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Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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Update 1: My internship experience has started by acclimating to my new workplace, training on various projects, and meeting clients with diverse experiences and legal issues. Each morning, I listen to voicemails left at the Allegheny County Bar Foundation's helpline. Potential clients call with a wide array of legal concerns, spanning from divorce to landlord/tenant matters. I log and return calls, directing clients to resources and assigning them to ACBF projects. This experience has revealed numerous legal aid organizations to me that span across Pittsburgh and work collaboratively to help clients.

The ACBF runs two programs assisting clients: The Divorce Law Project and the Pardons Project. I had the opportunity to interview clients and draft their incident and personal statements for their pardon application. One client's personal statement followed the client's struggle with sobriety while battling abuse. The client was sober for years and their charges were from decades ago, yet they were still being denied employment.

I look forward to continuing my work on pardon applications, simple divorces, resource navigation, and protection from abuse orders. Through my time working on these types of cases, I have gained experience in different types of law and addressed numerous clients' issues. I have also had the opportunity to communicate with various judges, clients, and staff at legal aid organizations across Pittsburgh.

Update 2: Since my last update, I had the opportunity to engage in two different types of legal work that are slightly different from my usual day-to-day assignments. First, I was able to participate in a meeting at a large firm regarding the Allegheny County Bar Foundation's role in facilitating a pro bono legal clinic aimed at helping the unhoused community in Pittsburgh. This clinic would be staffed with volunteers and staff at the firm, the ACBF, and Catholic Charities. It was both refreshing and interesting to see the cross-over between legal aid and big law.

Although almost all my legal experience has been at organizations that only offer services to low-income clients, I have never had work-related interactions with the city's



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unhoused population. The meeting exposed me to consistent legal issues that the unhoused face, specifically, violence against unhoused women. Addressing these issues where other resources, including law enforcement, often fall short helps protect society's most vulnerable.

Second, I attended a community fair where the ACBF had a table for consulting clients on criminal record clearing. The fair was inside a community center, there was food and employment opportunities, and several potential clients attended by themselves or with their family. The experience showed me how valuable community resources are. Our table allowed community members to attend a fun event while gaining valuable legal information. It took away the stress that potential clients may feel having to reach out to legal aid organizations themselves, the time they would have to set aside, and the professionalism of a legal environment. As I dive further into my internship, I continue to see the importance of accessible legal aid in low-income communities.

Update 3: Over the past two weeks, I completed research and revised my memorandum regarding Pennsylvania's Standby Guardianship Act. Originally intended to address guardianship needs during the AIDS epidemic, the Act allows parents to designate a caregiver for their child, in advance, in the event of a parent's death or incapacitation. The Act's scope has been litigated before, but case law focuses on "triggering events" such as incarceration, not deportation. As ICE enforcement has ramped up across the country, thousands of children who are American citizens have experienced the deportation of one or more of their parents. To address this crisis, some lower-level courts have allowed parents facing the threat of detainment or deportation to designate a caregiver for their children in advance using the Standby Guardianship Act.

However, whether the Act applies to such cases has not been litigated in any meaningful sense and the result remains inconsistent across lower-level courts. There is a current Pennsylvania House Bill that has been "laid on the table" amending the Act to include this kind of immigration situation. Because of the statute's ambiguity, it seems that the legislative history of the Act, the introduction of an amendment, and *expressio unius est exclusio alterius* would keep the Act, in its current form, from applying to parents facing deportation.

In completing the memorandum, I sought information from the family law clinic at my law school, where I work during the school year. The professor in charge of the clinic told me that her outlook is that "something is better than nothing", so she encourages immigrant parents to fill out the form, even if she cannot promise that it will be upheld in court. She was excited that another legal aid organization in Pittsburgh was looking into the applicability of the Act because she is currently overwhelmed with applications for help with this type of guardianship designation.

Working on this memorandum allowed me to learn more about immigration law during a time where competency in this field is paramount to the practice of law. The Allegheny County Bar Foundation does not normally deal with immigration cases because of their complexity. However, based on my memorandum, applying the Act to immigration scenarios may be something the ACBF will advocate for. Exposing myself to an area of the law I was unfamiliar



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with and helping aid in others' understanding and legal advocacy has been one of the most monumental experiences I have had at my internship so far.

Update 4: As I near the end of my internship, I continue to have valuable learning experiences. I recently attended PFA court to help represent two clients referred to the Allegheny County Bar Foundation from another legal aid organization in Pittsburgh. We successfully obtained three-year long PFAs for both of our clients. Although I have been to PFA court once before, it was only for a motion for alternative service where neither party was present. This time, both parties were present in both cases. Both cases were resolved through negotiation between the parties facilitated by my supervising attorney. Parties were in separate rooms and the attorney, and I went back and forth to convey information between the parties. It was helpful for me to learn how to negotiate, rather than solely argue on behalf of one party. This is an important skill in the legal field that I have not had much practice with.

I also attended a career panel, which was an event mandated by my Summer Fellowship. It was engaging to hear attorneys from different legal fields talk about their varied experiences and refreshing to hear how many of their paths involved shifting goals and changing practice areas along the way. Even in a profession so focused on specialization, it was encouraging to see that lawyers do not need their entire career mapped out from the start. I appreciated having the opportunity to speak with attorneys in different specializations about their work in a relaxed social setting.

Final Reflection: My summer was defined by exposure to various types of legal work, where I aided clients in navigating often traumatic times in their life. Through answering legal helpline calls, completing divorce pleadings, drafting motions for protection from abuse clients, filing expungement/sealing orders and completing pardon applications, and finalizing a memorandum on a lapse in immigration law, I worked across a diverse array of legal fields, issues, and clients. These experiences helped me identify what legal work I excel at, what work I most enjoy, and which areas I need additional practice in.

My experiences in the final weeks of my internship accurately capture my summer journey. In the last couple weeks of my job, I attended a legal clinic at a local library, where volunteer and staff attorneys aided individuals with legal issues spanning from healthcare advance directives to deeds. I sat in on several conversations with individuals dealing with legal issues that I had no experience with in the past or at my internship. Hearing the advice of lawyers working in diverse areas of the law was refreshing and intriguing.

Another thing I completed in my last couple weeks of work was shadowing the Allegheny County Bar Foundation's Juvenile Court Project (JCP). I had shadowed the JCP once before earlier in the summer and decided to return for a final court shadowing. The JCP defends indigent parents involved in Juvenile Court proceedings, including issues of abuse/neglect, dependency, and termination of parental rights. While I enjoyed shadowing JCP attorneys in the court proceedings and recognized the value of their important work, I realized representing



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children or parents in juvenile court proceedings was not something I see myself doing in the future.

Finally, I finalized my assigned divorce cases and made last-minute revisions to pardon and expungement applications. I contacted my clients to say goodbye and kept them updated on their case timelines. Working a case from beginning to end was extremely fulfilling. In my prior legal experience in criminal law, cases were not finished in the few short months of my internship unless they were dismissed. However, helping the same client from the start to finish of their legal issue was an amazing experience.

Ultimately, my experiences this summer shifted and shaped my understanding of how I envisioned my legal career. Going forward, I will continue to work in family law at my law school's family law clinic, and I will also begin another family law internship this fall. My interest in litigation was reinforced through my experiences this summer, but I also enjoyed working in the office. I now know that a mix will be best for my career. My commitment to helping vulnerable individuals navigate a system that works against them remains.