



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Michigan Law School

Fellowship: Greater Boston Legal Services

Entry 1: 6/10/19

Two weeks in, and I'm settling into my 1L internship at Greater Boston Legal Services. I've read 500+ pages on how Social Security is administered, sorted through my first THICK file, spent hours on the phone with various insurance agencies, and even took my first (and hopefully only) sick day. It already feels like home.

I spent the majority of last week going down a Social Security Act rabbit hole. I stared at one section of the Act until I could make sense of what it was saying, and then would read the sections it referenced. I then stared at *those* sections until I could make sense of what they were saying, and go to the *next* section they pointed me to. On and on. After lots of annotations, I had clarity that no, the client in question was not entitled to Social Security benefits. As disappointing as that was, I'm proud that I was able to sort through the difficult language--something I may not have been able to do with as much ease before law school! Thank you to EJA for allowing me to practice and improve my skills at such a great organization!

EJA funding has also allowed me to explore Boston with more freedom to determine if it is the area I want to practice. Last week, I went to see Cinderella at the Boston Ballet, made friends at a Silent Disco in Assembly Row, and attended the Boston Pride concert. It's gearing up to be an exciting summer!

Entry 2: 6/24/19

I can't believe it has been a month already! Now that all the interns have arrived, we have had training after training. It is great--the topics we are dealing with are complicated enough that an in-person lesson was necessary, and I was thrilled to finally have an official orientation! Ah, things *can* run well.

We started off with a training on how to better work with clients who had experienced trauma--the different ways that trauma can manifest, how that affects their interactions with us, and how to respond. My boss Donna ran our training on Medicare (we're all still confused about the various Medicare-for-All plans), and my other boss Karen taught us about the financial requirements and output of the SSA systems. We learned about the Guardianship program and how the understaffing of it can lead to a loss of autonomy for those under its watch. And then we capped it all off with an official HR Orientation!



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At the HR Orientation, we learned about the history of GBLS and of the legal aid program in general. I loved hearing from our Executive Director and getting to meet all of the other interns--I finally could see the rest of the organization!

As for my personal work, it hasn't been that exciting. I continued to call insurance companies, started a chronology, had a little bit of a breakdown, and badgered the SSA until I connected with a knowledgeable person. I was astounded at the number of people who did not want to tell me general information on what to do if Medicare Part B benefits were terminated for non-payment. The officers kept saying "well, they should pay their bills." "The best way to avoid this is to pay your bills." "I don't want to help someone take advantage of free insurance for several months." DUDE. Sometimes people can't pay their bills, and it is both of our jobs to help them through the system!!

Despite that frustration, I am learning a lot. I don't know how much I'm contributing, so that extra push will come next week.

Entry 3: 7/8/2019

For as slow as the previous two weeks were, these ones were hectic! I had my first client meeting, went to the SSA, and prepared for my first hearing!

The client meeting was excellent--I had Annerry translate for me because I was nervous that I might not know the law/process well enough and wanted someone there as backup. But according to her, I was well organized, knew my stuff, and communicated clearly! It really helped that the client spoke some English, had her daughter there to take care of things, and was incredibly well prepared with all the documentation we could have asked for. We will be ready to submit their waiver before I leave.

The SSA meeting went...differently...than expected. Some good, some bad. The SSA workers were more helpful than I expected, based on stories from the other interns. We were seen sooner than I expected (it helped that Rita and I waited on the church steps across the street for most of the time), and the worker communicated to us in both Spanish and English. Unfortunately, we learned that the client was unknowingly on Medicare Part A, which means that she will have to pay a penalty to get on Part B in the future. I've spent lots of time since then researching what MassHealth she is eligible for to help cover the Part B premiums. The outlook is not so good.

For the hearing, I wrote my first memo and prepared my oral argument. Karen said that it would be a pretty laid back environment, but I wanted to be sure to have everything in order for my first time--especially since I feel like I've dropped the ball with Karen before. She gave good feedback on the memo, and I got to use excel for all of the math and bank records. I forgot how time consuming some of this basic administrative work can be!

Then we were off for the 4th of July and a "snow day" on Friday. I spent the time exploring Boston and the surrounding area. James and I watched the reading of the Declaration of Independence at the Old State House, barbecued at Ian and Ruby's, and watched the fireworks along the Charles. Then we visited Newport to see all the old mansions and Providence to walk around Brown. It was an exhausting and fun two days.



Entry 4: 7/26/19

My hearing went really well--but that was only the beginning of a busy last few weeks that included two more briefs (both disability related!), several letters, closing cases, passing clients back to my supervisors, and several memo drafts. It was a whirlwind! But I am so glad that I finally dove in.

I haven't yet heard back from the Hearing Officer, but Karen said I did very well in the hearing. She said I was organized, knowledgeable, a clear communicator with a good roadmap, and flexible in my thinking. The flexibility part was key, since there were several wrenches thrown into the day. First, the Hearing Officer was on the phone. This made it hard to understand him and to give him our documents. Second, the translator was bad, which the client immediately called out. Third, the DTA officer insisted that our client did receive RSDI when it is literally impossible for her to receive that and SSI (and also impossible since she never worked in the US). It was a little bit more adversarial because of the completely different set of facts, but overall a good experience and low key hearing. Then Karen and I went out to lunch to discuss paralegal/attorney relationships, how she ended up at GBLS, and a bunch of other things that were very insightful as I continue in my law journey!

But the fun didn't stop there. As soon as we wrapped up the hearing, we scrambled to submit a disability brief that was due on Friday. I struggled to understand all of the parts, but we ultimately turned in a workable paper, albeit one I could have done much more on. Thank goodness for being able to take things from other people's drafts.

We turned that in, and then I started dedicating my time to Donna, who I had neglected for the past several weeks. I wrote another disability claim brief; since I had more time, I had the chance to dig into the regulations and finally understand some of the things that I had argued blindly in the previous brief.

Now I'm wrapping everything up. I wish that I could stay for longer, but my summer is full of other activities and travels.