



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT

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LAW SCHOOL	University of Wisconsin Law School
ORGANIZATION	Legal Aid Chicago

This summer, I served as a legal intern with Legal Aid Chicago's Trafficking Survivors Assistance Project (TSAP). I worked with the TSAP team to provide holistic support to immigrant survivors of labor and sex trafficking. The TSAP team focuses on assisting survivors of human trafficking who are undocumented or have an unstable legal immigration status. Through filing T visas, Adjustments of Status, and employment authorization applications, the TSAP team helps trafficking survivors find stability, resources, and access to justice in the United States where their home countries might not offer it.

As a TSAP intern, I worked directly with clients to ensure their experiences as human trafficking survivors were accurately and persuasively presented to USCIS. This required extensive interviews with clients to get an accurate picture of their experience as trauma survivors, and deep familiarization with the legally relevant elements of human trafficking. I worked independently to schedule, conduct, and debrief meetings with clients on my own. I was also excited that I could finally put my Spanish degree to use in the interviews, as the vast majority of my clients were Spanish speakers. Being able to talk to the clients in their first language was an important part of my work, and I am glad I was able to provide them with some comfort in that way.

The sheer number of client interactions I had this summer was unexpected and came with a few challenges. For one, almost all of my client meetings were in Spanish, which required me to put my (admittedly rusty) Spanish to the test and learn new vocabulary to describe highly specific legal terminology and processes. The meetings with clients were also very emotionally taxing, both for me and the clients. I learned a lot about trauma-informed interviewing practice, which balances the necessity of asking legally relevant questions with the risks of making clients feel



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interrogated or re-traumatized. I also learned about vicarious trauma, which affects many lawyers and other public servants who interact with trauma survivors on a daily basis. I was lucky that my supervisors were incredibly knowledgeable about both of these topics and encouraged me to engage in self-care practices and be cognizant of the symptoms of vicarious trauma where they arose.

The main project I worked on was a T Visa application. I was assigned a client who had been on the Legal Aid Chicago waitlist for some time. After conducting her intake, I found that her case was a bit complicated. Rather than a straight-forward human trafficking case, she had been trafficked after entering a voluntary smuggling agreement to cross the border into the United States. USCIS is far less likely to grant a T visa to applicants who voluntarily agreed to be taken across the border illegally, so it was very important to get all of the details correct in this case. Because of this, I had to do extensive legal research on USCIS decisions involving aspects of human smuggling. After a series of long interviews with the client, I drafted her affidavit and cover letter, laying out her experience as a trafficking survivor and matching up each piece to the legal elements of human trafficking. Though I unfortunately could not file the T Visa application before the end of my internship, I made significant progress on the application, and the client was very happy with how fast it had progressed.

Another piece of my summer that I really enjoyed was the opportunity to connect with other law students and receive mentorship from an Equal Justice America alumnus, who happened to have worked as an attorney for TSAP in the past! The Equal Justice America reception was extremely encouraging, and I was able to connect with other public interest-minded law students from law schools around the country. My EJA mentor also played a huge role in these connections and in my success during the summer overall. Meeting with her and talking with her about her path to immigration law was extremely helpful, especially as I look towards applying for 2L summer internships. It was incredibly inspiring to hear from immigration attorneys and fellow law students who persist in their dedications to public service despite the increasingly challenging nature of the legal landscape in recent years.

I am incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for making this summer possible. The opportunity to support human trafficking survivors in their paths to stability was very rewarding, both on a personal and professional level. Thank you so much for the funding that allowed me to spend the summer providing free legal aid to impoverished residents of Cook County!