



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: Happy summer, and happy pride month, y'all! Dropping in to share my first EJA Fellow Update and especially my gratitude to Equal Justice America for supporting me this summer. As I've shared here before, my dream of working at the ACLU of Michigan was a big reason I chose to attend law school in the first place. The EJA Fellowship enables me to do this vital work. In the first few weeks alone, I've directly contributed to cases that will improve not only our client's lives, but the lives of everyone that these bad policies impact (that's all of us). While doing so, I practiced and strengthened my legal research, writing, and problem-solving skills. If you'd like to support Equal Justice America's mission of funding law students working in public interest positions across the country, please consider donating.

Update 2: Since my last update, I have worked on several projects that connect directly to the needs of our clients. My new experience researching and writing is not only building my skills, it's contributing to the defense of our civil liberties and strengthening the output of the ACLU of Michigan's already phenomenal legal work. I've been able to do this work not only in partnership with ACLU lawyers, interns, and support staff, but with partner organizations as well. I'm so grateful for this experience and for EJA's support in making it possible.

Update 3: Hey all! Working at the ACLU of Michigan has demonstrated to me the importance of a vibrant workplace culture. Being a values-aligned nonprofit is no small job -- balancing the rigorous demands of legal advocacy with the high standards our values set is a full-time job in and of itself. But the ACLU-MI does a great job of doing that balancing. Leadership is communicative and available, and every staff member is valued and listened to. I hope to contribute to this culture during my internship and to learn the art of balancing so many competing interests. I'm deeply appreciative that I have been able to experience the joys of well-balanced legal work, and thankful to Equal Justice America for helping fund my summer.



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Update 4: These past two weeks, I had the incredible opportunity to sit in on oral arguments in two different courts. Watching the judges question counsel in real time was such a valuable window into how advocacy really plays out in the courtroom. Even better, I got to speak directly with a few of the judges afterward. Hearing their perspective on effective legal writing and oral advocacy (and getting some honest feedback on what actually persuades a bench) is the kind of experience you just can't get from a casebook. It's already changing how I think about the memos I write for my supervising attorneys. Grateful every day for this summer of hands-on learning made possible by Equal Justice America, and for the mentorship I'm getting at ACLU of Michigan. Couldn't do this without the support of Wayne State Law either — proud to represent both this summer!

Final Reflection: This summer I was honored to support the ACLU of MI's immigration habeas docket. I did this work by meeting with potential clients and performing an intake to determine if they were eligible for release. Each meeting required liaising with the government to set a time, scrambling to find a translator, preparing documents, and then finally sitting down with detained individuals who had no idea whether the person on the other end of the call would actually help them. We did the intakes over zoom, partially because the detention center is so far away, but also because digital meetings were given private rooms while in-person attorneys had to huddle with their clients in the corners of public rooms. Even those small logistics taught me how little privacy or dignity is built into this system by default -- we had to advocate and work for a confidential conversation.

One client we had will always stick with me. This poor woman went through a miscarriage while detained. Instead of receiving the care she deserved, she was thrown into solitary and denied even the most basic comforts. It took weeks of shuttling between clinics, hospitals, and solitary to allow this woman to heal from nearly bleeding out. She was given no dignity or care. At the hands of my government, she was abused and tormented. I sat with the details of her intake for a long time after the call ended. I knew that, despite what had happened to her funded by my tax dollars, she would likely be deported back to the country she had worked so hard to flee.

The most challenging part for me is that I will never know how her case ends -- nor will I know the ending of many of my client's stories. Intake work means you meet someone at their most vulnerable moment, do what you can with the time you have, and then hand their story off to someone else, or to time itself. This internship has taught me that legal representation is such a small but significant part of someone's life. It's important to recognize clients as full humans, ones whose lives will be impacted forever by their time interacting with us as lawyers.

I struggled to move on at the end of the day. Our clients are stuck in these horrific situations. But move on, we must. I was also able to meet with several judges who were kind enough to allow the interns to pick their brains about advocacy, the path to the bench, and work-life balance. This experience gave me unique insight into ways to pursue justice.