



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I'm having a great time so far at American Gateways! This has only been my first week, and it's mostly been training so far, but I already get the sense that I'm going to be doing a LOT of substantive legal work this summer. I'm currently working on a petition for a writ of habeas as part of a case to release an immigrant from detention, and I'll be helping out with transcribing some recorded evidence for a VAWA petition as well. After that, I'm not sure – but there is a lot of help needed at this little non-profit, and I'm happy I get to be one of the clerks that can lighten the load for all these brilliant attorneys this summer.

Update 2: This was a great week. I was able to work on a country conditions packet for an asylum seeker, go to immigration court and observe an IJ's courtroom, draft a pro-se template for a motion to reopen after a deportation order issued in absentia, and work on a BIA appellate brief. The visit to the courtroom in particular was a really important addition to my time at American Gateways. It allowed me to see the humanity of not just the immigrants in removal proceedings, but also the people – ICE attorneys and IJs included – who are part of the system they face. While I was in the courtroom on Tuesday, I saw an ICE attorney move to rescind an order of deportation issued in absentia because there was inadequate notice provided to the respondent. Watching that attorney uphold principles of due process for a pro-se respondent who wasn't even there to defend herself was incredibly refreshing and made me feel hopeful for the future – something that is sorely needed these days.

Update 3: Work is getting intense – good intense. I've been tasked with some legal research for appellate work, which means all kinds of fun interplay between immigration court, BIA and 5th Circuit precedent. I'm still getting to work on country conditions reports, cover letters for immigration benefit applications etc., but it's great to see how my work could meaningfully



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change things for a large class of people. I think I'm really well-suited for appellate work and I'm looking forward to the rest of the work I'll be doing here!

Update 4: I've got just three weeks left of my internship – it's a bittersweet feeling. Over the past seven weeks, I've gotten to work on two habeas cases, four asylum cases, two VAWA cases, a BIA appeal, some research for a Fifth Circuit appeal, and a naturalization application. I'm slated to work on four, maybe five more matters before the end of my time here. I'm doing real work that's making a meaningful impact in people's lives when they are confronting systems that can feel impersonal at best and actively predatory at worst. This experience has only stoked my love of immigration law, and it's allowed me to make connections with practitioners that I'm hoping will last for the rest of my career. I'm so grateful for my work with AG, and I'm looking forward to the next few weeks!

Final Reflection: What a summer this has been... honestly, this week, I was working down to the wire. I had to finish up a pre-hearing brief, an appellate brief and a habeas petition in about 48 hours! I closed my laptop at 5:40 pm yesterday with this strange feeling of "Thank God this week is over," indistinguishably mingled with, "if only I had more time!" The habeas petition for one of our clients that I mentioned way back in Week 1? He was ordered released by a federal judge, and ICE let him out of detention – and he actually visited our office here in Austin to thank us! I can scarcely believe the fact that my work (although it was definitely not *JUST* my work) could snatch someone's liberty back from between the jaws of the immigration detention industrial complex.

Looking back at where I started ten weeks ago, the breadth of what I've been able to take on is surreal. From drafting country conditions packets for asylum seekers and transcribing sensitive evidence for VAWA petitions, to untangling complex jurisdictional questions across BIA and Fifth Circuit precedent, every assignment felt tangible and urgent. I never once questioned the point of what I was doing – that "why" was ever-present. That courtroom visit from earlier this summer showed me how high the stakes truly are for unrepresented individuals facing removal, and it really underscored how crucial it is to be a zealous, compassionate advocate when your clients are navigating a Goliath of a system that feels brutal, impersonal and set to come down on them at any moment. Working alongside the brilliant attorneys at American Gateways has fundamentally shaped the kind of advocate I want to become. They didn't just teach me how to write an effective brief: they modeled how to practice law with deep empathy, resilience, and respect for client dignity.

As I head back to law school, I carry with me not just sharper legal research and writing skills, but a deeply reinforced conviction that direct legal services and appellate advocacy can genuinely change the lives of people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of the system. I have been profoundly moved by what I have witnessed and facilitated this summer. I am beyond grateful to Equal Justice America and its supporters for making this fellowship possible for me, and to the entire team at American Gateways for an unforgettable, formative internship experience. From the bottom of my heart – thank you!