparing my brief for an insanity exception for a client who was barred from receiving VA benefits due to an other than honorable discharge in lieu of trial. I have gone through his service treatment records from 2005-2008 to confirm that he had no preexisting or initial mental health conditions. I then went through his medical files from 2009-2010 during which he suffered from severe PTSD, alcoholism, and even a traumatic brain injury. I also collected evidence from his psychiatric reports from 2010 and 2011 that reflect severe sleep deprivation and instances of psychosis.

My job is to argue that going into the military, my client had no mental health conditions but by 2009, after his deployment to Iraq and the suicide of his best friend, his mental health rapidly declined. I have to argue that the mental conditions he developed were a direct result of his time in service and that he was medically insane at the time of his discharge due to severe sleep deprivation and a traumatic brain injury.

Final Reflection: I really appreciate how my supervisor treated me almost like another attorney and gave me the opportunity to experience some of the responsibility of being a lawyer with Legal Aid Chicago. My first week was mostly dedicated to shadowing, training, and completing modules. But by the second week I was completing full intakes on my own with supervision. By the third week, I was completing full intakes on my own without supervision! At first I was only assigned intakes related to VA Benefits but by my fourth week, I was completing intakes for all types of issues. From housing to criminal expungement!

Every two or three weeks I also got to experience what it was like to work directly within the community through our clinics. We had a clinic at the Hines Hospital, the Jesse Brown hospital, and the Community Resource and Referral Center for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. At these clinics, we would provide free legal advice, referrals, or take on the veteran's case as our own. We opened Legal Server profiles for every veteran. Even for veterans



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who we provided just advice or a referral to. Everyone was treated as a potential client, which I really appreciated.

Because most of my work was with veterans, one challenge that I experienced was getting into contact with some of my clients or receiving signed documents back. That was because some of our clients were older and suffering from dementia or similar disabilities. We found an easier way to get signed documents back: through click and sign with Adobe sign. For clients who struggled with memory loss, I learned to call at the same time every day to establish a routine.

Through this internship, I learned that legal work, especially legal aid, is oftentimes a combination of legal help and social work. A lot of the clients we had come to us for help because they were low-income and disabled. They have been through a lot and have sacrificed their health to serve. Most of the time, they really need someone and someone to advocate for them. All of the clients I worked with were so grateful for our services, even if it was just to give them advice. Many of them are frustrated with the way the government has neglected them after their service to this country and were just happy that someone cared enough to help. This internship was an amazing opportunity and a great learning experience. It was my first time actually working with clients! I'm so glad I got the chance to give back to our veterans