



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: My first few weeks at the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative at Michigan Law have already been exciting and educational! I am especially proud of a letter that I drafted together with EJA fellow Sophie Helfer on behalf of a local peace group to their city manager, raising First Amendment and policy concerns about new Fourth of July parade rules. The city is prohibiting all messaging on signs, banners, clothing, or vehicles during the parade, apparently in response to complaints from community members who opposed the group's calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. In our letter, we explained why these restrictions are unconstitutional and urged the city to rescind them. We will continue to advocate on the group's behalf as the matter develops. This experience has shown me how lawyers can help community organizations respond to government efforts to suppress speech. Advocates for an end to the war in Gaza have been targets of such restrictions for years, and protecting the right to participate in public debate is especially important in local contexts, where restrictions may attract less scrutiny and press coverage. We hope the city will allow the peace group to engage in their usual advocacy this Fourth of July.

Update 2: My past few weeks at CRLI have been deeply educational. Most recently, I have been focused on a habeas corpus case on behalf of a client who has been detained by ICE for a long time despite being seriously ill with multiple chronic conditions and late-stage cancer and the government having no current plans to remove him. We filed our petition a few weeks ago and are preparing to file our reply brief next week. We are hopeful that the court will promptly order his release so that he can rejoin his wife and children and receive the care he needs. The case has reinforced for me how urgent habeas advocacy is for people detained by ICE, especially in this moment. Conditions in detention centers have become increasingly dire, with record numbers of deaths in custody, and access to counsel for people in detention remains far too limited. Advocating for people who have immigrated to this country is a cause close to my heart,



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and I previously had little knowledge of the legal process for habeas petitions. It has been invaluable to get to know the local community of immigrant rights lawyers and rely on their expertise.

Update 3: I'm now about halfway through my summer clinic experience at CRLI, and the work continues to challenge me and teach me new things. Over the past few weeks, I have been helping the ACLU of Michigan document conditions at the North Lake detention facility. A big part of this work has been speaking directly with people held there about their experiences in detention. Those conversations have stayed with me. I've been struck by people's willingness to speak openly and their resilience as they recounted experiences of pain and mistreatment. The work has also taught me how to build trust and set expectations when we cannot establish an attorney-client relationship or provide direct assistance. I'm incredibly grateful for our undergrad intern, Camila, who serves as a Spanish interpreter on our virtual calls. She brings a lot of care and understanding to these conversations, and her tone makes our calls feel more like a natural three-way conversation than a mechanical back and forth. At the same time, she pays a lot of attention to detail and accuracy. I'm proud of how we've worked as a team.

Update 4: I'm happy to share that we have closed out this week at CRLI with good news! A few weeks ago, we filed a petition for writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a client detained by ICE, and this Thursday, the court granted it, meaning that our client will soon be released. Our client suffers from several illnesses, including late-stage cancer, which long went undiagnosed and worsened in detention. Access to medical treatment in detention is notoriously poor, and our client went undertreated for months. He is now recovering from cancer surgery. It was covered by the government—but likely necessary only because his cancer went untreated for so long. Now his family can finally coordinate the care he needs, on his terms. Since the second Trump administration began its aggressive campaign to detain record numbers of people, many have been held in horrid conditions for months or even years. Habeas petitions are an important tool for securing release. Zadvydas petitions in particular—filed when someone with a final order of removal has been detained for six months and the government has no real plan to deport them—can help people get out of these facilities. I'm filled with gratitude and admiration for the lawyers in the immigrant rights community who do this work every day and have shared their insights with us to make this win possible.

Final Reflection: My time at the Civil Rights Litigation Initiative has come to an end, and looking back, I still feel a little overwhelmed by how much I learned in a relatively short span of time. I came in wanting to explore a range of civil rights issues, and I got to do just that. I began the summer helping a local peace group push back against their city's new restrictions on protest messaging at their city's Fourth of July parade, then focused on a habeas corpus case for a client who had spent a year in ICE detention while suffering from several chronic illnesses. Alongside



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that case, I helped document conditions at the North Lake detention center by speaking with people held there about what they were experiencing. And toward the end of the summer, I spent most of my time on an appellate brief for our FOIA case in the Michigan Court of Appeals, representing investigative journalists in their effort to access police records in order to build a national database and report on misconduct.

Going up against government bodies felt daunting. The immigration work stood out to me for how much concentrated power the government holds over people's lives, and how bureaucratic hurdles can be the difference between a habeas win and continued ineligibility for release. Still, we had happy outcomes to celebrate. Our client's habeas petition was granted, as were those of several other people at North Lake I had spoken with. And in the parade matter, the city ultimately declined to enforce its speech restrictions.

The advocates I worked alongside, and the people I worked on behalf of, are what I will remember most from this summer. In the parade matter, we argued to the city's attorney that the speech restrictions were unconstitutional; when the city did not lift them, the peace group met the moment with a lot of creativity, marching with gags and crossed-out signs to draw public attention. The people I talked to in detention were generous with their time even though speaking with us carried significant risks. I'm also grateful to the Michigan community of immigrant rights lawyers, many of whom readily shared their guidance with us throughout the summer. And I really valued the EJA event in New York, where I picked up advice from lawyers about building client relationships and got to learn about other fellows' work.

While the sheer variety of matters I was working on felt daunting at times, I was motivated by a common thread that ran through each one: we were helping clients surface harm that a government body was trying to keep out of public view. That goal was very energizing, especially at a time when it feels like many civil liberties are under attack.

I feel very grateful for the fellowship. Through the clinic, I learned so much in just a few short months, and I feel especially proud of our habeas win, which so tangibly affected our client's life. Thank you!