



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: Joseph Zimmerman

Law School: University of Michigan

Organization: University of Michigan Human Trafficking Clinic

Week of June 15th:

This summer I am fortunate enough to be an Equal Justice America Fellow as I complete my internship for the Human Trafficking Clinic at University of Michigan Law School. I have not been able to start my internship yet, but I'd like to briefly share why I pursued this position and why their work is so important. For my internship, I will be providing direct legal aid services to the victims of human trafficking and offering much needed help to those who may not otherwise receive it. In America, 80% of people in poverty that require civil legal assistance do not have access to that necessary assistance. I look forward to working with EJA do my part to decrease that number as much as I can.

Week of July 6th:

My primary source of motivation is helping people that are different than me. This started when I was 5 through my brother Kyle, who has Down Syndrome. Across the board, I occupy every position of privilege that there is, but I have never understood why. I certainly didn't do anything to deserve it. I believe deep at my core that it is my duty to utilize whatever privileges I may have to empower people. This summer, I am incredibly fortunate to be able to work towards this aim as a legal intern for the Human Trafficking Clinic here at Michigan. Our clients have been deceived, coerced, abused, and treated like property. The least we can do is make it possible for them to live and work in America without fear of deportation. America's immigration system is depressingly defective, but one of the few areas where it is possible to make a difference is by protecting the immigration status of the victims of human trafficking. It's not enough, but it's a start. I'd like to thank Equal Justice America for enabling me to take part in this work.



Week of July 27th:

It is one thing to know in theory that the American immigration system is woefully insufficient, and another thing to see it in practice. As I have been working for the Human Trafficking Clinic at the University of Michigan, I have seen several instances where victims have been overlooked, dehumanized, or disenfranchised. The more I see, the more I believe that a systemic overhaul is necessary. In the meantime, however, I am grateful that I have the opportunity to fight for my clients and give them the best representation I can.

Week of August 10th:

As I enter the back stretch of my time at the Human Trafficking Clinic, it is the little things about my clients that will stay with me. I'll remember when my client only knew how to sign her fake name. I'll remember when my client insisted on describing the nuances of his experience even though it might hurt his case. I'll remember when my client was nonplussed by good news because she had been shuffled around the bureaucracy for years. If I have learned anything, it is that everyone deserves legal help, but victims, immigrants, and the poor deserve it most of all.