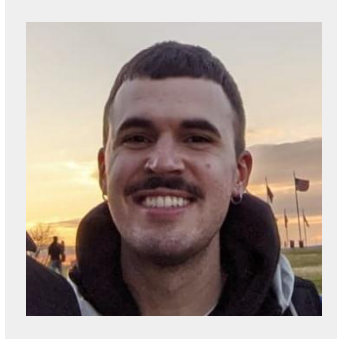




## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Michael Smith

**Law School:** Georgetown University Law Center

**Organization:** Legal Aid Society of DC

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### Week of June 15th:

I have really enjoyed my first two weeks at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, and I'm so grateful to have financial support from Equal Justice America. In my time so far at Legal Aid, I have had the opportunity to work directly with clients (over the phone, of course) to discuss benefits applications, to answer questions about benefit programs, and to gather evidence to support benefits appeal cases. I have also conducted research on interesting legal questions regarding disability determinations by the Social Security Administration. I have already learned a great deal, and I'm excited to continue this work over the summer. Thank you to EJA for making it much easier to be able to financially sustain myself while doing this work!

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### Week of July 6th:

My work in Legal Aid DC's Public Benefits Unit continues! I had the opportunity to work on a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability determination appeal case that is now before the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. The supervising attorney had me research other cases that were factually similar to our client's in which the court remanded for an award of benefits. I was able to find a handful of cases that the supervising attorney ended up incorporating into our client's reply brief. It was really exciting to see my research incorporated into a court filing! Unfortunately, it will likely be about a year before the court issues a decision. But we are cautiously optimistic that our client will finally be awarded the benefits to which he is clearly entitled.

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### Week of July 27th:

Earlier this month, I began working with Ms. A after her TANF benefit was reduced unexpectedly. She is a single mother and relies on her TANF benefit each month to make ends meet. Unfortunately, the DC Department of Human Services (DHS) was unresponsive when Ms. A reached out numerous times on her



own for assistance. We asked Ms. A to send us several verification documents and to sign a release granting us permission to work directly with DHS on her behalf. Soon after we reached out to DHS, they agreed to reinstate Ms. A.'s full monthly TANF benefit and to provide back benefits for the months that her benefit was wrongfully reduced. Had Ms. A not received our help, she would have lost a third of her annual income.

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**Week of August 10th:**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Legal Aid has been receiving significantly more requests for legal assistance with public benefits. To help address this increased need for services, I conducted numerous telephone intakes in the month of July. I loved getting the opportunity to work with so many different people, and this experience helped improve my interviewing and legal issue spotting skills as well as my knowledge of different areas of public benefits law. This work also helped Legal Aid in being able to quickly assess the merits of an applicant's case and connect eligible clients with a staff attorney as soon as possible.