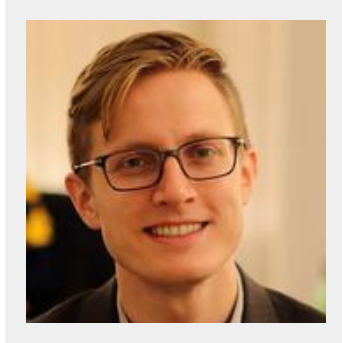




Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Andrew B. Keefe
Law School: Harvard Law School
Organization: Greater Boston Legal Services

Week of June 15th:

Since finishing my first year of coursework at Harvard Law School, I have been honored to serve as an Equal Justice America Fellow in the Employment Law Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services. During the four weeks I have worked at GBLS, I have helped over 30 workers claim unemployment benefits, file their tax returns, and acquire Economic Impact Payments. Nearly all of my clients are Spanish speakers who have struggled to access state and federal relief during the Coronavirus Recession due to online systems that lack basic translation and interpretation services for people who speak English as a second language. In addition to helping workers navigate these systems, I have collaborated with senior attorneys to propose provisions in a \$1.7 billion bond bill that recently passed the MA House of Representatives; our proposal would overhaul MA's current system for applying for unemployment insurance, making it easier to apply for English language learners, people with disabilities, and those without immediate access to internet or a computer.

My incredible experience at GBLS was made possible in part by EJA, which is doing tremendous work to prepare the next generation of public interest lawyers.

Week of July 6th:

This week I was delighted to learn that a worker whom I have served since my first week as an Equal Justice America Fellow at Greater Boston Legal Services successfully appealed the initial date of her unemployment insurance eligibility, claiming three additional weeks of benefits. This extra support amounted to \$3,140, including \$1,800 from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program. Last month, this client, a single mother and a frontline healthcare worker who was diagnosed with COVID-19 in late March, offered testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance as it deliberated whether to extend FPUC past July 31, when the program is set to expire: "This extra income has helped my family tremendously. If it wasn't because of this income I don't know the crisis I would be in. I been able to maintain food, clothes and shelter for my 6-year-old daughter . . . [A]lthough I am



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feeling much better, I continue to remain with positive PCR's and don't know how much longer it will be for a complete 'normal' again."

Please call your representatives and tell them that Congress must extend FPUC so that unemployed workers like my client can take care of themselves and their families!

Week of July 27th:

Last week I wrapped up my work as an Equal Justice America Fellow at Greater Boston Legal Services. I was sad to say goodbye to the workers I served and the attorneys and law students I collaborated with. I also felt gratitude for the work I got to do at GBLS. I helped 46 workers claim unemployment insurance, collect Economic Impact Payments, and file their taxes. I advocated on behalf of one of these workers, a custodian who was denied unemployment insurance benefits, at a hearing administered by the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance. Besides direct service, I researched a variety of legal issues at GBLS. One of these research projects generated a report that was presented to the MA Legislature last month. The report used MA survey data to show the disproportionate impacts of the Coronavirus Recession on various groups, including people of color, people who are limited English proficient, people with disabilities, and people with limited access to technology, and called on the Legislature to include these groups in the design, review, and implementation of a new unemployment insurance system.

It truly was a pleasure working at GBLS as an EJA Fellow this summer.

Week of August 10th:

It has been two weeks since I finished my Equal Justice America Fellowship at Greater Boston Legal Services. As I've reflected on this experience, I've noticed a tension in how serving unemployed workers made me feel this summer. On the one hand, it felt gratifying to connect workers to hundreds of dollars of assistance per week, especially when they commended me for my work. But, upon realizing that what kept workers from accessing benefits usually had to do with computer glitches, reporting errors, and other avoidable issues attributable to state agencies, it also often felt like I was helping people solve problems that easily could've been avoided, which made the gratification feel misplaced. I'm surely not the first professional to wrestle with this kind of tension.

I think legal aid providers and other nonprofits ought to consider whether their time is better spent resolving frivolous problems created by states or pressuring states to do so themselves. I appreciated witnessing both approaches at GBLS, which provides direct services to thousands of workers and lobbies the Commonwealth, in coalition with other organizations, to make benefits easier to access.