



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I have been able to work on motions and assist immigrants at the immigration court during my internship with American Gateways (AG). I have also been provided with multiple professional development opportunities such as a Legal Research Tips for Immigration training. This week I was able to work on and file two motions for an immigrant who could not physically show up to his hearing due to a medical condition. This case was specifically important to me as it made me see how fast immigration law moves and how it is critical to inform immigrants about their rights, options, and risks. With the supervision of an AG attorney, I saw this case from start "to finish." I spoke with the immigrant, listened to his situation, gathered facts, and provided him with essential information. With the help of my supervising AG attorney, I developed two motions for him and concurrently filed them with the court. I emphasized "to finish" because immigration cases can be quite lengthy, and one of the motions I filed for the immigrant was a motion for continuance. His case also showed me how legal aid is vital as he immediately sought help when he noticed his hearing was moved up. I was also able to be part of a panel that informed high school students interested in the law field. I am grateful to have been able to help him and others these past two weeks.

Update 2: Injustice - a word that no one wants to hear. During my time helping immigrants at the immigration court in San Antonio, TX, it became evident that immigration had not sent letters notifying immigrants of their new hearing dates. Their hearings were moved up, some from 2027 to June 2026. Upon asking, many immigrants said that they only found out because they frequently check the status of their case online. I asked them whether the Court had their current addresses, and they said yes. There wasn't an excuse for immigration to not send those letters. I can't imagine how many immigrants might have missed their hearings because they didn't receive a proper notice. Lately, I've worked on multiple types of motions, but one that helped an individual navigate his unexpected new hearing date was a motion for continuance because he had a severe injury followed by surgery. Given his situation and the lack of a proper,



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timely notice, he immediately sought help from our organization. We worked on a motion for Webex appearance, which immigration is now no longer allowing for unrepresented individuals. We also submitted a motion for continuance in the case the Webex motion was denied.

He is just one of many in this situation, so we need more hands on deck, more law students writing these motions. The need for legal aid remains critical, and more must be done to address the access-to-justice gap.

Update 3: The access-to-justice gap is extremely dire. Immigrants in proceedings are affected by many things the normal U.S. citizen is affected by. Yet, many individuals have a misconception of immigrants not complying or doing things the “right” way, and those individuals use that misconception to rationalize to themselves and to the world that an immigrant is not entitled to immigration relief. Well, it is indeed a misconception, and this is further exacerbated by the critical need for legal aid. These past weeks, I met an individual that missed her court hearing because she was receiving cancer treatment, another because she was holding her dying son’s hand at a hospital, and another who lacked knowledge using technology, even his phone. Because they could not attend their hearings, their immigration judges issued in absentia deportation orders, so we helped with motions to reopen. As we helped them, I asked myself how many other individuals are facing similar challenges yet do not have financial resources or access to pro bono attorneys to solve their immigration issues. While I am glad we helped those individuals, my heart aches for immigrants who did not have access to similar organizations like ours. Today, our organization conducted a legal aid clinic, and we were able to help more than 30 individuals, and that gave me more hope. Hope that one day any immigrant needing help will have access to justice. As I continue my legal education and internship, I reflect on the opportunities I have had to create an impact on immigrants’ lives, and I hope other law students are able to contribute in similar ways. The need for legal aid remains critical.

Update 4: I only have two weeks left of my internship. I think there is so much to do. So many people I wish I could keep helping. Although my internship will soon come to an end, the impact other interns and I have had on the lives of immigrants will be everlasting. As an immigrant from a low-income family myself, I recognize the need for nonprofits like American Gateways. I often wonder how many other people we could help out if there were more of us, everywhere. All states. I hope that one day, immigration attorneys can become available like public defenders are, free of charge and accessible. The gap to justice continues to widen as people experience economic hardships. I feel that the nation must understand, if they haven’t done so, that oftentimes immigrants lack the economic means to get access to legal representation and services, and because of that, they may end up with no status at all. It is not a decision to lack status. Immigrants often seek help from nonprofits like ours, but it is a long wait at times



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because attorneys have their hands full. The need for pro bono legal services is big, and I wish others could become part of the solution.

Final Reflection: Impactful - that is what comes to mind when I think about my summer internship. Before starting, I thought about how my 1L year developed me, but I was also anxious as my experience in immigration advocacy has been heavy due to my own immigration status (DACA recipient). I feared having a negative experience and being discouraged from practicing immigration law. That was not the case. I found so much warmth, guidance, and knowledge in the American Gateways family. With the mentorship of my supervising attorney, Laura Flores Dixit, I assisted in case preparation for clients with active cases before the Immigration Courts and clients who are survivors of crimes seeking immigration benefits before United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. I also provided legal information and limited legal services to pro se asylum applicants appearing before the San Antonio immigration court. I conducted legal research and developed legal arguments for appeals, petitions, and motions including writs of habeas corpus, motions for continuance, and motions for Webex appearance. When Attorney Flores Dixit informed me of the release of a detained immigrant, my heart knew I was not going to have a heavy experience. Our filing of a writ of habeas corpus got him out. However, my anxiety due to the uncertainty of DACA and DACA recipients being detained and deported intensified with the murder of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo by DHS agents. Lorenzo was not the target of the operation, and his final words were "Me están matando" (They're killing me). His loved ones further echoed this: "they're killing us like dogs." This was a heavy moment we experienced as an immigrant community. His murder reminded me of my why. Many immigrants cannot afford the services they need. The immigrants I met escaped persecution, were victims of crimes, family separation, unscrupulous notaries, and of the immigration system itself. They were also experiencing the most horrible things in life, like cancer and death of loved ones, so they were given deportation orders in absentia when they didn't show up despite informing the court about their situations. We were also able to help a young adult who lost his parents yet was determined to find legal services. The need for legal services and representation is big. Being an Equal Justice America Fellow allowed me to help close the justice gap, ensuring that all people, regardless of income or background, have access to civil legal representation. The work was demanding but impactful. It has shaped me as an advocate and professional. I will end with the words of David Gruber: "what starts today does not end in August." There is so much work to do, and I will use my summer internship experience to continue helping the immigrant community because justice is a right, not a privilege.

I sincerely appreciate each one of you at American Gateways for making my experience impactful for our community and myself.