



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I did not have much experience in labor and employment law before this summer, but I chose my position to get the most hands-on experience I could and to work on legal issues that impact people's day-to-day lives and well-being. In my first few days as an intern, I was able to work on claims based on state and federal human rights and civil rights laws that were filed in federal court. I observed and took notes for an arbitration to intervene on behalf of a union employee that the employer was attempting to terminate. And I attended an oral argument to try to prevent the dismissal of a client's emergency injunction. During my second week, I worked on cases related to sexual harassment, unlawful retaliation, gender discrimination, and violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act. My experience thus far has been a mix of substantive legal work and less glamorous work: combing through long depositions, deciphering confusing records, and organizing then organizing again a huge binder of evidence to best present the information for the attorney. Whether exciting or tedious, each task is important to represent our clients well and advocate for their livelihoods and dignity. These first weeks make me excited for the experiences to come and what we will be able to accomplish for clients this summer.

Update 2: I have spent the past several weeks becoming more familiar with New York State and City Human Rights Laws and learning how those protections vary from federal laws. While it is no secret that the civil legal system is exceedingly complicated, it is difficult to discover flaws in the system, such as confusing deadlines and bureaucratic processes, in real time that prevent your clients from accessing remedies for the harms they have encountered. I am fortunate to be working with a group of motivated attorneys and interns that recognize and want to address structural issues. I have often seen in previous positions, as a different kind of professional, how the complexities of the legal system keep people out, but I did not have an in-depth knowledge of how to use the system at the time. There is a reason why "Civil Procedure" is widely regarded as one of the most difficult law school classes. This is the first time I have been in a position



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

where I can understand the system's structure, see its flaws, and have the knowledge to begin to challenge some of them. As we are early in our legal careers, this experience will be essential to inform how we, as future attorneys, choose to make change and reform the legal system to make it more accessible.

Update 3: The legal profession is adversarial by nature. When zealous attorneys are advocating on both sides, tensions and tempers can rise. What can be even more challenging, however, is when you believe in your client's cause, their rights have been violated, and you know that you are on the side of "right," but the opposing counsel, whether they believe what they are advocating for or not, has more funding, better resources, or a more advantageous position in the legal community. I have witnessed, these past few weeks, attorneys aggressively arguing for their clients in contentious cases that are not difficult because of the subject matter, but because of how the attorneys choose to approach them. It is important, I think, to remember that we do not have to carry our passion for the work into personal animosity for the opposing side's attorneys. It can require a conscious effort on both sides, and some attorneys will choose not to be cordial, but we should not have to fight each other while we are fighting a system that disadvantages our clients. Good sportsmanship is a part of good lawyering and maintaining high standards of professionalism will set you apart in ways that may ultimately result in better outcomes for your clients.

Update 4: Employment cases often take a significant amount of time; it is easy, both as client and attorney, to become frustrated or disheartened. The "wins" can be small and protracted. But it is comforting when, in rare circumstances, you know the law and the judge are on your side, and a case is treated with urgency. I had the opportunity to attend an arbitration where it seemed clear from the start that the arbitrator did not believe the employee needed to be terminated for "misconduct." After each side presented their view of the case, the arbitrator gave us half of the usual time to submit our final documents. This is one of the few times I have seen an awareness that every day of delay is another day our client is out of work, unable to do their job and get paid. I wrote the closing brief to argue exactly why our client should keep his job and submitted it with confidence that, for this client, things will work out, and quickly. Most of the cases I contributed to this summer predated me and will outlast me. It was good to be able to see this case through to a positive resolution in the final weeks of my fellowship.

Final Reflection: As I conclude my internship, I am reflecting on all the small but integral pieces of lawyering that go unseen and unrecognized. There are many parts of this profession that would not make a compelling episode of a legal television drama but are nonetheless essential to addressing the challenges and injustices our clients face. I worked on behalf of clients who had been discriminated against because of their race, gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. I learned about the nuances of federal, state, and city human rights laws. I combed



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

through hundreds of pages of depositions, helped draft motions I had never heard of, and researched the appropriate type of interest to apply to a jury award. I organized and reorganized an evidence binder four times until it was in the most helpful format; I was then able to summarize major issues of the case so we could better address opposing counsel's arguments. I worked on novel legal issues and a case that had been going on for seven years.

I saw how there are many ways to approach legal issues and seek solutions. I also saw the legal system fall short and fail our clients when they need it most, when their jobs or housing are on the line, through extensive scheduling delays, confusing rulings, and limits on what someone can recover when they are harmed. The system is not built with tenants or employees in mind; we are fighting an uphill battle with every case regardless of the situation. I was fortunate to have an office of attorneys that have about one hundred years of combined experience in fighting for people's basic rights.

Each job, internship, and fellowship is an opportunity to learn. Every attorney has a different style. There is a time for subtlety and a time for boldness; it is a skill you practice determining which is appropriate and when. You are the best advocate for your client when you learn from many sources what being a good attorney is and incorporate the best approaches to your own style. In addition to refining skills and style, I have been able to build relationships with my supervising attorneys that I look forward to continuing as I move forward in my legal career.

Building a network of public interest-focused and advocacy-driven attorneys who are using their skills to increase access to justice is essential. The work is tiring; it is long and often thankless. But we keep working, and we keep working together. People rarely bring about change alone. We pull each other up. We move the needle further together. And we make the world better by not surrendering.