



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Emily Grau

Law School: University of Michigan Law School

Organization: Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia

Week of June 15th:

This summer, I'm serving as an Equal Justice America Fellow at the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia. Legal Aid aims to make justice real – in individual and systemic ways – for low-income DC residents. As an intern in the Domestic Violence & Family Law Unit, I'm helping to advocate for domestic violence survivors seeking safety and independence from their abusers. Domestic violence is a hidden but pervasive problem both nationally and locally. In DC, 39% of women have experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner, and 50% have experienced psychological aggression. On top of this, DC has some of the highest income inequality in the country, meaning that many individuals would be unable to afford legal assistance if not for organizations like Legal Aid.

Although I've only been at Legal Aid for one week, I'm already learning so much about practicing family law. I'm incredibly grateful to Equal Justice America for funding my work this summer.

Week of July 6th:

Today I wanted to share more about the Family Law Assistance Network (FLAN) – one of the many ways that the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia is working to advance access to justice for D.C. residents.

In the District, 83% of plaintiffs and 93% of respondents in divorce and custody cases are unrepresented. Furthermore, 97% of respondents in paternity and child support cases lack legal counsel. Access to counsel in family law matters is critical. The outcome of these cases can affect one's safety, economic security, and familial relationships. However, in the District, most litigants navigate these complicated and emotional issues alone.

FLAN – a collaboration between Legal Aid, the DC Affordable Law Firm, and the D.C. Bar Pro Bono



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Center – works to close this justice gap in Family Court. FLAN operates on-site at D.C. Superior Court, providing pro se litigants with free legal advice or representation on the day of their hearing. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, FLAN has continued to serve unrepresented individuals via a legal advice hotline.

I'm grateful to Equal Justice America for making it possible for me to contribute to this important work.

Week of July 27th:

This summer at Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, I've had the opportunity to explore the intersection of my two legal interests—immigration and family law. These two issue areas are closely intertwined. Many individuals flee their home countries and seek immigration protection in the U.S. after experiencing gender-based persecution, including intimate partner violence. Similarly, many immigrants living in the U.S. are survivors of domestic violence and face heightened barriers when seeking safety and justice.

This summer, I've worked at the intersection of family law and immigration in a number of ways. I've helped represent immigrant clients seeking protection orders and divorce. I've conducted research to help Legal Aid better assist immigrant youth petitioning for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. And I've observed Legal Aid's denunciation of proposed regulations that would effectively eliminate gender-based persecution as a basis for asylum protection.

I'm grateful to be able to contribute to Legal Aid's advocacy on behalf of immigrant communities.

Week of August 10th:

I recently wrapped up my internship with the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia. Although my time at Legal Aid was brief, I was able to learn so much about working in civil legal services. I assisted with a broad range of family law cases. I was able to do a little bit of everything, from writing a motion on behalf of a client seeking extended protection from her abuser to working on court projects that increase representation for pro se litigants.

There's always a need for civil legal services. However, the need is now even greater due to the COVID-19 crisis. In June 2020, Legal Aid received twice as many requests for assistance as it did last summer. Clients are facing eviction, struggling to get unemployment benefits, and experiencing increased domestic violence. This summer, I witnessed the innovative ways in which legal service organizations are responding to this increased need. As I start my last year of law school and begin applying for public interest jobs, I'm proud to be entering a profession dedicated to serving vulnerable individuals in their times of need.

Thank you again to Equal Justice America for supporting me this summer.