



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Kathryn Romo

Law School: Temple University Beasley School of Law

Fellowship: Oklahoma Indian Legal Services

Entry 1: June 10, 2019

This summer I am receiving a fellowship through Equal Justice America and will be posting every so often to keep you all updated! About two weeks ago I started my summer internship at Oklahoma Indian Legal Services in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In the past two weeks I have been able to draft wills, prep documents for probate petitions, talk to clients, go to court hearings in a variety of matters, and attend a two-day conference about Indian Law. In between these notable events, I have been spending much of my time learning the very basics of Indian Law. The long history of oppression of Native people by the American government has led to the creation of Indian Child Welfare Act, Individual Indian Money Accounts, and other statutes and programs specific to the Indian American community. In addition to the specific federal and state laws that pertain to Native people, tribal laws are specific to each individual tribe, of which there are 39 recognized in the state of Oklahoma.

Oklahoma Indian Legal Services (OILS) works with low income Native folks from all over the state in cases that relate to their status as Native. Some of OILS' main concerns are child welfare and making sure that Indian Country stays in Indian hands. In addition to learning about Indian Law through my assignments, I have already learned a great deal of information about issues in the Native community through conversations with my co-interns and folks in the office. I am looking forward to the rest of my summer here and will update you all in a couple weeks!

Entry 2: June 23, 2019

I spent part of my first night in Oklahoma in a tornado shelter. That night, two people died in a tornado that ripped through a town just 40 miles away from where I sheltered. Yesterday felt sort of full circle as I sat with Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma at their booth to provide services for the victims of that tornado. I learned about the problems people face when FEMA vastly underestimates the losses, or when landlords force



tenants to pay rent on properties that are uninhabitable, and often the cost of repairing the damage to the property as well. Most people feel stuck and do not know that they have the right to appeal a FEMA decision or fight back against a horrible landlord.

Entry 3: July 9, 2019

In the past few weeks I have drafted many wills for clients at Oklahoma Indian Legal Services. The process for Native people to pass land on to their loved ones after their death is complicated, as they can own trust, restricted, and/or regular fee land. Because we work with clients across Oklahoma who often have limited means of transportation, we hold will clinics in rural parts of the state. We often drive two to three hours on narrow winding highways to get to community centers for these meet clients. After long days of driving and working, it's always great to hand clients their final will and see how relieved they are to know that they don't have to worry about what will happen after they pass.

Entry 4: August 2, 2019

Today is my last day interning at Oklahoma Indian Legal Services. Throughout this summer, I have had the opportunity to meet many clients and work through their concerns to draft life planning documents for them. Direct services work is much more than simply understanding the law behind the documents that you draft, but having cultural competency and empathy with the people you serve. OILS has given me so many opportunities to learn about the many tribes of Oklahoma and beyond. The history of the Five Tribes restricted land, Osage murders, and cultural traditions of other tribes has given me a better understanding of our clients' perspectives, and why a client might not feel comfortable giving information to a non-Native person, for example. This experience has been incredibly enriching and an amazing reminder of the ways in which lawyering goes beyond the black letter law. Please consider donating to Equal Justice America so that my work, and the work of my peers, may continue.