



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: So far, my clinical internship with the University of Michigan Law School has been a baptism by fire in the best possible way.

On Day 1, I was staffed on six matters across several areas of law (family, housing, education rights, and civil rights) and in various stages of litigation. My most pressing assignment: A parenting time case with an evidentiary hearing the following week.

The supervising attorney asked me if I wanted to take witness testimony on the record. I could examine any number of witnesses - all I had to do was let her know who I had in mind.

Like most rising 2Ls, I haven't taken Family Law, Evidence, or Trial Advocacy. Still, my supervisor trusted me to take the plunge. So, I decided to take on a direct examination (baby steps!) and spent the rest of the week preparing.

Of course, my supervisor also warned me to expect the unexpected. At our hearing, that turned out to mean extensive negotiations that punted witness examinations to another date. (More on that next month.) But in watching my supervisor reason with the other side, I got to see what zealous advocacy looked like up close. I was also struck by the depth of our client's trust in our team to protect her children's interests.

These trust-centered relationships define legal aid. The clients I'm working with this summer face life-altering legal problems, from evictions to lead poisoning. They depend on empathetic advocates to help them achieve justice. Unfortunately, there's limited access to representation nationwide.



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Update 2: One of the most eye-opening matters I've worked on since my last update is a landlord-tenant dispute. The client and her kids experienced horrific living conditions. Multiple kids got lead poisoning.

To support this litigation, I worked on two very different writing assignments: a formal research memo and a brief client letter. The memo was certainly challenging. It involved analyzing several dense insurance policies (and I'd like a word with whoever wrote them). But in some ways, the letter proved trickier to write.

The thrust of the letter was simple: "Please sign the enclosed forms from opposing counsel." My first draft was direct and concise, with all the right information. As my supervising attorney reminded me, though, the client just signed a batch of very similar forms. She also has her hands full with a new job, a new apartment, and several young children. All while recovering from the trauma of her last living situation.

It was important to recognize all of this up front. Just as important was anticipating her needs by noting which post office to visit and what time it closed.

My supervisor's feedback showed me the little things attorneys think about when providing legal aid. Every client interaction demands empathy, and there are countless ways to demonstrate it.

Update 3: There's been a ton of action over the last few weeks.

My most active matter right now is my parenting time case with the University of Michigan Law School's Pediatric Advocacy Clinic. The hearing I mentioned in Update #1 is coming up soon. So, my partners and I made a home visit to the client. Almost immediately, I could tell the human connection mattered a lot to a mother who's worked with too many student attorneys to count over the years. What's more, I was able to leverage my (rusty) client interview skills to gather crucial facts and better understand her needs. The immediate output: A pre-hearing brief that I co-wrote and filed this week. Now, I'm preparing to negotiate with the other side and present our case in an evidentiary hearing.

Meanwhile, my only federal matter—with the Veterans Legal Clinic—has started to pick up steam. The case sits at a unique intersection of artists' rights and civil rights. There are also a lot of thorny procedural considerations. Overall, I'm getting a comprehensive view of early-stage litigation, from meet-and-confers to case management strategy. I can see how people become civil procedure nerds.



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In both these cases, my clients have paths to justice. But many Americans don't.

Update 4: My parenting time case with the University of Michigan Law School's Pediatric Advocacy Clinic came full circle: I co-lead a negotiation with the other side, just six weeks after watching my supervisor negotiate with the same party. We ultimately moved forward with an evidentiary hearing. During that hearing, I delivered an opening statement and took witness testimony before the Washtenaw County Friend of the Court. We'll get a recommendation back later this week. I hope it grants the client's children some long-overdue relief.

In my artists' rights case with the Veterans Legal Clinic, I got to lead a Rule 26(f) pre-trial conference with opposing counsel. Afterward, I co-wrote a case management report / discovery plan. My clinic partner and I also needed to prepare initial disclosures, so we met our client in person to nail down some details. Seeing his life's work up close—and the enormous respect he's earned from his community—put the stakes of this litigation in perspective. I'll likely be staying on for the upcoming semester as an advanced clinical student-attorney.

I also had two big assignments for my other matters: (1) a motion to modify child support for a disabled veteran, and (2) a research memo on possible tort claims for a domestic violence survivor seeking housing justice. I know the students on these cases this semester will do a great job carrying the torch.

It's been a privilege to serve Southeast Michiganders this summer alongside the PAC, VLC, and CCLC attorneys and staff. Equal Justice America helped make this possible via fellowship resources and mentorship (shoutout to Jordane, my incredible mentor and MLaw alumna!).

Final Reflection: As an Equal Justice America Fellow, I worked at the University of Michigan Law School across the Pediatric Advocacy, Civil-Criminal Litigation, and Veterans Legal Clinics. This unique, three-clinic collaboration exposed me to several areas of law and different stages of litigation.

At the Pediatric Advocacy Clinic, I spent most of my time preparing for an evidentiary hearing on a parenting-time matter. Our client's children often faced physical and emotional abuse while at their father's home. My clinic partner and I interviewed the client in person to learn more about her and her children's needs. Hearing about their difficult experience—contrasted with the warm and loving home she'd cultivated—was one of the most impactful moments of my summer. I used the takeaways to inform a pre-hearing brief. I also led negotiations with the father. We ultimately moved forward with a full hearing, where I delivered an opening statement and examined two witnesses before the Washtenaw County Friend of the Court (FOC). This hearing



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was a capstone experience for me. A few weeks later, the FOC made a favorable recommendation that went well beyond our requested parenting-time modifications. The client was delighted and relieved. After years of litigation, she felt like her children had finally been heard.

At the Civil-Criminal Litigation Clinic, I worked on two landlord-tenant matters. The first involved a client whose children suffered lead poisoning and asbestos exposure in their rental unit. I co-wrote a research memo to determine whether the property management company's various insurance policies covered it for any of our client's claims. For the second matter, I interviewed a client about several traumatic interactions with her building's property manager. I then wrote a research memo on whether our client had a viable claim for intentional infliction of emotional distress. Across both matters, I learned to be creative in my legal reasoning and leave no stone unturned.

Lastly, my work at the Veterans Legal Clinic focused on a case at the intersection of artists' and civil rights. It was my only federal matter (and perhaps the first in the Clinic's history). I also happened to join the case shortly after the Clinic filed its complaint. As a result, I spent a lot of time with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. I led a Rule 26(f) conference with opposing counsel and co-wrote a case management report and discovery plan. I then helped prepare and serve initial disclosures. While putting those disclosures together, my clinic partner and I visited the client in person to nail down some key details. I loved seeing his life's work up close, not to mention the accolades he'd earned along the way. This visit helped contextualize the injustice our client faced—and the ripple effect on his community. I'm excited to continue working on this case this fall as an advanced clinical student-attorney.

After an enriching summer, I am more confident in my legal-writing, oral-advocacy, and client-service skills. I also have a deeper understanding of the interconnected legal, social, and economic issues impacting low-income Michiganders. And I know that zealous, public-interest advocacy will be core to my professional future. Thank you, Equal Justice America, for making this experience possible.