



## Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** James deBoer

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

**Fellowship:** American Friends Service Committee

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### Entry 1:

This summer, I am working for the American Friends Service Committee, in the detention representation program in Newark, NJ. This program helps provide representation to everyone in immigration detention who needs it. Since starting just two weeks ago, I have met clients from Cuba, Ghana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nigeria, and Venezuela, many of whom are seeking asylum. My role so far has been to support my supervisors in identifying the grounds that might support asylum claims, because, as I'm learning, people are seldom eligible for asylum simply because they are escaping generally violent situations—they often need to show that the violence is directed at them for particular reasons. It has been inspiring and humbling to work alongside such a dedicated group of attorneys, who recognize and honor the trust that our clients place in them. I look forward to learning more and am grateful to Equal Justice America for assisting to make this internship possible and expanding access to representation for those who need it most.

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### Entry 2:

Yesterday, I was given the opportunity to participate in the bond hearing for an asylum seeker, who had routinely been subject to police brutality in his home country. When he arrived at the U.S. border, he was given a number and placed on a queue, told he would need to wait at least a month. But the next day, he was eating breakfast in a plaza when a drive-by shooting occurred, and the assailants then started gunning down the bystanders as well. He fled, crossing the border illegally. I met our client on Friday, and spent Monday and Tuesday gathering materials to demonstrate that he presents neither a flight risk, nor a danger to the community — mainly in the form of letters of support from friends and family. Thankfully, the judge granted bond! Once my client's family posts the bond amount, he will be re-united with them for the duration of his immigration proceedings. This experience has brought into clearer focus for me the vital role that lawyers play; even asylum-



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seekers with very strong claims and many family members in the U.S. might not necessarily receive bond, unless their applications are formatted to address the questions that judges ask. Therefore, legal services for those who are most in need are essential for ensuring access to justice for all, and I appreciate the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America Fellow.

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### **Entry 3:**

Last week was a week of ups and downs. On Tuesday, I attended an immigration judge review of a credible fear interview. A credible fear interview, the first step in the asylum process, is meant as an opportunity for asylum seekers to show why they fear returning to their country. In this instance, our client did not pass his credible fear interview because he did not provide sufficient details about the suffering he experienced at the hands of gang members in Guatemala, and the judge upheld the determination. No appeal is available, but we are now working on a request for a new credible fear interview. I've been helping the client recognize the abuse that he endured and put it into words to strengthen his application. This hard situation was balanced by the good news on Thursday that another client, who had received a bond, was released. He and his family were elated; his family member sent me a picture of him with a big grin giving thumbs up at a diner (glad he got to sample a NJ tradition before reuniting with his family elsewhere!). Both instances speak to the vital importance of the work of public interest immigration attorneys, whose help is needed so that asylum seekers can fully articulate their stories and be reunited with their families.

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### **Entry 4:**

The Journey to Freedom. I received an unexpected message upon arriving in the office Thursday: a client for whom we had applied for parole in June was getting released that evening. I was overjoyed - given how much time had elapsed since we had heard anything, I was convinced his parole had been denied. But then all at once a whirlwind of communicating with the sponsor, thinking through post-release steps, coordinating logistics -- and special thanks to the New Sanctuary Coalition for their assistance.

I met the client at 7:45pm at the back door of the Elizabeth Detention Center, where he emerged and remarked how wonderful it was to breathe free air. Together we traveled to Newark Penn Station, and rode the train towards Jersey City. I could only imagine how new and different everything must have seemed for an individual whose only exposure to the United States so far had been the border and immigration detention. The experience helped make more vivid for me the extent to which people feel they have no choice but to flee their homelands and venture into an entirely unfamiliar, in many ways hostile country. Detained immigrants' lawyers are sometimes the first people they can trust after crossing the border. Immigration attorneys, at least those I've had the privilege of working with this summer, treat that trust as a serious responsibility, working above and beyond to help their clients reach safety.