



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: After just my first week at Legal Momentum, I am much more informed about the types of civil legal aid available to survivors of gender-based violence and discrimination. I spent the week familiarizing myself with the organization's work, including learning about Legal Momentum's community hotline, and conducting research for a forthcoming court filing challenging the nonconsensual drug testing of a pregnant client. Working on this case showed me the growing need for legal aid for families facing consequences of child protective services investigations, and how this impact can be affected by racial and gender bias within the legal system. It also gave me a better understanding of how protections under New York State and City human rights laws can be used to defend personal medical decisions and challenge forms of discrimination that often have far-reaching consequences for families. Even in my first week, I have been struck by the creativity with which legal aid attorneys leverage every available tool, argument, and law to support their clients. It has been exciting to discover how Legal Momentum's policy advocacy - at the municipal, state, and federal levels - strengthens its direct representation of clients by expanding that toolkit. I can't wait to continue learning about civil legal aid from a gender justice perspective this summer!

Update 2: Over the past several weeks, I have had the opportunity to dive much deeper into Legal Momentum's work addressing the nonconsensual drug testing of pregnant patients. For one of our cases, I have begun drafting a post-hearing brief for the administrative court, which has required me to study the hearing transcript and see firsthand how my team framed its arguments, examined witnesses, and advocated for our client earlier this spring. I have also followed developments in our out-of-state nonconsensual drug testing case, demonstrating how similar cases can face divergent outcomes depending on the jurisdiction, judge, and local law. Beyond litigation, I have conducted comparative legislative analyses to help the team evaluate proposed legislation and begun a longer-term research project exploring employment



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

protections available to survivors of gender-based violence under New York State and New York City law.

As the summer has progressed, I have gained a greater appreciation for how public interest organizations balance direct client representation with broader policy advocacy. I have also seen firsthand how Legal Momentum's gender justice lens enables it to provide civil legal aid across a wide range of issue areas while remaining attentive to the ways in which discrimination shapes our clients' experiences and legal needs.

Update 3: This week, I completed the post-hearing brief for our case involving a patient who was non-consensually drug tested. I spent countless hours poring over the hearing transcript to identify the strongest facts and testimony while researching the New York State and New York City Human Rights Laws and the caselaw interpreting them. Our client's experience reflects broader patterns of discrimination and coercion experienced by pregnant patients subjected to nonconsensual drug testing. It has been fascinating to see how direct civil legal aid and impact litigation intersect in this case. Working on this brief showed me how careful factual development, legal research, and persuasive advocacy on behalf of one client can strengthen legal protections for others facing similar discrimination. Contributing to advocacy that advances both an individual client's interests and broader systemic change strengthened my belief in public-interest litigation as a powerful tool for social change.

This week, I also joined a client intake meeting for Legal Momentum's program supporting survivors of gender-based violence facing employment issues. I saw how—despite the limits of the law—access to legal counsel can be transformative. Sometimes, one conversation with an attorney can help a survivor to discover rights and workplace accommodations they did not know were available. Overall, my work this week underscored the importance of expanding women's access to high-quality civil legal aid.

Update 4: This week, our team submitted our post-hearing brief in a years-long case involving pregnancy-related harassment and discrimination. Our client, a working mother, has spent years navigating the legal system to have her experiences recognized. The hours I spent reading her testimony in the hearing transcript reminded me that legal advocacy is about more than securing a particular remedy. For many clients, it is also about being given the opportunity to tell their story and to have it taken seriously. Being entrusted to identify the facts that mattered most and translate them into persuasive legal arguments has been the most meaningful part of my summer. Submitting the brief marked the final stage of this litigation after five years of relentless client advocacy.



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

The brief deadline also coincided with an informed consent coalition call discussing the Maternal Health, Dignity and Consent Act and its progress in the New York Legislature this session. The bill is a policy effort aimed at addressing harms associated with nonconsensual drug testing of pregnant patients—the very type of harm at the center of our client's case. Although the Act passed the Senate, it ultimately stalled before becoming law this session. Together, these experiences put into perspective the importance of civil legal aid. The law does not often provide clear or comprehensive protections for people who experience discrimination and reproductive injustice. When it does not, access to dedicated legal advocates can make the difference. While policy advocacy is crucial to expanding public interest lawyers' toolkits, this summer has shown me that civil legal aid is often what bridges the gap between the law as it exists and the justice that clients deserve.

Final Reflection: This week, I am wrapping up my summer at Legal Momentum, the country's first and longest-running legal defense and education fund for women. During my time on the legal team, I have seen how gender and gender-based violence connect with many areas of law, including reproductive justice, employment discrimination, and racial discrimination.

Working for a small and dedicated legal team has exposed me to so many of the skills required to be a strong civil legal advocate: patience, resourcefulness, collaboration, persistence, understanding, and fortitude. I saw these qualities in my coworkers day in and day out, despite imperfect legal tools, the limits of available legal remedies, and mounting threats to our work from a changing political terrain.

I also saw these qualities in the clients whose cases I supported over the last three months. One case I supported had stretched on for years before finally resolving this summer - a reminder of the patience and persistence that civil litigation can demand from clients as much as their advocates. I saw, too, how much this work depends on clients as partners in their own advocacy and on the trust built between clients and their legal teams.

Throughout the summer, I saw the importance of these qualities in civil legal aid and impact litigation, and I saw them begin to develop in my own work: when I supported a difficult client intake and confronted the limits of what the law could offer; when I scoured databases for our post-hearing brief, hoping that the caselaw I wanted existed; when I joined coalition calls and learned about the work of organizations across the country that our team and clients will benefit from; when I researched and submitted a public comment about federal policy that could affect Legal Momentum's advocacy; and when I created a research memo that my team will use long after I finish my internship to assess the employment protections available for survivors of gender-based violence who seek our help.



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The time I've spent at Legal Momentum this summer has been transformative. It has refined my interest in public interest litigation and educated me in how policy advocacy can be a part of that work. My summer has confirmed for me the profound unmet need for civil legal aid across this country and validated my reason for getting a law degree: becoming equipped to translate a client's problem into a legal solution.

I will take a lot forward with me from this summer, but the predominant feeling is gratitude. I am grateful for my mentors at Legal Momentum, who invested considerable time and effort to train me, support me, and give me opportunities to grow. And I am grateful for Equal Justice America and its donors for making it possible for the next generation of public interest lawyers to spend our summers doing work that is meaningful and impactful. I look forward to paying this generosity forward as I continue to build a public interest legal career.