



## Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Hannah Sotnick

**Law School:** New York University School of Law

**Fellowship:** Florence Project, Mental Health Team

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### Entry 1: June 10, 2019

I learned so much in my first two weeks interning with the Florence Project. We attended many trainings on substantive areas of immigration law, observed Know Your Rights trainings at both children and adult immigration detention facilities, and learned more about the organization's amazing work. Florence is essentially the only major provider of free legal assistance to the thousands of immigrants in detention in Eloy and Florence, AZ. The amount of assistance they are able to provide with a low capacity is incredible. It has been deeply upsetting to visit the immigration jails--isolated in the middle of the desert, with frequent outbreaks of diseases like the mumps, where most immigrants do not have attorneys and many are ineligible for bond. Additionally, I am working exclusively with clients struggling with severe mental health problems, for whom the challenges of detention are often compounded. I'm eager to continue supporting the Florence Project's work and learning about their amazing work to lessen the harm of immigration enforcement and detention on the border.

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### Entry 2: June 23, 2019

It's been really fascinating to learn about the different way severe mental illness is dealt with in immigration proceedings as compared to criminal cases. In my job before law school in federal public defense, a client being declared incompetent meant they would be incarcerated in a "federal medical center," which was really just a prison in North Carolina, until they were "restored to competency" and prosecution against them could proceed. It has been really interesting to learn about the ways immigration proceedings accommodate incompetent clients. Unlike criminal cases, DHS is allowed to proceed with removal proceedings but incompetent individuals are entitled to safeguards. The National Qualified Representative Project attorneys have room for really creative advocacy in requesting safeguards that will protect incompetent clients' due process rights and accommodate their mental illnesses and disabilities. For example, they can request that cross-



examination be done in a flat tone for clients who respond disproportionately to tonal changes, or request that the immigration judge not make adverse credibility findings due to inconsistencies in their testimony. I wrote my first real-life motion this week, arguing that immigration judges still have authority to terminate removal proceedings as a safeguard for incompetent clients after a recent Attorney General decision stripping some discretionary authority to terminate proceedings from immigration judges. It was really interesting to work on a novel and unresolved legal issue in a field I am extremely interested in. I am beginning to work on a T-visa application, preparation for a bond hearing, and a section of a BIA appeal and I am really excited for everything I will be learning in the next few weeks.

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### **Entry 3: July 6, 2019**

I continue to be impressed by the collaborative work style of the Florence Project. The team I am working with has a Judicial Case Review once a month, which lasts almost the entire day, to review every one of their cases and ask any questions they have from coworkers. The “Adult Team,” which is a much bigger group of everyone working with detained adults, also has a Judicial Case Review every two weeks for announcements, “happy thoughts,” and questions. Given that the staff is spread out across three offices that are up to 2 hours apart, I think it’s amazing how much effort they put into creating a supportive and collaborative environment. I have learned a lot hearing about all of the cases they are working on, and I think it’s great that the attorneys are able to learn routinely about other attorneys’ strategies. Compared to the office I worked at before law school, it seems like the Florence Project’s form of knowledge-sharing probably benefits clients and attorney learning (especially in a pretty young office). Definitely something I’ll be looking out for as I explore places I’d like to work in the future.

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### **Entry 4: July 24, 2019**

I am in my final few weeks at my internship, and am working on wrapping up the large assignments I have been working on. Tomorrow I will be arguing in court for the first time, representing a client in his bond hearing before an immigration judge. Yesterday we submitted a brief I wrote in preparation for his bond hearing, and I am finishing up a pre-hearing brief in advance of the same client’s upcoming asylum hearing, and an additional motion to terminate a client’s removal proceedings. Everyone has been very supportive and provided really helpful feedback. I have been able to put the skills I gained from my last job to use, and have gained a lot more confidence in my legal research and writing skills. I will be practicing my bond argument with attorneys in the office today and am looking forward to getting feedback on my oral advocacy skills as well. Additionally, I feel like I know a lot more about substantive immigration law that I can put to use in future work experiences. I am excited about these opportunities and grateful for all the substantive learning experiences I have been able to take advantage of during this internship.