



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:

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Law School: UC Hastings

Fellowship: Centro Legal de La Raza Workers' Rights Project

Entry 1:

I've completed the first two weeks of my summer fellowship at Centro Legal de la Raza in the Fruitvale neighborhood of Oakland, CA. It's hard to believe it's only been two weeks, as I feel like I've learned so much since I started. I am working at Centro's workers' rights department, which represents workers who are primarily low-wage, Spanish speaking immigrants. I thought I knew what I was getting into, but it's nonetheless shocking to see workers in the Bay Area regularly being denied basic protections like minimum wage, overtime, and meal breaks. It's discouraging that public interest attorneys must spend so much time fighting to sure that these most basic of standards be enforced, when there is so much more to be done in terms of making the Bay Area livable for working class people. On the other hand, I'm already inspired by clients' bravery in coming forward, and by how many clients have they are motivated by the desire to help other workers in the same situation. I'm glad to be here, and I'm looking forward to continuing this work.

Entry 2:

I got my first big win for a low-income worker this week! My supervising attorney and I obtained a favorable settlement agreement in a legally tricky workers' rights case. I worked with the client for a few weeks leading up to today's agreement, and it was so great to see the client grow more and more confident in asserting her rights. In a time when I feel like advocates are struggling merely to hold ground, it feels wonderful to be literally putting money into the pockets of members of the communities who are bearing the brunt of our national political situation. While I worked as an advocate prior to law school, this summer has allowed me more opportunities to combine what I've learned in law school with my prior practical experience. I'm also grateful for the opportunity to learn more about state law, which is seldom a focus in most law school classes but often is more influential on people's lives than federal law. Overall, I'm having a great time at Centro and am happy I have had this opportunity.



Entry 3:

I'm genuinely sad to be wrapping up my internship in just one more week. I have continued to learn about the wage claim process, and attended another settlement conference at the Labor Commissioner with a worker. This conference was far more difficult than the previous one because the violations our client were alleging weren't on the record—the client hadn't actually been allowed to take breaks for meals or rest, but instead was instead told to work through them and grab food whenever there was a free moment. If the employer claims this never happened, it's very difficult for the client to win on this argument. In this case, the employer was a well-established company who sent an attorney to this conference—making it even more unlikely that the employer would slip up and reveal a violation during the conference. Needless to say, we didn't get a settlement in that one- which means the client will have to attend a hearing in about a year's time and the Labor Commissioner will make a judgment. I was disappointed that I wasn't able to help the client settle the case so she can move on, but grateful that she has another opportunity for an attorney to make her case.

Entry 4:

I had my last day interning at Centro Legal on Friday! I had a wonderful summer and am so glad EJA gave me this experience this summer. I feel rededicated to public interest law and far more ready to tackle my last year of law school.

In my last few weeks at Centro, I assisted attorneys more with workplace discrimination claims. When an employee in California is discriminated against at work, they can submit a complaint to the Department of Fair Employment & Housing, who then conducts an investigation. Sexual harassment and assault at work is considered to be discrimination on the basis of sex/gender. It's been interesting to think about the (mostly) women involved in these cases who are low-income, immigrant workers, since much of the coverage of #metoo has focused on white collar and nonimmigrant workers.