



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Isabella Rivera
LAW SCHOOL	New York Law School
ORGANIZATION	Rutgers Immigrant Rights Clinic

Update 1: During this period, I have worked closely on a case involving a client who is currently detained by ICE and is seeking protection from removal. A significant portion of my work has focused on gathering and organizing evidence to support his claim that he faces serious danger if returned to his home country. This has included obtaining supporting documentation, collection records that corroborate his experiences, and researching country conditions that align with the basis of his fear of persecution and return. Through this process, I have gained a deeper understanding of the extensive preparation required to build a strong case and the importance of presenting both individualized evidence and broader contextual information.

This experience has reinforced for me the critical role of legal aid in immigration proceedings. Unlike criminal courts, immigration courts do not provide appointed public defenders to individuals who cannot afford legal representation. As a result, many immigrants must navigate a highly complex and constantly evolving legal system on their own. Having knowledgeable legal advocates is essential to ensuring that individuals understand their rights, have the opportunity to present their claims effectively, and receive a fair hearing. Legal aid helps bridge this gap and can make a profound difference in the outcome of a person's case and future.

Update 2: This week I have been assisting with the preparation of an asylum case for an individual hearing. I have spent significant time meeting with the client, listening to his story, and helping organize the facts of his claim into a clear and persuasive narrative, through these conversations, I have gained a deeper understanding of the trauma, fear, and uncertainty that many asylum seekers experience before arriving in the United States. In addition, I have conducted country conditions research to identify reports, articles, and other evidence that support his claim. This process has shown me how important it is to connect a client's personal experiences with objective evidence demonstrating the dangers they would face if returned to



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their home country. Every piece of evidence can play a critical role in establishing credibility and proving eligibility for protection.

Many individuals seeking asylum do not have the resources to hire private counsel and must navigate a complex legal system while carrying the weight of past persecution and fear of future harm. Legal aid ensures that vulnerable individuals have access to representation, guidance and a fair opportunity to present their case. By helping clients tell their stories and advocate for their rights, legal aid can make the difference between safety and danger.

Update 3: This week I had the opportunity to observe an individual merits hearing for an asylum case. Watching the client testify about the persecution they experienced in their home country reinforced the human impact behind every case file. I also observed the government's cross-examination, which highlighted the importance of thorough preparation, credibility and careful advocacy in immigration proceedings. Seeing both sides of the hearing gave me a deeper appreciation for the complexities of asylum litigation and the vital role attorneys play in protecting due process.

In addition to attending the hearing, I worked on drafting a bond filing for a detained client seeking release from immigration custody and assisted with preparing a Notice of Appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals. These assignments strengthened my understanding of procedural aspects of immigration law and the different avenues available to advocate for clients at various stages of their cases.

This week underscored why legal aid is so important. Many individuals navigating these systems face language barriers and unfamiliar legal procedures. Access to dedicated legal representation can make a significant difference by ensuring that clients have a meaningful opportunity to present their claims and exercise legal rights.

Update 4: This week, I had the opportunity to work with a detained client beyond the initial intake process by conducting a follow-up legal consultation. After completing the client's intake, I met with my supervisor to moot the consultation, discussing the client's legal options, the advice we would provide, and how to communicate complex immigration issues in a way that was clear and compassionate. During the actual meeting, I took the lead in counseling the client, explaining the available legal pathways, answering questions, and ensuring he understood the next steps in his case. It was a rewarding experience that strengthened both my legal knowledge and my confidence in client advocacy.

Experiences like this highlight the importance of legal aid, particularly for individuals in immigration detention. Many detained immigrants face complicated legal proceedings without



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access to counsel or a clear understanding of their rights. Providing accurate legal information and individualized guidance empowers clients to make informed decisions about their cases and helps ensure that the legal process is as fair as possible.

Final Reflection: The EJA Fellowship was one of the most formative experiences of my legal education. As a rising second-year law student, I entered the summer eager to learn about immigration law in practice. I left with a deeper understanding of client advocacy, the realities of immigration detention, and the responsibility that comes with representing individuals whose futures depend on the legal system.

Throughout the summer at the Rutgers Immigrant Rights Clinic, I worked on a wide variety of immigration matters involving detained noncitizens. My work included conducting legal research, drafting motions and briefs, preparing notices of appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals, reviewing country conditions evidence, and counseling clients on their legal options. I also visited detention facilities and participated in client meetings, where I witnessed firsthand the emotional and legal challenges that accompany immigration detention. These experiences reinforced that effective advocacy requires not only legal knowledge, but also empathy, patience, and the ability to build trust with clients during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

The most meaningful part of my fellowship was the opportunity to advocate directly for clients. One experience that will remain with me was representing a detained client before an Immigration Judge. Standing in court on behalf of another person was both humbling and empowering. Although I was only a first-year law student, I was entrusted with a meaningful responsibility that had a real impact on someone's legal journey. That experience strengthened my confidence as an advocate and affirmed my decision to pursue a career in immigration law.

Many of the clients I served had endured persecution, prolonged detention, or the uncertainty of being separated from their families. Their resilience reminded me that every case file represents a person with hopes, fears, and a story worth hearing. While legal outcomes are never guaranteed, I learned that providing competent representation, listening carefully, and treating clients with dignity are meaningful forms of advocacy in themselves.

This fellowship has profoundly shaped my professional development. I strengthened my legal writing, research, client interviewing, and oral advocacy skills while gaining a realistic understanding of the complexities of removal defense. More importantly, I developed a greater appreciation for the role attorneys play in promoting access to justice. My experience confirmed my commitment to a career in immigration law and inspired me to continue serving vulnerable communities with compassion, integrity, and excellence.