



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	PinYi Lee
LAW SCHOOL	Loyola University Chicago School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Legal Aid Chicago

Update 1: This summer, I started my internship at Legal Aid Chicago in the Immigrants and Workers' Rights Practice Group, specifically with the Immigration Team. Since starting, I have had the opportunity to work on a range of matters, including intake interviews, pro se asylum applications, work permit renewals, FOIA requests, and various motions.

Working alongside the incredible attorneys and paralegals in the IWRPG has been both inspiring and deeply meaningful. I have already learned so much from observing the care, patience, and skill that goes into supporting clients as they navigate a complex and difficult immigration system shaped by constantly shifting policies and increasing barriers under the current administration. This experience has strengthened my commitment to public interest work and reminded me of the importance of accessible, client-centered, and trauma-informed legal advocacy.

I'm also grateful to everyone at Legal Aid Chicago who has made this internship experience so welcoming and supportive, from the office support team to the tech support team, and to the many others who help make this work possible every day.

I'm grateful to EJA for making this summer experience possible, and I'm looking forward to continuing to learn from the Legal Aid Chicago team in the weeks ahead!!

Update 2: As I wrap up my first month at Legal Aid Chicago, it feels like the perfect time for another update. One thing that has stood out to me is how frequently immigration policies and procedures change, requiring attorneys to remain flexible while continuing to advocate effectively for their clients. I have especially admired the IWR Team's ability to adapt to new developments without losing sight of each client's needs and the broader goals of their case.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Watching them navigate these challenges with care, creativity, and resilience has deepened my understanding of the demands of trauma-informed immigrant advocacy. I'm grateful to be learning from such thoughtful and dedicated attorneys, and to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible.

Update 3: One thing I have been learning more about is what trauma-informed advocacy looks like in practice. In immigration cases, attorneys often need clients to recount deeply personal and difficult experiences in significant detail, sometimes multiple times throughout the course of a case. I have come to appreciate how much thought goes into balancing the need to gather complete and accurate information with the importance of not making an already difficult process unnecessarily overwhelming for the client. Watching the IWR attorneys and paralegals navigate that balance with care and intentionality has shown me that trauma-informed advocacy is not simply about being compassionate, but about making deliberate choices that prioritize both effective representation and the client's well-being throughout the process. This experience has given me a much more concrete understanding of what trauma-informed advocacy actually demands, and I'm grateful to Equal Justice America for making it possible!

Update 4: Recently, I had the opportunity to help prepare a pro se asylum application involving complex procedural and legal issues that was accepted by the immigration judge and allowed to proceed. This felt especially meaningful amid the increasingly frequent pretermissions of asylum applications before applicants have the opportunity to fully present their claims and be meaningfully heard.

Working on the application showed me how much careful preparation goes into translating someone's life experiences, including deeply personal and traumatic events, into a clear and legally sufficient argument. It required close attention to the relevant facts and legal standards while being mindful about how those experiences were discussed, organized, and presented.

It also reinforced how difficult it can be for individuals to navigate the already complex and ever-changing immigration system without representation. Even when someone must proceed pro se, access to legal information, thoughtful guidance, and well-prepared materials can make a big difference in whether their claim is fully considered. This process also underscored the importance of gathering the information needed to build a strong legal claim with a trauma-informed approach that respects the client's well-being, autonomy, and dignity.

Final Reflection:

My summer at Legal Aid Chicago has come to an end, and I'm grateful to share one final update!



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

One of the most valuable parts of this summer was seeing how immigration cases develop over time and how many smaller pieces go into moving each case forward. My work included preparing applications and motions, submitting FOIA requests, researching legal issues, and communicating with clients. As the summer went on, I was able to see how those individual tasks connected and contributed to the overall progression of a case, giving me a much better understanding of the work that happens at every stage of representation.

I also learned how rarely immigration work follows a predictable path. Cases can change because of new facts, procedural developments, changing policies, or unexpected issues that require attorneys to rethink their approach. Being part of that process taught me to be more comfortable asking questions and identifying what I did not know. It also gave me a much greater appreciation for the amount of collaboration that goes into legal aid work. Attorneys, paralegals, support staff, interpreters, and social workers all play an important role in helping clients navigate a system that can be extraordinarily difficult to navigate alone.

The moments that stayed with me most were the ones that made the impact of the work feel more tangible, such as seeing a filing finally submitted after weeks of preparation, helping resolve an issue that had been holding up a case, and hearing the relief in a client's voice when there was finally a clear next step. Those experiences strengthened my commitment to pursuing this kind of work.

I'm especially excited that my time with Legal Aid Chicago is not ending here. I'll be continuing with the Immigrants and Workers' Rights Practice Group this semester as an extern, where I hope to build on what I learned this summer and continue working on some of the cases I began during my internship.

I'm incredibly grateful to the Legal Aid Chicago team for such a meaningful summer and to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible.

If you are interested in supporting future public interest lawyers, please consider donating.