



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I'm excited to share that I've started my Equal Justice America fellowship this summer. I am working with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) in Eagle Pass to support low-income clients on a wide variety of legal matters. I will primarily be working with the Native American Practice Team, which serves the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, but will also serve clients from the broader community. I'm deeply excited by this opportunity to support the Indigenous community and those in need of legal representation. This service allows me to make a real-world impact while still in law school and will help me gain skills and experiences to make me a more effective advocate as I continue my work in the public interest sector after graduation. I'm so grateful to Equal Justice America for making this opportunity possible through this summer fellowship, as most legal internships, including this position, are otherwise unpaid.

If you believe everyone has the right to critical legal services, including those who can't afford them, I hope you'll consider donating to support me AND this important work!

Update 2: Since my last Equal Justice America Fellowship update, I've been continuing my work at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA). I have contributed to multiple exciting projects but wanted to share about one of the most rewarding experiences to date: observing tribal court proceedings.

In the past few weeks, I have attended multiple tribal court proceedings of the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas, including a criminal docket. These visits are my first experiences attending tribal court proceedings and have been an amazing opportunity to see a tribal justice system in action. Making this experience even more meaningful, I have been involved in legal



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work concerning some of these cases.

In many of these cases, TRLA attorneys serve as court-appointed counsel for their clients, providing representation to those who need it and thereby exemplifying Equal Justice America's goal of ensuring equal justice for all.

Update 3: I have been continuing to enjoy my work with Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid. In this post, I want to discuss one of the more meaningful aspects of my experience to date: personal interactions with clients. Throughout the summer I have had the opportunity to interact and meet with clients in many different formats. One of my primary responsibilities has been to manage intakes for new clients, the first step in addressing their legal situation. While there are many administrative steps in this process, such as confirming that our clients reach the financial threshold to be eligible for our services, much of this work is simply getting to know the clients and why they came into the office. My intakes have covered a wide variety of legal issues ranging from routine estate management to a civil rights violation. At times, these conversations can be challenging, as clients may be deeply emotionally affected by their circumstances.

Even though it can be unfortunate to hear about the difficult situations that our clients are dealing with, I have enjoyed these conversations. Informing our clients of their potential for legal action empowers them and has a noticeable effect on their demeanor. In most cases, clients leave these initial intakes feeling more relieved with the knowledge that they have TRLA advocating on their behalf. Seeing these reactions is a great reminder of the impact of this work. In addition to these intakes, I have also had the opportunity to engage more deeply with clients by substantively addressing their legal concerns. As many of these cases remain in progress, I will not discuss them at the current time. However, I may be able to share more about these experiences in a subsequent update.

Update 4: This publication concerns the final week of my time with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid. In this update, I want to mention one of the final projects that I was able to complete. Given the complex nature of many legal matters, it is rare for students in my position to be able to see through the entire process of a legal matter, but in my case, I was able to assist a client directly in an intake, be meaningfully involved document preparation, and present the relevant document to the client for signing. Due to the responsiveness of the client and the relative simplicity of the matter, this whole process took approximately one week. Even though it did not take long, the work was important to the client, and it was a relief for them to have it completed. The client was very appreciative of our ability to handle the matter quickly and to their satisfaction.



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These kinds of experiences illustrate the power of legal aid organizations to empower our clients. Having had such a positive experience, it appears that this client would be eager to return for legal support in the future. By completing these kinds of projects effectively and efficiently, we can demonstrate the value of legal aid organizations with specific examples.

Final Reflection: My time working with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) served as an introduction to the world of legal aid and gave me much to consider as I reflected on my experience.

First, as my updates have shown, TRLA engages in meaningful work that directly impacts the community. As a law clerk, I worked on substantive matters as well as other parts of the representation process, including performing client intakes. Through these experiences, I became deeply acquainted with our individual clients' circumstances and could see how much TRLA's representation benefited them. Clients were frequently grateful for the services we provided, but also for simply having someone to help them through the legal issues they were facing. Without divulging client information, I handled matters that had significant impacts on clients' financial and personal wellbeing. In the vast majority of cases, there is no one else our clients could seek for representation, as they would be unable to pay for these kinds of services. Our clients recognized that without TRLA, their matter would likely not be resolved appropriately.

Second, the sheer number of clients that TRLA served was incredible. As a law clerk, I was involved in over 20 different cases. The staff attorneys and paralegals handle even more matters on a routine basis. I witnessed first-hand the passion that TRLA employees put into their work and found it deeply inspiring. It is clear from their performance and dedication that TRLA employees care about the community and individuals they are supporting. The Eagle Pass office excels in this regard, insisting on allowing walk-in clients (extremely rare among TRLA offices) so that the office truly is a safe space for the community.

I was also able to observe the many difficulties that our clients face within the current legal system. It was clear that most of our clients had limited prior contact with the legal system and were unaware of how the relevant legal processes functioned. Again, if TRLA team members were unable to expand their already significant workloads, it is unclear what would happen with these cases. In our more adversarial decisions, I also could get a glimpse of the predatory tactics used by opposing parties. I witnessed how some bad actors tried to take advantage of our clients, assuming that they do not know their rights and would lack legal representation.

My work at TRLA and partnering with Equal Justice American reinforces my understanding that legal aid providers need our support. Funding is a huge part of this, as additional resources



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would certainly help to improve the size and functioning of these organizations. However, I also want to stress the need for people on the ground making a difference. Additional funding facilitates operations, but without driven individuals who care about the communities they represent, legal aid would be nowhere near as impactful. Sponsoring students to participate in these internships and inspiring those to continue a career in legal aid is one of the most important services Equal Justice America provides.