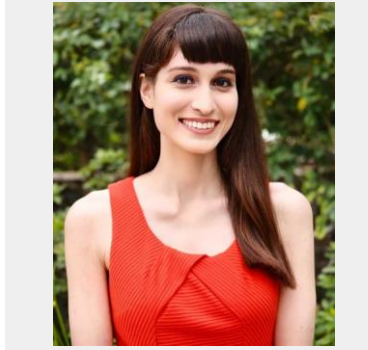




Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Lilit S. Arakelyan

Law School: UC Hastings College of the Law

Fellowship: East Bay Community Law Center

Entry 1:

This summer, I am working at East Bay Community Law Center's Immigration Unit in Berkeley, CA with the generous support of Equal Justice America's Summer Fellowship Program.

My first two weeks at EBCLC have been a meaningful introduction to the field of immigration law that serves vulnerable and marginalized populations. Thus far, I've delved into asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile cases, and I'm eager to learn more and meet my clients in person. I deeply appreciate EBCLC's robust training program; it is both empowering and overwhelming (and at times disheartening) to learn how to navigate the immigration system, which can feel labyrinthine, arbitrary, and inhumane. This reality makes EBCLC's client-centered, trauma-informed approach to providing legal services that much more critical.

I am grateful to be an Equal Justice America Fellow and to have the opportunity to contribute to the important work at EBCLC.

Entry 2:

My summer internship at East Bay Community Law Center has been flying by!

This week, our team retained an individual being held at Mesa Verde Detention Facility and we'll begin work on their bond case this Monday. I'm looking forward to seeing a bond case through its life-cycle — hopefully we'll be able to visit our client in person at Mesa Verde (in Bakersfield) and ultimately secure bond, allowing them to better present their case in front of the Immigration Judge.

In these past few weeks, I've also had the opportunity to attend EBCLC's intake sessions in Fruitvale — which helps orient community members around avenues of immigration relief they may be eligible for — participate in a Know Your Rights presentation for UC Berkeley's Undocumented Students Program, and observe hearings in the Ninth Circuit, Immigration Court, and Probate Court.



Lastly, in reflecting on Pride and the populations that EBCLC serves, it's important to remember that immigration is a critical issue for members of the LGBTQIA+ community globally. In the wake of Independence Day celebrations, it is equally important to remember the men, women, and children held in cages at our border, and to take steps to put an end to this unconscionable crisis.

I wouldn't be able to do this work without the generous support of Equal Justice America's summer fellowship program.

Entry 3:

Working in immigration law—particularly with detained individuals—teaches you to brace yourself for bad news.

At our recent bond hearing, we received the worst possible outcome from the immigration judge. Not only did they refuse to lower the bond amount for our client so they can prepare their asylum case outside of detention—they revoked bond for our client entirely.

I admit, I hadn't contemplated this outcome, even though it's well within the immigration judge's power. It's hard to accept that, sometimes, no matter the argument you make, a judge can be predisposed to tipping the scales in favor of ICE.

I don't have a neat takeaway from this experience, except how viscerally frustrating it can be to work within this system. However, I do know that despite this, detained individuals need and deserve representation.

I wouldn't be able to do this important work without the generous support of Equal Justice America.

Entry 4:

My last update! My internship at East Bay Community Law Center ended a little over a week ago. In reflecting on my ten weeks working in immigration law at EBCLC, I'm so very thankful for the opportunity to learn from the tireless and dedicated advocates at the forefront of this ever-changing field; it's been an incredibly meaningful and rewarding experience. Most of all, I remain awed and appreciative of the strength, bravery, and trust our clients continually exhibited in relaying their stories. Vulnerable immigrant populations deserve vigilant and steadfast advocacy and the need remains abundant.

Finally, this opportunity would not have been possible without the generous support of Equal Justice America, a non-profit committed to funding students who pursue public interest work providing direct civil legal aid services.