



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Matthew Torres
LAW SCHOOL	Stanford Law School
ORGANIZATION	Brennan Center for Justice, ACLU of New Mexico

Update 1: This week was my first week as an Equal Justice Fellow at the Brennan Center for Justice in Washington, DC. Because Stanford is on the quarter system, I started a bit later than others. I arrived one week after other interns had, but it was incredibly welcoming and I have settled in just fine. As I've spent even the first week in DC, it's been stressed upon me how important the work being done here and in other organizations is. At a time when legal aid is being unappreciated to say the least, the folks I work with are tireless every day to try and make an impact on the lives of people all around us. I am working primarily on judiciary issues. This week I began working on a policy memo that is focused on security measures for judiciary officers after the rise in previous years of threats and acts of violence against legal staff that has ruled or worked against legally invalid orders from the federal administration. I've been comparing judicial security measures from other countries to see what kinds of changes we can make to create a safer and more independent judiciary. When I initially thought about the work I would be doing, I imagined it might be more related to everyday people as opposed to staff and judicial representatives, but through my research I've been able to see how the downward effects of these situations have a massive impact on people everywhere. If safety and security is not shored up, the judiciary is more susceptible to external pressures to follow outside influences rather than the law, and in such instances, the people seeking relief are not on level grounds with their opponents. We had the opportunity to speak with the President of the Brennan Center for Justice who shared us a story about the creation of the Brennan Center. It was created in memory of Justice Brennan of the Supreme Court. Justice Brennan, however, left one condition prior to giving his blessing. He asked that the Brennan Center not be directed by what they thought He would do, but rather, asked that they follow the law where it takes them. He wanted the center to do what it thought was right for democracy and the rule of law even if it was not what Justice Brennan would have done, because he believed the Center should adapt, as the constitution should, to the people and to democracy. This was clear when the Brennan



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Center worked to narrow and dismantle the decision in *Buckley v. Valeo* which was a per curiam opinion that later turned out to be written primarily by Justice Brennan himself. I think the idea that we don't have all the answers, but we should still do our best to help those around us is what sticks with me. Legal aid is about being there to help everyone around us, even if the odds are long and the work is hard. That doesn't mean, however, that it isn't worth it every single time, even for a single person. I'm looking forward to the rest of the summer.

Update 2: It's been 3 weeks since I started at the Brennan Center, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I've primarily been working on researching international judicial security measures to compare with the United States. For a time, it felt like something very removed from affecting individuals, but as I've been learning more and more about the voting rights space and the rule of law, I'm seeing how the courts and the judiciary generally is one of the greatest backstops we have against expansion of executive power in ways that can disenfranchise or otherwise harm everyday Americans. Nations like Mexico are facing what could be described as a further along process in the rise of distrust in the courts, attacks on the judiciary from the executive, and flourishing corruption in the federal government. Nations like Canada, seem to be doing significantly better, even compared to the U.S., in part due to their almost constant reinforcement of the concept of Rule of Law. When something rears its head that could threaten the rule of law it is immediately called out by organizations in a way that is not angry, but rather wary. It's like trying to ask someone you may not agree with to work with you on addressing an issue rather than being against each other. This kind of vigilance keeps a nation healthy and collaborative rather than spiteful and antagonistic. I have also been able to be a part of several different events on the hill and with other organizations that have helped me realize just how hard it can be to get things done in the nation's nerve center. Through coffee chats, I'm getting to know other attorneys who are brilliant and kind and helpful. I am so glad I get to be here and I'm excited to get back to school and keep doing what I can.

Update 3: It is now week 5 of my internship at the Brennan Center for Justice. Since the last update, I've gotten a number of assignments ranging from researching how legislatures are leveraging AI to engage with the public to researching how history can be used in litigation in non-originalist ways to counter the rising trend in originalist interpretation of the constitution. It was a goal of mine during this first summer to experience the kind of work lawyers can and currently do in the field of policy rather than just the courtroom so I could widen the breadth of what I can see myself doing. While I have enjoyed my time at the Brennan Center more than any other job I've done, I do wonder if I would be happier working in a more litigation focused environment. I'm looking forward to next year and other experiences to find out what the answer to that question is. As a first-generation student part of the difficulty in navigating these new spaces is not knowing which doors are open, so taking a summer just to explore opportunities has been such a great thing. I know more than ever that I want to be working in



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

public interest regardless of what I choose to do after graduation, and I know that this work really interests me. Last week we were able to attend Georgetown Law School's supreme court term in review. One of the things that stuck out to me was the idea of the partisanship of judges. As I've been researching this topic in my work, it's become ever more clear to me that access to justice is so easily curtailed by a single person closing the door on the everyday citizen's attempt to have their day in court. When Judges make their decisions based on their ideologies rather than the law, they are choosing to be loyal to something other than the constitution and their oath to uphold the law. Other countries are seeing this in their systems as well whether they are more eroded than we are or whether they are seeing the indices of erosion and wondering if they are on similar paths.

