



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Hana Murphy
LAW SCHOOL	Santa Clara University School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Law Foundation of Silicon Valley

Update 1: During the beginning of my fellowship with the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley's Health Program, I have been learning more about the intersection of public benefits, healthcare, and legal advocacy. I have begun working directly with clients seeking assistance with SSI and SSDI benefits and learning how to navigate the Social Security benefits system. One of the most valuable parts of these first few weeks has been seeing how attorneys can make complicated administrative systems more accessible to clients. I am excited to continue developing my client communication skills and take on greater responsibility as the summer progresses.

Update 2: As my fellowship has progressed, I have begun taking greater responsibility for my own caseload. I have been communicating directly with clients, reviewing their circumstances, identifying issues involving their public benefits, and working with my supervisors to determine the best next steps in their cases. Having my own cases has challenged me to become more independent and confident in my judgment. I am learning that effective advocacy often requires persistence and creativity, particularly when clients are navigating systems that can be difficult to understand and access.

Update 3: One of the most meaningful matters I have worked on this summer involves an immigrant client whose U.S. citizen husband passed away. I have been working to determine whether she and her daughters can obtain Social Security survivor benefits following his death. This matter has shown me how immigration status, family circumstances, and public benefits can intersect in ways that create significant challenges for clients. It has also reminded me that the legal questions I research have very real consequences for the individuals and families we serve.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

I have appreciated the opportunity to advocate for a client while developing my research, problem solving, and client communication skills.

Update 4:

As I approach the end of my fellowship, I have been reflecting on how much more comfortable I have become working directly with clients and independently managing legal matters. In addition to my public benefits work, I have had the opportunity to observe 5150 and 5250 certification review hearings involving individuals receiving involuntary mental health treatment. These experiences expanded my understanding of public interest advocacy and the ways that law intersects with healthcare, disability, poverty, and individual autonomy. This summer has strengthened my commitment to a career in public interest law and has shown me the kind of advocate I hope to become someone who approaches clients with empathy while persistently working to protect their rights.

Final Reflection:

My summer fellowship with the Law Foundation of Silicon Valley was one of my first opportunities to experience what it means to take meaningful responsibility for clients while still learning how to become an effective advocate. Working in the Health Program, I assisted low-income clients navigating public benefits systems, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Over the course of the summer, I became increasingly responsible for managing my own caseload, communicating directly with clients, identifying legal issues, and determining the next steps necessary to move their cases forward. One of the most impactful experiences of my fellowship involved assisting an immigrant client whose U.S. citizen husband had passed away. I worked to determine whether she and her daughters could obtain Social Security survivor benefits following his death. The case required me to work through complicated legal and administrative questions while recognizing that, for my client, these questions were not abstract. She was grieving the loss of her husband while simultaneously trying to navigate an unfamiliar benefits system and maintain stability for her family. Working with her reinforced for me that effective public interest advocacy requires not only legal knowledge, but also patience, empathy, persistence, and an understanding of the circumstances affecting a client's ability to navigate the legal system.

My fellowship also exposed me to areas of advocacy that I had not previously encountered. I had opportunities to observe 5150 and 5250 certification review hearings involving individuals receiving involuntary mental health treatment. These experiences gave me a greater understanding of how legal advocacy intersects healthcare, disability, poverty, and individual autonomy. They also demonstrated the importance of ensuring that individuals have an advocate when decisions affecting their most fundamental rights are being made. Throughout the summer, I grew significantly in my confidence as a law student and advocate. At the beginning of my fellowship, I often looked for reassurance that I was approaching an assignment or client matter correctly. As I gained experience, I became more comfortable independently identifying issues, researching possible solutions, communicating with clients, and bringing informed questions to my supervisors when I needed guidance. I learned



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

that becoming an attorney does not mean immediately knowing every answer; it means developing the judgment and resourcefulness necessary to determine how to find one.

I am incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for making this experience possible. My summer at the Law Foundation strengthened my commitment to public interest law and reminded me why I chose to pursue a legal career centered on serving individuals who might otherwise struggle to navigate complex legal systems. I will carry the lessons, relationships, and responsibility entrusted to me this summer throughout law school and into my future career.