



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: My work with the Second Look Project in D.C. focuses on securing the release of people who were given extremely harsh prison sentences as teenagers or young adults. Two weeks in, I have learned a tremendous amount about the work and the effort and care SLP attorneys put into each client's case. I have participated in extensive training on different aspects of the work, the laws we work with, and the history of D.C. and how it pertains to our work. I have also attended court hearings for our clients. I am currently working on several cases in different postures. So far I have done a lot of reading and analysis. I am working on several memos and helping an attorney prepare for a big hearing. Being here reminds me every day why I went to law school. I feel motivated by our clients, their incredible stories of adversity and growth, and the amazing attorneys at SLP who believe ardently in this work. I feel I am able to play a tiny part in fighting mass incarceration; it is a feeling I want to continue having throughout my legal career.

Update 2: I am four weeks into my internship with the Second Look Project in D.C. I am doing substantive work on several of my cases. One of my clients has been incarcerated since he was seventeen; he is now forty-two. He still has fourteen years left on his sentence, which would make him fifty-six if he serves his entire sentence. He has done everything he could to better himself while incarcerated. He has his GED and has taken AA classes. He has completed all the courses and programming that was offered at the federal prisons where he has been incarcerated. He has learned three languages. He has a clean disciplinary record. And he has worked the entire time he has been incarcerated. He is a wonderful human being who made one mistake when he was seventeen years old. He has a release hearing coming up in two months, and we are working hard to bring him home now. Thus far, I have conducted a number of interviews with his friends and family members and written memos of the interviews. I have obtained records pertaining to his case. I will now write a portion of his release motion. I am



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very happy I chose the Second Look Project; it is a great organization with amazing people. I am inspired by my clients every day.

Update 3: I am six weeks into my internship. The last two weeks I have been conducting interviews with witnesses in two of my clients' cases and writing memos for the interviews. I am beginning to dig deeply into one of my clients' childhood and social history before he was incarcerated. He has been incarcerated since he was twenty years old; he is now in his late forties. I will be writing a substantial portion of his release motion. In preparation, I will be conducting a series of interviews with the client. In addition, I am working on several smaller projects. I have also been spending substantial time discussing my cases with the attorneys. That has been the most valuable part of my internship; I have learned a ton about every aspect of putting together a case, strategy, mitigation, research, writing, client communication, and hearing preparation. Last week I attended a training on mitigation conducted by Advancing Real Change. It featured highly experienced mitigation specialists who shared best practices (and personal anecdotes) for developing mitigation for clients. It was a tremendous learning experience. I am into the second half of my internship and really looking forward to my work ahead.

Update 4: The last two weeks I have worked on two significant projects. The first one required me to find a provider who would file a guardianship petition for one of our clients. The client is eighty years old and has dementia. I researched providers and spoke to numerous government agencies, nonprofits, and law firms. I was able to identify four options we could pursue. The other big project I undertook is beginning writing the social history for one of my clients as part of his release motion. I will conduct a number of interviews with the client. I will also research D.C. neighborhood history and newspaper archives. In addition to these projects, I have been working with one of the attorneys on case strategy for one of our clients. This has been an invaluable learning experience. Eight weeks in, I feel I have learned so much at The Second Look Project. I feel committed to this work and look forward to fighting mass incarceration for years to come.

Final Reflection: I had a wonderful experience at The Second Look Project (SLP). I started my internship with an idea that I might like post-conviction indigent defense work. By the end I was convinced this is the work I want to do. I had the opportunity to work on a number of cases in different postures. My responsibilities varied, which made the internship not only interesting but highly educational as well. I received invaluable feedback and mentorship from the attorneys. I particularly benefited from two things: meetings with clients (and their families) and case discussions with the attorneys. The case discussions were very instructive in several ways. I learned how to analyze a case, synthesize the available information, and develop a case strategy, and what to prioritize and when, all with the end goal in mind: getting our clients released from



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federal prison. The discussions with attorneys also involved a lot of conversation about ethics, an attorney's responsibilities, professionalism, client management, and conflict resolution. The highlight of my internship was my conversations with my clients and their friends and families. I am drawn to indigent criminal defense because I believe ardently in providing poor persons, especially those of color, the highest quality legal counsel possible. I also believe our criminal justice system disproportionately targets and punishes persons of color, the poor, and immigrants, with these identities often intersecting. It is talking to and getting to know my clients and their life stories and experiences that keeps me motivated and inspired. The legal work, for me, is in service of the human being who needs help; it is the person who matters above all. Each time I spoke to one of my clients or the client's sister or childhood friend, it reminded me why I love this work. On a personal level, my time at SLP deepened my empathy and compassion. My clients experienced unimaginable trauma as children and as young adults – murder of a brother, domestic abuse, poverty, being shot, and environments rife with drugs and guns. Learning about their life paths made me reflect on the injustices in our society, especially the scourges of racism and poverty, the combination of these two evils being the reason my clients find themselves where they are, locked up for decades in a federal prison since the tender age of seventeen or nineteen. Playing a small part in the effort to bring them home and get them their lives back was the honor of my life.