



Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



Name: Emma Halas-O'Connor

Law School: Northeastern University School of Law

EJA Fellowship: Greater Boston Legal Services,
Housing and Employment Units

Entry 1: 6/17/18

#EJAFellowUpdate

So, I received a fellowship through [Equal Justice America](#) to work at Greater Boston Legal Services this summer, learning how to represent people with low incomes who face employment and housing problems. This week I'm working on my first unemployment case, trying to help someone collect unemployment insurance benefits after losing their job. I'll be posting updates throughout the summer as part of my fellowship.

Entry 2: 7/9/18

#EJAFellowUpdate

A belated update from my Equal Justice America fellowship: I've now spent about 7 weeks at Greater Boston Legal Services, which has included representing someone at an unemployment insurance hearing for the first time, meeting up with workers whose employers had stolen their wages at a community meeting in East Boston, attending a worker's know-your-rights meeting at the Chelsea Collaborative, and talking to people facing eviction and other housing issues at City Life Vida Urbana. So grateful to meet and learn from amazing clients, attorneys, and organizations.



Entry 3: 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Another update from my Equal Justice America fellowship: reflecting on the ripple effects of gentrification and housing shortages - not only for those who get pushed to housing outside their neighborhoods, but also for those who are without homes to begin with, and are waiting for a seemingly endless period of time for a place to live. I met someone last week who has been waiting for a spot in public housing for 12 years. 12. She is currently homeless. When a developer advertises a sparkling new apartment building, even if there are promises to devote a certain number of units to affordable housing, the question to ask is not only how many affordable units will there be at this new place, but who will be displaced, and how long is it going to take them to get back in. Usually, too long.

Entry 4: 8/7/18

#EJAFellowUpdate

Final week at GBLS (plus Monday, when I have part two of an unemployment hearing). What an amazing and humbling experience - definitely an affirmation of the decision to go to law school. I've gotten to meet amazing clients, help someone get access to public housing, work on getting rid of someone's looming debt, tell people's stories about injustice at their workplaces, researched and written about things that I knew nothing about before. I am so very grateful.



GREATER BOSTON
LEGAL SERVICES
...and justice for all

August 30, 2018

By electronic mail

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
13540 East Boundary Road, Building II, Suite 204
Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

My name is Joey Michalakes and I am an attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) in the Housing and Employment Law Units. I was the supervising attorney for Emma Halas-O'Connor for the summer of 2018.

GBLS provides free legal representation to individuals who are low-income, as well as systemic advocacy to achieve justice for our clients. Our work in the Housing Unit includes preventing hundreds of people each year from eviction, working with tenant associations to combat unfair housing policies, and helping people gain access to permanent affordable housing. In the Employment Law Unit we work to help low-wage workers maximize their income and overcome obstacles that limit their employment opportunities and income levels in several ways, such as assisting people with wrongful denials of unemployment insurance, and representing workers whose employers are violating state and federal wage laws resulting in wage theft.

Emma came to GBLS with a background in legislative advocacy, and she enthusiastically and effectively took on a range of projects at GBLS that were new to her. She represented two clients in their efforts to overturn denials of unemployment insurance benefits at hearings before the Department of Unemployment Assistance, preparing clients for questioning, conducting direct and cross examinations, preparing supportive briefs. She assisted clients who were facing wage theft, calculating wages due for hours worked and drafting complaints and demand letters. She also represented a homeless client who had been denied status on a priority list for public housing, attending a hearing that resulted in the client's placement on the priority list. In the course of this experience, Emma did an incredible job guiding the client, a trauma survivor and person with serious and ongoing mental and emotional disabilities—through an extremely frustrating bureaucratic process, respecting and privileging her client's voice while at the same time using her advocacy skills and knowledge of relevant law to emphasize and highlight the details that ultimately persuaded the hearing examiner to grant the client priority status. In addition to all of the above, Emma gained experience providing limited advice and counsel to numerous tenants facing eviction, by attending several meetings with the anti-eviction tenants' group City Life Vida Urbana, and spending a day staffing GBLS' Attorney for the Day table at Housing Court.

In addition to her experiences helping clients, Emma conducted research that will help the Housing Unit and its partner organizations develop next steps for its plans to systemically combat the displacement of low-income communities due to gentrification in Boston. Emma researched and drafted an extremely detailed and thorough memo about how tenants and affordable housing advocates can use the Fair Housing Act to challenge actions by landlords and developers that push tenants of color out of their homes and communities. She also researched how a tenants' association could assert their freedom of speech rights in Housing Court. Her research and writing on these topics was insightful and detailed, and were of such high quality that I intend to use them as resources for our community partners and stakeholders moving forward.

I cannot speak highly enough as to the quality of Emma's work, in addition to her professionalism and commitment to GBLS' work as well as the clients we serve. From the moment she started working here this summer, she fit into our office as though she were one of our colleagues, rather than an intern. We are extremely grateful for the support EJA was able to provide Emma this summer that enabled her to play such a vital and helpful role in our office.

Feel free to contact me at the number below if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joseph Michalakes
Joseph Michalakes, Esq.
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