



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Xavier O'Connor

Law School: Temple Law

Fellowship: AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania

Entry 1:

Hi y'all, I was recently selected to be an Equal Justice America Summer Fellow so I will be sharing some of the work I'm involved in this summer through a series of posts.

In my first few weeks at the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania, I have attended hearings at Philadelphia's Fair Housing Commission, learned about the various pathways to Medicaid in PA, conducted intake interviews, filed a name change at City Hall, and researched various discrimination and confidentiality issues for my supervising attorney.

Recently, my fellow summer associates and I attended Philadelphia FIGHT's HIV Prevention & Education Summit, which focused on public health evidence-based strategies and best practices to: prevent HIV, link individuals to care, and provide culturally competent services to all individuals. Finding ways to use legal interventions to improve the health outcomes of marginalized folks is incredibly important to me so being at a conference that examined the intersection of public health and law was amazing.

Direct service is incredibly satisfying and I'm really looking forward to the rest of the summer.

Entry 2:

Hey y'all, as previously stated, I was lucky enough to be chosen as an Equal Justice America this summer so here's another update on my recent work.

In the last couple of weeks at the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania, I have regularly conducted intake interviews with potential new clients, fully drafted and electronically filed a name change for a client, and am currently taking the lead on writing the rebuttal to a defendant's response in a discrimination case. This rebuttal



has allowed me to dig into the Pennsylvania's Human Relations Act and learn about settled PA law on discrimination cases.

Recently, I have been involved in a potentially landmark case on the legality of supervised consumption sites. Philadelphia has become the battleground for these sites, a harm reductionist public health measure that rightfully rejects the rhetoric from War on Drugs and acknowledges it as the complete and utter failure that it was, and still, is. My supervising attorney and I, quite literally, took turns reading out loud a 60-page brief (ironic, yes) to catch any errors or typos. I'm incredibly thankful to have such a close look at a case that genuinely could change the course of this nation's fight against the opioid crisis.

I've thoroughly enjoyed my summer and can't believe there's only three weeks left.

Entry 3:

Hi again, y'all, as my last full week at the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania is underway, here's another update on my work this summer.

Since my last update, I have successfully worked with a client to retain his Medical Assistance (Medicaid) - an important win but yet another reminder of the absurdity of our for-profit healthcare system. This particular client was over the resource limit for MAWD (Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities), a type of Medical Assistance. As such, the appeal had to show the County Assistance Office that he was no longer over this resource limit. The issue is that the resource limit is ridiculously low so it punishes poor folks who aren't poorer. Our appeal was successful but given that a lot his resources are tied up in an IRA, it is quite likely that he will have to take money out of his IRA to retain his Medical Assistance. It makes absolutely no sense but that's our healthcare system. Another reminder that Medicare for All is essential.

Anyway, I also filed the rebuttal in a discrimination case that I spoke about a couple weeks back. I will not be around to work on the case after the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission makes a decision but my supervising attorney has promised to keep me updated. And, of course, intake interviews are still a part of my day to day. The summer has been incredible and absolutely flown by; it's wild that I only have six days left. Please consider donating to Equal Justice America so that my work, and the work of my public interest peers, may continue for the rest of the summer and beyond.