



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Lauren Acevedo
LAW SCHOOL	Harvard Law School
ORGANIZATION	Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)

Update 1:

This summer, I'm interning with the Los Angeles regional office of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the nation's leading Latino legal civil rights organization. Although I'm only in my second week, I've already had the opportunity to conduct research for cases involving the protection of Latino students' right to education. As a Latina who came to law school to better understand the intersection of law and education, contributing to MALDEF's work has been incredibly meaningful. I'm excited to continue supporting our team and learning from the important advocacy taking place in our office every day.

Through this experience, I've been able to gain a deeper appreciation for the role organizations like MALDEF play in helping individuals and communities overcome systemic barriers. In just the past two weeks, I've seen how MALDEF ensures that students and families have access to resources and representation when facing unequal educational opportunities. While much of the work happens behind the scenes, the research and preparation involved in these cases are essential to advancing educational equity and protecting civil rights. This experience is already strengthening my commitment to using the law as a tool to expand access to education and create opportunities for underserved communities.

Update 2:

In the past two weeks at MALDEF's Los Angeles regional office, I've had the opportunity to continue researching for cases involving the protection of Latino students' right to education, and I've also begun researching for a memorandum involving Latino voting rights, which are currently being threatened. Working on matters that span both education and voting rights has given me a broader perspective on how organizations like MALDEF advocate for Latino



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

communities and address systemic barriers through strategic litigation. It has been especially meaningful to see how the legal issues I've studied in the classroom directly impact individuals and families across California.

As I continue my internship, I've become more familiar with the preparation that goes into each of MALDEF's cases. Whether researching legal precedents, finding relevant statutes, or meeting with attorneys, I have gained a greater appreciation for the importance of thorough legal research in advancing effective advocacy. Each assignment has strengthened my legal research and analytical skills while reinforcing my commitment to pursuing a career focused on expanding educational opportunities and protecting the rights of underserved communities. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn from the dedicated attorneys at MALDEF and look forward to continuing to contribute to their important work for the rest of the summer.

Update 3:

As I enter my seventh week at MALDEF's Los Angeles regional office, I'm grateful to have the opportunity to reflect on the meaningful work I've contributed to recently. I've been able to research California state law for our education-related cases, examine state and federal interpretations of voting laws for a voting rights memo, and even help draft a response to a Daubert motion to exclude expert witness testimony. Through these assignments, I have become increasingly involved in the research and preparation that support MALDEF's litigation and advocacy efforts.

This experience has also deepened my appreciation for the important role organizations like MALDEF play in expanding access to justice. For many individuals and communities, legal representation can be the difference between having their rights protected or going unheard. By providing legal advocacy to those who might otherwise lack access, organizations like MALDEF help ensure that civil rights protections are actually meaningful in practice.

Each new project has reinforced my interest in pursuing a career dedicated to expanding educational opportunities and protecting civil rights. I'm grateful for the chance to learn from the attorneys at MALDEF, whose commitment to public service has been inspiring, and I look forward to continuing to contribute throughout the remainder of the summer.

Update 4:

For the past two weeks at MALDEF's Los Angeles regional office, I've had the opportunity to research for and draft an opposition brief responding to a Daubert motion seeking to exclude expert witness testimony in an age and race employment discrimination case. The drafting



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

process was a valuable learning experience that strengthened my writing skills while also giving me insight into the role expert testimony plays in employment discrimination cases.

Working on this case also allowed me to learn more about employment law and MALDEF's employment-related advocacy. Unlike much of MALDEF's impact litigation, which often involves systemic discrimination affecting groups of plaintiffs, employment cases usually involve the experiences of one person. This distinction showed me how civil rights advocacy comes in different forms: it can challenge institutional practices in some cases and seek justice for one person whose rights have been violated in others.

Finally, researching for this brief helped me understand some of the legal standards governing employment discrimination claims and reinforced the importance of clear factual development and persuasive legal writing in being an effective advocate. Overall, my experience at MALDEF has taught me more about the organization's work and provided a meaningful opportunity to develop litigation skills that I will use throughout my legal career.

Final Reflection:

This summer, I had an incredible time at MALDEF's Los Angeles regional office. Not only did I learn more about the intersection of law and education, something I went to law school to study, but I also learned about employment law and voting rights, two areas I have yet to study. I am grateful to have worked with such bright and passionate attorneys, and I am happy to be coming out of this experience with a new mentor.

I initially wanted to intern with MALDEF to work on *Chavez v. Pasadena Unified School District*, a school closure case I wrote about in a research paper for my 1L spring elective. My class focused on the intersection of the law and three child-facing systems: the education system, the welfare system, and the juvenile justice system. In my paper, I wrote about the system problem of school closures in California and proposed a temporary legislative solution to one aspect of the problem. During the summer, it was so rewarding to research for the *Chavez* appellate brief, which MALDEF recently filed, because the case directly challenges this system problem by arguing that the discriminatory effects the Pasadena school closure decisions had on Latino students violated the California Constitution, the California Government Code, and the California Education Code. I am eager to stay in touch with my supervisor to follow the appeal in the coming months.

Drafting a *Daubert* opposition brief for an employment discrimination case was rewarding in different ways. I have not taken a class on evidence yet, so addressing an evidentiary issue in a formal writing assignment was, at first, a challenge. But with the help of a staff attorney in our D.C. office, I delivered a draft that I was proud of, and I later received helpful feedback on the draft. It



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

was great to learn how to better address written feedback from a supervising attorney, and that is a skill I will definitely be taking forward.

I ended my internship with a memorandum on voting rights, and I found the drafting and editing process to be both fun and intellectually engaging. I had a lot more independence with this writing assignment than with others, and its scope was fairly broad. Although that initially led me down a few research rabbit holes, I communicated regularly with my supervisor to make sure I was on the right track, and that showed me the importance of updating a supervisor to avoid any miscommunications about the expectations for an assignment.

This experience has made me eager to work with more nonprofits that do impact litigation and to get involved in similar work through school clinics. I am grateful to MALDEF for making my summer one to remember, and I am also grateful to Equal Justice America for allowing me to work with MALDEF!