



## Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** University of Pennsylvania

**Fellowship:** Prairie State Legal Services, Waukegan, IL

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### Entry 1:

The first two weeks have been a blur. Life in a legal aid organization is hectic, and my supervisor quickly set me to work, which I appreciate. After the rabbit hole of 1L, it feels nice to be using my legal training for something more concrete, and it feels nice to realize I remember some of what I learned as well! I sat in on walk-ins a couple times this week, and am helping several clients with various issues they brought to us. One woman, on Social Security, has all of a sudden begun to have a massive amount of her check withheld, for student loans she took out years ago, and thought had been discharged when she became disabled. I've been working with her to help file a discharge application, coordinating between doctors and the department of education, as well as weighing in with thoughts on how to tell her story in the most compelling manner. It feels good to be at work, and to be doing work worth doing.

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### Entry 2:

I have to say that this job is making me regret taking French in high school and college in a way that abstract jokes about how no one really speaks the language ever did. Nevertheless, clients have been patient with me, and quite proud when a phrase of middle school Spanish comes rushing back! I've been running around doing various tasks for several different attorneys the past couple weeks--call this agency, track down that form, send those clients some guidance on how to represent themselves pro se--whatever I can to help make the roiling heap of obligations our attorneys face a little bit smaller. This week I also got put in charge of one client's U visa case, which I am excited about. U visas are available to people who are victims of crimes and help the police in their prosecution of those who commit the crime. They can be arduous, requiring documentation from police departments and other agencies, but also a lot of soft evidence as well--character recommendations and personal statements. I am planning to get this submitted by the time I leave for the summer, so I'll be able to know I helped at least one person become a lot more secure in their life in The States.



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Entry 3:

The past couple weeks have continued to be engaging, and hectic. The most notable experiences I've had from them were being able to attend a disability hearing in front of an ALJ, as well as a hearing before a housing authority. In both cases, our clients won, and I was able to contribute to developing the legal arguments that enabled them to do so! I've continued my visa work, expanding to a T visa, which is for victims of human trafficking. In this case, much of the work on that visa involves meticulous accounting of the client's details and experiences, which makes for some difficult interviews. It also requires a lot of tracking down records and documents from police departments and clerks, which is a never-ending process of phone calls and follow-ups. Some of the other tasks I've worked on have involved helping a woman appeal a rejection from subsidized housing due to some collections she had on her record, researching a legal issue involving the Illinois rules of evidence that had significant bearing on a criminal record expungement case, as well as doing research on appealing an eviction from a nursing home.

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Entry 4:

Things are winding down, and in spectacular news, the disabled woman whom I'd helped file to have her student loans discharged at the beginning of the internship got the news today that they had been! There have been a lot of churning little victories throughout this job, but many of them feel qualified--a move-out agreement instead of an eviction, or helping someone with a divorce that alleviates, but does not fix, her broader situation. This was a solid, and significant accomplishment for our client, and that feels good. Working in legal aid has been a spectacular experience, and I've developed dynamic, effective lawyering skills I would not have in any other environment, as well as an evolved idea of the role of lawyers, the legal system, and my role in it. Some other highlights of the summer include helping put together the brief that led to a man being awarded disability in front of an ALJ, helping an elderly couple get into subsidized housing despite the property manager's initial insistence he would not accept them due to a prior eviction on their record, and countless tinkering around the margins--making calls, sending letters, and so on--that had an outsized impact for clients who lacked the institutional knowledge, and quite often time, to do so themselves. All in all it has been a great experience, and I thank EJA for enabling me to participate in it!