Update 4: The week have been racing by and things are busier than ever. I have a full plate of work and I'm enjoying everything I'm doing immensely. I have just a few weeks left before I head to the ACLU of New Mexico for the second half of my summer. I have been working on a confidential project related to judicial security and I'm excited at finishing it soon. I'll be sure to share it in a final update. I've also been working on researching non originalist uses of history in supreme court jurisprudence and helped put on a number of events focused on supreme court reform and support for term limits in the supreme court. I had lunch with my mentor today and was asked if I had worked on anything this summer that had altered my perspective. It hadn't occurred to me, but I realized I definitely had. When I came into this summer, I think I was remarkably cynical about the possibility of big change or reform in systems that don't always seem to work for those most vulnerable populations in our country. Perhaps growing up watching those systems fail me hardened me towards that possibility, and so while I wanted to make a difference, I think deep down I was skeptical about if I really could. As you can imagine, a skepticism about the possibility of changing things for the better doesn't pair well with a desire to make the world a better place for others. You have to believe things can be better if you want to work to make them so. Coming into this space that is focused on policy and putting forward ideas about how we can reform our systems for the better opened my eyes to just how many people are doing this work, and just how much they are doing. I don't think I put my thought behind the idea of supreme court term limits or ethics reform, and now I'm surprised by how much I support it and feel comfortable talking about it. There's a level of optimism and hope that I think is necessary to work in legal aid or public interest at large. Without that motivation, I think it can be easy to become discouraged or give up, but I think it's important to remind ourselves why we started on this path. It wasn't generally for a massive reform or solving the world's issues in one fell swoop. It was likely for the opportunity to help even one person make sure their voice was heard, whether in our elections, in court, or to their representatives.

Final Reflection: This past weekend, I ended my internship at the Brennan Center for Justice and traveled to Albuquerque to begin my internship with the ACLU of New Mexico. While I was



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

there, I spent a large amount of time working on reports that deal with the judiciary, some time researching the impact and use of amicus briefs, non-originalist uses of history, and the use of AI in the legislative branch to increase public participation in local government. In my work looking at AI use in the legislatures of different states and more broadly, I've been impressed by just how much different groups collaborate and help each other in public interest work. When I had a coffee chat with an attorney, he told me he knew several attorneys at the ACLU of New Mexico where I would be working later in the summer. At the end of my time at Brennan, I was working to finish a few projects that I had but also beginning to hear and see presentations by the other interns as they finished up their projects as well. I was enlightened to hear them and others present and talk on topics they had all but mastered in the 9 weeks we had been there that I had not the faintest idea about. Likewise, I presented on topics they had not spent much time with either. The amount that we need each other in this work not only to support us through the ups and downs of winning and losing cases is evident. This kind of cooperation also allows us to lift where we stand and do far more than we could alone.

Now, I turn to the ACLU of New Mexico, and although it is my first day, it seems I will be working mostly with the New Mexico Civil Rights Act and fighting against attempts to limit its reach to recovery for New Mexicans across the state. It was an altogether disorienting experience for me stepping off the plane into the dry heat. I had not been in my home state for almost ten years. Part of me was remembering who I was then, the concerns I had, and the issues my family and my communities faced. The other part was glad I could come back with more agency to help those around me. I left New Mexico so long ago, saying that I wanted to give back and grateful for everyone here who had supported me and made it possible for me to have the opportunities I have had. Coming back felt full circle, and I'm glad I can be here. What I do here I think is likely to be minimal, as my skills at the end of 1L are nothing to be written home about, but to me, it is amazing to just come back and lift where I stand to help my communities.

Being an Equal Justice America Fellow is another glad moment for me. For someone with my background, from my communities and my state, it often feels like justice, opportunity, and liberty are just out of reach, or that we are not seen at all. Being able to say "I made it" as a proud New Mexican is a reminder to me and those in my community that those opportunities are for us as well, that those liberties have always been ours, and that justice is something we should always claim, no matter how loud we must be to do so. Thank you to EJA for making that possible for me.