



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Moriah Wilkins

Law School: Northeastern University School of Law

Fellowship: Legal Aid Justice Center, Economic Justice

Entry 1:

As an intern at the Legal Aid Justice Center, so far, I've discovered the various challenges low income communities face in not only securing but maintaining housing. Five Virginia cities are among the top 10 cities with the highest eviction rates in the country. Virginia's overall eviction rate is also twice the national average.

It's beyond important that Virginia, and the entire nation, have a surplus of equipped legal aid attorneys and individuals engaging in pro bono legal aid work. Especially since most individuals that try to fight evictions in VA without representation are unsuccessful.

Even more disheartening is that despite the efforts of amazing Legal Aid organizations like the Legal Aid Justice Center and Central Virginia Legal Aid Services, these organizations are only able to address less than 20% of the need despite their vigorous efforts all year long.

With that said, it becomes even more important to support organizations whose entire mission is to support civil legal efforts.

Please consider supporting Equal Justice America so that we can support the most vulnerable communities nationwide through civil legal services organizations.

Entry 2:

This summer at the Legal Aid Justice Center has really taught me that being an attorney is more than just advocating for individuals in court, but also being a mediator, problem solver, and a communicator. So far this summer, I've advocated for two clients in informal hearings regarding evictions and termination of their housing vouchers. One client's eviction was reversed and the



other's informal hearing went well and we hope to hear back soon. I learned that if you can clearly communicate, reason, and have the adjudicating party empathize with your clients early on in the decision making process, a trial or court hearing may not be necessary which saves your client time, money (don't have to miss work or get babysitters), and honestly stress. It has motivated me to become a well-versed mediator and someone who's able to communicate the circumstances as well as a solution that both parties can agree on.

If you'd like to support legal aid organizations across the country in continuing to make an impact in the lives of those with few resources, consider donating to Equal Justice America who fund those with a passion for serving low income communities.

Entry 3:

As an intern, I've discovered how stressful legal issues can be on low income clients and how intersectional legal issues are. For instance, if a client has an employment issue that effects their wages, they now have a housing issue because they can't pay their rent, and in some cases, they end up having a consumer/debt issue because of the unpaid rent. I've learned that civil legal issues seldom occur in a vacuum and that civil legal issues often have a domino effect on multiple areas of a client's life. As an advocate, it is important to not only understand the legal issues but also the potential collateral damage a client is facing.

Entry 4:

As I reflect on my summer, I not only reflect on the invaluable opportunity to work directly with clients but also the people I was able to work and collaborate with. From the supervising attorneys to the support staff and to the awesome interns I was able to work with each and every day. All of them made it so that I not only learned a lot but enjoyed my time at the LAJC. My hope for the future is to be able volunteer at the LAJC whenever I'm back in Charlottesville because I feel as though I've forged long-lasting relationships with such knowledgeable and passionate people. I believe that everyone should work in Legal aid at least once and I believe the LAJC would be a good match for anyone. I've had an incredible summer and I wouldn't trade it for anything.