



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: This summer, I am grateful that Equal Justice America will be supporting me during my internship at Brooklyn Defender Services' New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). NYIFUP began in 2013 as a first-of-its-kind universal representation model for detained New York City immigrants because immigrants are not provided with government-appointed counsel as they face removal proceedings. I am grateful to be able to deepen my understanding and experience in detained deportation defense, because I was primarily working on non-detained cases last summer, until I became more involved in rapid response, which led to some exposure to our immigration system's ability to detain immigrants. In my first two weeks, I have attended several trainings covering topics like habeas petitions to release immigrants from unjust detention and also the basics of immigration law, like inadmissibility and deportability grounds. I have especially found it helpful to have trainings on the impact of criminal legal system contact or involvement on one's immigration status because one of my projects in the past week was to evaluate whether one client's criminal convictions were considered 'aggravated felonies' in the immigration context. I also shadowed calls with several who are in detention centers all over the country. I look forward to sharing more updates this summer with EJA and thank EJA for its continued support of my endeavors.

Update 2: Last week, I entered my appearance in court as a law student for the very first time, under the supervision of an attorney. With the attorney's support and guidance, I spoke directly with the immigration judge in immigration court to advocate per our client's wishes. While I was nervous at first, I think it was good to get in the habit of speaking on the record. I also worked on a small piece of case research to contribute to ongoing litigation, in the effort to free one of our clients from unjust detention. I am also currently working on my first appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). I will also begin working on a political opinion asylum case, by researching country conditions. As immigrants and immigration law face continued onslaught,



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

with outright cruel decisions like *Blanche v. Lau*, *Mullin v. Al Otro Lado*, and *Mullin v. Doe* coming out of the Supreme Court this week, chipping away at the meager protections offered to noncitizens, I have found hope working at Brooklyn Defenders. I admire the staff I work with because I can always count on them to be creative in their legal thinking. Having observed the intake process for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), I would love if NYIFUP can be replicated across all municipalities or scaled nationally, because the need to have legal representation is as important as it is dire.

Update 3: As I write this update, I am thinking about the recent murder of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, a man in Houston, by a United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer. In a system completely void of humanity, I am reminded of how the advocates I work with imbue enough humanity in an admirable effort to make up for it. Yet hearing about the murder of Mr. Salgado Araujo, I am reminded that whatever I do is not enough because it is not enough to protect people from violent encounters with ICE or their inhumane treatment in ICE detention facilities. I am motivated to keep continuing because advocates act as a line of defense to push back against injustice, and sometimes, they even win. However, I am holding space for the disappointment and dismay following a bond denial—I observed one at an immigration court in Manhattan the other day. I was inspired by the way the attorney I work with zealously advocated for her client's release from prolonged detention, and the support from the client's family's presence. Currently, I am supporting three habeas petitions to help clients be released from unjust detention. I am also finishing my first appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). While times feel bleak, I remain hopeful for a day where being an immigrant is not a prison sentence, or a death sentence.

Update 4: In the past couple of weeks, I had the opportunity to go through intake questions to determine a client's eligibility for the free services offered by my organization and understand what options for relief he may have. I also supported another client's case by helping prepare a habeas petition in the scenario that he would be re-detained at his next ICE check-in. This involved calling the client to get some important updates on his life and how detention would upend his family's life. The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) appeal I worked on was also submitted to the BIA. I visited a client for the first time at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, and will be working on preparing for his bond hearing. I'm continuing to support a case where a habeas offered little recourse for release from detention, which has been a difficult truth to grapple with. In several cases I've supported this summer, I've noticed that contact with the criminal legal system is often what puts clients on ICE's radar. Even once their criminal charges are dismissed, their painful reality remains—they continue to be detained, under the notion that they are a "danger to the community" or a "flight risk," under egregious conditions, where there is no potable water or access to legal counsel. I continue to be inspired by clients' stories and their attorneys, who keep fighting for their clients even in the bleakest



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

circumstances, and hope to join them soon in trying to leverage any legal remedy available to free our clients.

Final Reflection: I had a transformative, eye-opening experience at Brooklyn Defender Services as part of the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). Operating through three public defender organizations in New York City, NYIFUP operates as a universal representation model for noncitizens detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), because the government does not provide noncitizens with an attorney if they cannot afford one during their removal proceedings. This distinct model provides a vital lifeline to zealous advocacy for people who are otherwise unable to procure legal representation during some of the darkest, most consequential periods of their lives.

Over the course of the summer, I worked on the cases of nine clients who were all in various legal postures. Yet one theme threaded through all their cases—all of them had come into ICE custody following contact with the criminal legal system. Yet however minor the contact, and regardless of whether the charges were dropped or frivolous, there was a long legal battle ahead to free them from ICE detention, which I was a small part of this summer. Some clients were moved far away from their homes overnight, as far as Louisiana or Oklahoma, and to detention centers that had made the news for horrific conditions. One client said the water wasn't clean to drink, while others were denied access to counsel for days. My clients, all Black and brown folks, were part of the 65,765 individuals detained by ICE as of July 11, 2026. I couldn't help but feel like I was observing ethnic cleansing in real-time.

This summer was one of many firsts—I contributed substantively to an appeal submitted to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), which allowed me to strengthen my written advocacy skills in a way I never had before. I entered my appearance in immigration court for the first time as a law student under attorney supervision, and spoke on the record to represent a detained client. I worked on my first U visa (a visa for survivors of crime) application, including successfully receiving a U visa certification from a local law enforcement agency. I also worked on my first bond hearing, visiting our client at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn several times to prepare our client for the bond hearing and coming up with arguments for why our client merits bond. Unfortunately, our client was transferred to another detention center, far away, just after receiving a bond hearing, meaning the original bond hearing was cancelled. I am hopeful that another bond hearing will be scheduled in the future that I could attend, even if virtually.

Perhaps what I will most remember from this summer is bearing witness. Nationwide, ICE arrested 51,000 people in July. The large-scale scapegoating and vilification of noncitizens and communities of color, more broadly, are reflected in the legal system. One of our clients reported being arrested when ICE was looking for someone else entirely—an apparent case of



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

racial profiling. This practice is clear in the bodycam footage revealed in a recent lawsuit in California, where immigration enforcement agents were caught using racial slurs as they track down and arrest individuals. Yet this practice—coined as ‘Kavanaugh stops,’—was greenlit by the Supreme Court. While supposedly limited to the Los Angeles area, where the lawsuit emerged, they are clearly happening all over the country, including in New York.

As I sat through some of the more appalling events transpiring this summer, I found solace with advocates, whose cases are frequently upended. Weeks of work are tossed aside because of new case law or because their clients were moved to another state, inevitably changing venue. Yet they continue onward, providing the same fierce representation. And I saw the value of simply being on the phone, listening to clients talk about detention conditions, and validating their experiences, as the attorneys I worked with did daily. Dr. Rümeysa Öztürk once recounted a fellow noncitizen at a Louisiana ICE detention center saying to her: “Even God cannot hear us here.” The mental and physical toll that detention and such isolation take on the human body motivated me to prioritize non-legal tasks, like connecting one of our clients with a program that could send him a religious text in his native language, before the end of my internship. Though outside of the confines of courtroom litigation, there is power in this too.