



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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ORGANIZATION	Education Law Center-PA

Update 1: After my third week at Education Law Center-PA, I want to take a moment to thank Equal Justice America for generously supporting me and many other law students working in legal aid this summer.

In just three weeks at ELC, I have had the opportunity to do client intakes, draft documents for systemic litigation on behalf of young children with disabilities who are being pushed out of preschools in Pennsylvania, and work on updates to ELC's "Back to School Guide," which provides easily accessible legal resources and information to students and families across the Commonwealth.

I've learned so much already in my brief time at ELC, but I want to share some statistics that stood out during a training this week:

In Pennsylvania, over a quarter of parents who initiate due process hearings (to ensure their children receive the supports they are legally entitled to at school) are not represented by counsel. School districts are always represented by counsel at due process hearings.

Parents represented by counsel prevail in nearly 60% of due process hearings. Parents without counsel, in contrast, prevail just over 15% of the time.

These statistics highlight the difference that access to legal representation can make in the lives of students and their families. If you would like to support Equal Justice America's goal of expanding access to legal representation by ensuring law students like me can work in legal aid, I encourage you to consider donating to EJA.



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Update 2: With summer flying by, it's time for another update/

Spending my summer fighting for education equity at Education Law Center-PA is an incredible privilege, and I'm so grateful for the support of Equal Justice America that has made it possible for me to do so. At ELC, I've had the opportunity to support systemic litigation through research and drafting responses to motions, create self-advocacy tools for students and families experiencing homelessness, and work directly with families seeking legal assistance through ELC's Help Line. I've also been supported and mentored at every turn by the incredible attorneys at ELC, who have taught me so much in the short time I've been there.

Final Reflection:

I had an incredible experience at Education Law Center-PA this summer, and I am very grateful for the support from EJA. At ELC-PA, I had the opportunity to work on a wide range engaging and meaningful assignments to support students and families in Pennsylvania public schools and advance education equity. These included drafting responses to motions to dismiss Individuals with Disabilities Education Act claims, drafting seven fact sheets and self-advocacy tools for ELC-PA's Back to School Guide, reviewing settlement agreements, and conducting legal research for partner organizations. I especially enjoyed getting to research and write about the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness and the rights of students referred to law enforcement at school.

I also had the opportunity to work directly with clients through ELC-PA's HelpLine. I completed two intakes each week from the HelpLine. After completing intakes, I would suggest next steps to my supervising attorney, draft advice emails, and join in on any meetings with the client. Through this, I learned about the multitude of problems and barriers faced by students and families in Pennsylvania schools daily and how these impact their lives. I also learned how to effectively communicate with clients and manage an active caseload.

Along with the meaningful work, what made my experience at ELC-PA so special was the incredible mentorship I received by talented and dedicated public interest attorneys. Each summer intern at ELC-PA was assigned a mentor, and my mentor, Paige Joki, went above and beyond to support me, teach me, and give me opportunities to grow my lawyering skills and confidence. I also felt very supported by the other attorneys in the office and my fellow interns. Through my internship at ELC-PA, I didn't just learn about education law, I learned about how to be a great public interest attorney who can make a difference in the lives of their clients and in the community. I was truly inspired by the commitment, creativity, and unwavering hope that those around me brought to work daily—and I feel a renewed sense of enthusiasm for working in civil legal aid after I graduate law school.