



Summer 2018 EJA Fellow



Name: Graham Sternberg

Law School: Boston College Law School

EJA Fellowship: Greater Boston Legal Services

Entry 1: Week of 6/11/2018

[#EJAFellowUpdate](#)

I'm finishing up my third week at Greater Boston Legal Services, where I've been helping victims of domestic violence with immigration and family law. We've only had a physical altercation with the opposing party during a hearing once, which seems like a good record, all things considered.

My ability to provide legal aid to vulnerable women in Boston is entirely thanks to the generosity of Equal Justice America.

Entry 2: Week of 6/25/2018

[#EJAFellowUpdate](#)

Five weeks in and I was finally forced to reject my first prospective client. It was a stark reminder that organizations like Greater Boston Legal Services have far more people seeking help than they have the capacity to serve. Law students like me play an enormous role in keeping that caseload manageable, but as you can see it's still not enough.

My ability to provide legal aid to vulnerable women in Boston is entirely thanks to the generosity of Equal Justice America. Please consider supporting Equal Justice America, so that my work, and the work of my peers, may continue. But even more than that, call your state representatives and request that they prioritize funding for legal aid organizations.



Entry 3: Week of 7/9/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

Last Thursday morning I went to Boston Housing Court, and it was the most tragic, ableist, and racist thing I've ever seen.

Every Thursday, tenants who are suing or being sued by their landlords attend hearings in housing court. The seats at the front of the courtroom are filled beyond capacity with folks waiting to have their case called. The vast majority of those tenants are people of color, and probably more than half of them have visible physical disabilities. The jury box is filled with bored-looking attorneys (100% white men) in nice suits.

The clerk calls the cases in rapid succession, leaving only a second or two in between for tenants to respond (the landlord attorneys have been allowed to check-in beforehand and don't need to respond). Any tenant who fails to respond in that time has their case defaulted-on. In a courthouse that is aggressively hostile to navigation by people with disabilities, in an area of law that largely affects people with disabilities, the extra time it takes for someone in a wheelchair to get up to the fourth floor might cost them their home. If the clerk mispronounces your name and you don't answer? You default.

Legal aid organizations like GBLS do their best to help the people attending Housing Court-- there are tables set up outside the courtroom to answer questions, and legal aid attorneys prowl the courtrooms, but it's not enough: there are many times more people in housing court than there are qualified attorneys to help them.

Thursday mornings at Suffolk County Probate Court are a travesty.

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Entry 4: Week of 7/23/2018

#EJAFellowUpdate

We're coming up on my last week as a student attorney at Greater Boston Legal Services. For my last update about my time at GBLS I'm not going to talk about my experience or my clients', I'm going to talk about inequity in legal education. I'm sure you understand that donations make it possible for EJA to support law students who are working at legal aid organizations over the summer, but what isn't necessarily clear is that support from EJA makes it possible for less privileged law students to participate in the kinds of internships that are absolutely necessary to have a career in law after graduation.

Elite universities are able to self-fund stipends and fellowships for their students, while students at less wealthy institutions are forced to fund raise, or to work unpaid for the summer. Three months without student loan money or income might be manageable for students from privileged backgrounds, but presents an insurmountable barrier to less affluent law students. Students working at firms are paid well for their summers, but public interest work is often uncompensated. As a result, individuals from the communities most dependent on legal aid are paradoxically unable to engage with public interest work during their summers while in law school.

Fellowships like that offered by EJA helps to fill in the cracks of this bizarre job market, and provides access to vital internship opportunities to less privileged students. I'm honored to be a fellow myself, and grateful for the work that they do.

TLDR: I want to thank everybody for their generosity over the last nine weeks. It's been going to a good cause.

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