



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: Hi everyone! I have a quick life update: I just finished my first year in law school and I am working this summer as an Equal Justice America Fellow, providing free legal representation to clients in unemployment cases in Philadelphia while also working as a research assistant on a project investigating new ways to support veterans experiencing homelessness! One interesting thing about unemployment cases in Pennsylvania is that law students are allowed to represent our own clients in their benefits hearings. That means we can introduce evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and make arguments in official proceedings! While it is an exciting opportunity, it is also a big responsibility, and I'm looking forward to spending this summer becoming the best representative I can be for my clients!

Update 2: I had my first hearings with my own clients! Getting an objection sustained in a hearing was a very fun landmark and I am happy I was able to assist my clients in receiving their benefits! I also got a chance to learn the ropes at CareerLink, where we serve a variety of clients in a number of matters, attempting to solve common problems. I have learned so much from the attorneys at Philadelphia Legal Assistance and am very lucky to have such patient people showing me how the law works in practice.

Update 3: I had submitted my first appeals briefs and had more hearings! It was very exciting getting to dive into a case record and pick out issues, and even more exciting to have the chance to develop an argument that mixed due process and substantive unemployment issues. Outside of my own cases, I am now able to serve clients on my own at CareerLink (a physical location people can go to to address issues with their claims, seek work or training, and more), which is very rewarding! One thing I am struck by is the grace people have while navigating through what is often a frustratingly complex and bureaucratic system at a particularly stressful time. Even when facing technical issues or administrative problems holding up their benefits



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through no fault of their own, the clients I have worked with have been committed to engaging the system in good faith and with understanding. I have learned a lot from them this summer and I look forward to continuing this work during the academic year!

Update 4: I've taken a few more hearings, briefs, and days at CareerLink! Working with a bit more independence, I have been faced with a tough fact: there is a tension between the number of cases we can take on and the stakes of each case. Each person's case is extraordinarily important, and as such you want to put as much time in to as many of them as you can, and you have to decide how to allocate time very carefully. In some cases, people have waited hours for help with issues that take potentially hours to solve. On top of all of that, courts have to balance scheduling all of these cases and can cause further delays. Luckily, as an intern who is still learning, I have been given ample time on each case so far, but I can see how important this issue will become when I do this full-time. The folks at PLA are showing me how to work more efficiently, which I appreciate, but I am now more determined than ever to contribute as a volunteer after my fellowship is over and put significant time this year into researching ways we might be able to improve these processes and serve more clients with the quality of representation they deserve.

Final Reflection: I just wrapped up my summer as an Equal Justice America Fellow, where I had the privilege of working with Philadelphia Legal Assistance in their Unemployment Compensation Unit! Through their mentorship and guidance, I was able to provide free legal assistance to individuals whose unemployment benefits were denied or at risk, both as their representative in unemployment appeals hearings and in written appeals to the Unemployment Compensation Board of Review!

Outside of this, I also learned how to assist clients as an unemployment navigator, working with dozens of hardworking Pennsylvanians as they navigated the complex web of public benefits.

Through EJA's help, I was able to balance that job with a research assistant position at Penn studying permanent supportive housing projects. This summer has fueled my passion for working with people as they fight for recognition and support for their basic needs, and I cannot thank the attorneys, staff members, supervisors, and clients enough for their patience, guidance, and investment in me this summer. I look forward to using these skills as a pro bono volunteer with Penn's Employment Advocacy Project this year.