



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: I started last week in the housing unit at Community Legal Aid SoCal. Specifically, I work on unlawful detainer defense, which is a notoriously fast-moving field: in my week and a half here, I have already been to court twice - once observing a summary judgment argument, and on the other occasion shadowing a bench trial. I have also had the pleasure of speaking to clients in our answer clinics. During clinic, attorneys speak to our clients about their situation in order to develop plausible defenses. While I enjoy the legal aspect of the work, it's the people part of the job that I have liked the most - everyone at the legal aid is compassionate and cares deeply about the work we're doing. Our clients are often people who have been marginalized by society even though they are hardworking people, and I'm glad we're doing what we can to keep them housed. Housing is, or at least should be, a basic human right. I am glad legal aid exists to protect the people who have built our society but have too little legal know-how to protect their own rights. I am also glad that we are taking the fight to greedy landlords who try to squeeze every penny out of their tenants.

Update 2: It's been almost three weeks since I've started this job. I've now done more substantive work than I did in my last update, namely, I started drafting motions on my own (summary judgment and judgment on the pleadings). I'm appreciating how iterative the motion drafting process is because often I find myself having to communicate to the client about more facts that would help the motion. I am also taking on clinic work where I help clients file their answer. Learning to talk about the law with clients who might not be well versed in this type of work is a challenging but rewarding process. I look forward to doing more in the future.

Update 3: I have been doing more direct work with clients and realizing how much more help legal aid organizations need. I have had to tell clients that we don't have enough attorneys to take on their cases in multiple occasions. One client broke down crying. I felt powerless but the



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only thing I could do then was to reassure them that we're doing everything we could. More funding is desperately needed for legal aid!

Update 4: I have been getting more motion, discovery, and direct client work. It has become more obvious that the process of the lawsuit is sometimes even more important than the substantive law. I drafted a motion that successfully got the case dismissed that was entirely procedural based. The client had no substantive defense, but the landlord messed up procedurally. Moving forward, I hope to go to court more and get more experience observing attorneys argue in court!

Final Reflection: My summer has been an incredibly meaningful experience where I learned the ins and outs of being a housing lawyer. I have learned so much from my supervising attorneys, our paralegals, and other summer legal interns. I had no idea how much of a fast-paced environment the unlawful detainer process – it really put the meaning of a “summary procedure” from my property class in perspective. The attorneys are incredibly committed to the noble cause of helping people stay housed. This summer I worked on every stage of an unlawful detainer suit on the defense side – I helped our clients file an answer, drafted discovery requests and dispositive motions, attended a trial, and drafted a motion for attorney’s fees. Throughout the process, I learned to put my legal writing skills to practice. It was difficult in the beginning because I had only days to prepare a brief on a legal question when I had an entire quarter to do so during school. But I quickly learned to adapt to the pace of litigation.

I understood the meaning of the maxim “procedure is power” – so many times the landlord’s lawyer will make a procedural mistake like service of notice or missing some statutory required period of notice that we took advantage of.

Beyond the legal aspect of my summer, I enjoyed servicing clients. Talking to clients and learning their story made me realize how important legal aid is as a means for disadvantaged people to access justice. Importantly, I have had multiple clients who grew frustrated with the process and yelled at me for not giving them more comprehensive legal advice – one client thought we had lied to them about the scope of our representation, and another insisted that their research via ChatGPT was better than what I was able to provide them. It occurred to me that our clients were going through possibly the most difficult period of their lives when they come through our door, and this led me to take what they have to say to me with grace and not react harshly myself. At the end of the day, we were there to help them out when they had very little legal help otherwise. My supervisor said we should approach our work in a “trauma-informed” way, and I think that perspective helped my work a lot.