



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: My internship with the East Bay Community Law Center's Health & Welfare practice has begun to instill in me valuable insight into the critical role that legal advocacy plays in protecting access to essential services. One of the primary reasons I pursued this opportunity was my desire to support my local community, particularly individuals and families who rely on public benefits and healthcare programs to meet their basic needs. In a time when access to these resources continues to face significant challenges, I believe it is more important than ever to understand how legal professionals can help bridge gaps in services and ensure that vulnerable populations receive the support they deserve.

During the first weeks of my internship, I have learned a great deal about the public benefits system and the complexities that individuals encounter when seeking assistance. I have been exposed to issues involving healthcare coverage, public assistance programs, and the legal processes that often determine whether someone can access these essential benefits. This experience has reinforced my understanding that access to healthcare and social services is not simply an administrative matter but one that can profoundly impact a person's quality of life.

This summer, I look forward to continuing to learn from the dedicated advocates around me and to developing the skills necessary to effectively serve my community in the future.

Update 2: As my internship continues, I have had the opportunity to take a more active role in assisting clients facing public benefits issues. Much of my work has involved investigating and researching the barriers clients encounter when attempting to access or maintain essential benefits. Through this process, I have developed a greater understanding of both the complexity



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of public benefits programs and the significant impact these programs have on the lives of community members.

A large portion of my responsibilities have involved communicating with agencies such as the Social Security Administration and county benefits offices to gather information, clarify eligibility issues, and identify the status of pending claims or benefits. These experiences have provided valuable insight into the administrative processes that govern public assistance programs and the challenges that individuals often face when navigating them. In many cases, resolving an issue requires extensive follow-up, detailed fact-finding, and coordination between multiple agencies.

In addition to conducting research and making agency contacts, I have also had the opportunity to meet directly with clients. These meetings have allowed me to better understand the personal circumstances underlying each case and to help identify the core issues affecting their access to benefits. Working alongside attorneys and advocates, I have participated in developing plans of action tailored to each client's needs and goals.

Through this work, I have strengthened my legal research, communication, and problem-solving skills while gaining a deeper appreciation for the role legal aid organizations play in supporting vulnerable communities. This experience continues to reinforce my commitment to public service and has given me a firsthand understanding of the challenges many individuals face when seeking access to critical public benefits.

Update 3: This summer, I have had the privilege to work with many clients who are women of color. Many of these clients struggle being heard by public benefits departments like the SSA when navigating their disability claims. As a black woman, we often get overlooked medically and dismissed on real issues. I personally spent years of my life arguing with doctors about genetic disorders that run in my family, going ignored. So, working with clients who also are having issues being heard by their medical teams and being overlooked by Social Security because they feel like they are fine, despite the fact that they do not know how their day-to-day life is, really connected with me and my own experiences. Clients like these are the ones I feel an extra sense of need to fight for because I had to fight my battles alone. So, knowing that women work towards ensuring that the stigmas and cycle of poor medical treatment because black woman are never considered in the medical sphere is very important to me. I am happy that my internship has allowed me to continue the work towards the issues that I find personally important and need attention.

Update 4: As I enter the final week of my internship, I find myself reflecting on how much I have learned over the course of the summer. What began as an opportunity to gain practical legal



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experience has become an incredibly meaningful experience that has strengthened my commitment to public interest law and serving vulnerable communities.

Over the past several weeks, I have had the privilege of working closely with clients facing complex public benefits issues. Whether I was researching eligibility questions, communicating with the Social Security Administration and county benefits offices, or meeting with clients to identify the root of their legal issues and develop plans of action, each experience reinforced the importance of compassionate and thorough legal advocacy. I have seen firsthand how access to public benefits can impact every aspect of a person's life and how dedicated legal aid attorneys can make a meaningful difference.

As my internship comes to an end, one of the most difficult parts will be saying goodbye to the clients I have worked with throughout the summer. Although my role in their cases is ending, I have become genuinely invested in their well-being and in seeing their matters resolved successfully. I plan to stay in touch with my supervising attorney so I can continue to learn about the progress of their cases and celebrate the outcomes with the team.

This internship has provided me with invaluable practical skills, but more importantly, it has reminded me why I chose to pursue a legal career in the first place. I leave this experience with a deeper understanding of public benefits advocacy, greater confidence in my legal abilities, and an even stronger desire to use the law to improve the lives of others. I am incredibly grateful to my supervising attorney, the legal aid team, and my fellowship for making this experience possible, and I look forward to carrying these lessons with me throughout law school and into my future legal career.

Final Reflection: My summer internship has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my law school journey and has given me a much clearer understanding of the type of attorney I hope to become. Before beginning this internship, I knew that I was interested in public interest law and wanted to use my legal education to serve communities that face barriers to accessing essential resources. However, working directly with clients navigating public benefits issues allowed me to see what that work looks like in practice and confirmed that I want public interest to remain an important part of my legal career.

Throughout the summer, I had the opportunity to investigate and research clients' public benefits issues, communicate with the Social Security Administration and county benefits offices, and meet directly with clients to better understand their circumstances. I learned how to break down complicated problems into manageable issues, identify potential solutions, and work with clients to create plans of action. These experiences showed me how much legal advocacy can matter to someone whose healthcare, income, or ability to support themselves depends on receiving the benefits for which they qualify.



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The internship also helped me recognize how strongly my interests in law and policy intersect. Public benefits systems are shaped not only by statutes and regulations, but also by administrative practices and broader policy decisions. Seeing how changes in policy can directly affect the people I was serving made me increasingly interested in understanding and addressing these systems on both an individual and larger policy level.

As I look toward my 2L summer, I hope to build upon this experience by seeking internship opportunities that allow me to continue working in public interest while exploring the intersection of law and policy. In particular, I am interested in opportunities involving public benefits, disability advocacy, healthcare access, and policies affecting individuals with disabilities and other underserved communities. I would like to gain experience not only advocating for individual clients but also understanding how legal and policy systems can be improved to make essential benefits more accessible.