



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I'm now exactly a quarter of the way through my summer clerkship at the Oregon Law Center, and I can already see why some employees have spent 20 years here. The office environment is great--the attorneys are friendly and collaborative, they value the support staff highly, and they've welcomed me warmly. The expertise within the organization impresses me, as well. I've had the privilege of working with the org's expert on family law and domestic violence, who's just brilliant. I'm looking forward to learning more from her and everyone else at my office over the rest of the summer.

Update 2: About halfway through my summer and continuing to learn a lot. I've begun a new project, investigating whether local governments in Oregon may be violating Oregon's Sanctuary Protection Act, which (as far as I understand it) prohibits any state dollars from being spent on immigration enforcement. I've been using PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) and OEI (Oregon eCourt Case Information), and it's been unexpectedly fun to learn how to use new websites. I didn't enter this job thinking I would get to do anything federal, or to learn about new web programs; I am once again reminded that legal aid attorneys do all sorts of work and every day is something new.

Update 3: One of my goals going into this summer was to figure out my own career preferences. I wanted to figure out what areas of the law are most interesting to me, and I wanted to try and figure out what I liked about the legal aid office environment. So far, I've learned that though I enjoy helping out on the family law cases, I find them emotionally draining, and I think I would struggle with a full family law caseload. I hadn't realized I would feel this way, and I'm glad I figured it out before committing to a career as a family law attorney. I've also remembered how much I love a day where I do several different things. I am not cut out for a life of sitting in solitude researching all day--I need to be able to talk to my coworkers or clients, and to switch back and forth between projects. These are practical lessons that I'll carry with me into next summer and beyond, and I'm grateful to be learning them now.



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Update 4: Today, me and the rest of the law clerks at my organization watched oral argument in front of the Oregon Court of Appeals. It was, frankly, incomprehensible. This made me wonder--was it incomprehensible to the judges as well? To their clerks? To the attorneys? I learned that some judges do something called "front loading," where they read the briefs and research oral argument before the case is argued. The goal here is being able to really hone in and focus on key issues at argument. We also ate lunch with the chief judge, who told us some about how the court operates.

Final Reflection: I just finished ten weeks of work with the Oregon Law Center's Lane County office, where I helped a team of attorneys provide legal services to low-income Oregonians. The vibes at the office were excellent, and the dedication and expertise of my colleagues really impressed me. I got to work on a wide range of projects over the summer, and I'm thankful I was able to use so many different parts of my brain. I researched, wrote, talked to people, and set up systems to track large-scale research projects. Two projects I want to highlight are a research project investigating data privacy in Oregon and a project summarizing Oregon protective order case law.

At the beginning of summer, I was given a long-term project: find and summarize all new Oregon case law on stalking protective orders and Family Abuse Prevention Act restraining orders. These summaries are a resource that lawyers throughout my organization reference as they work on cases, and I felt good knowing I was working on something that would have a positive impact on many clients across the state. I really enjoyed closely reading the cases, then trying to get my summary as succinct as possible without sacrificing any necessary details. As I read the opinions, I found myself really impressed by the quality of the writing. I had been on the fence about clerking, but the idea that I could be the person writing those well-structured paragraphs and clear topic sentences convinced me that I should apply to clerk. I also learned that I couldn't spend more than a few hours at a time working on the project, because the factual background of many cases was too emotionally intense. This suggests to me that I might not flourish with a full family law caseload--something I am glad to know!

My other long-term project was a research project investigating the extent to which government bodies in Oregon contract with data brokers. I drafted a public records request, submitted the requests to 100+ Oregon government bodies, then handled follow-up communications with all government officials. I felt very helpful on this project--submitting all the requests and communicating with officials just took a lot of time that neither of the attorneys leading the project had. I gained a lot of content-area knowledge about data brokers and data privacy. I also improved my knowledge of Oregon geography. I can name all 36 counties!

Beyond the work I did, I found it valuable to just be in a real law office with real attorneys. It was reassuring to realize that I do like the sort of work legal aid attorneys do. And, not even one time was I asked to explain the statute of frauds. This was a valuable experience, and I will recommend it to my fellow law students.