



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: University of Pennsylvania Law School

Organization: Philadelphia Legal Assistance

Week of June 15th

My current project has been researching Pa unemployment compensation law to see if it provides any protections for workers who are called back to work during COVID19. UC law's good cause for refusal is determined on a case by case basis with no strict or rigid test of determination-which is frustrating. While the flexibility of good cause allows for nuances, it also creates a difficult structure for determining what is good cause. This has been highlighted in considerations of a claimant's fear for their safety. Fear for one's health or safety can be good cause for refusal of work, however, the fear must be real, it must be from immediate and imminent danger, and cannot be due to apprehension of natural workplace hazards that are different or greater than one's expectations. This standard has been tricky to understand in the context of COVID19, when we all feel a decent amount of fear and apprehension of COVID19's immediate and imminent danger anytime we leave home. This research project, though it has been difficult, has been a valuable insight into UC case law! Please consider donating to EJA's campaign to provide legal aid access to all those in need.

Week of July 6th

This week I have been spending a lot of time helping folks troubleshoot their unemployment claims. Spending time working directly with clients has been both so valuable in terms of work experience, but especially in having opportunities to just connect with people and give them space for their frustrations and fears to be heard. Even though I am able to help clients in real tangible ways with their unemployment benefits, over the past month in this role it has become clear that what can be even more valuable is providing space for clients to be heard. So many folks are unable to get through to DLI because of the influx of people calling, and for many of my clients just having space to be heard, and to know that their case will be paid attention to has been important. I think this especially points to the importance of accessibility to legal aid and client interactions. I am grateful to be spending this summer



in a position that allows me to help folks in all of those ways - it has emphasized the importance of human connection in legal advocacy.

Week of July 27th

This was my last week Philadelphia Legal Assistance in the Unemployment Compensation Unit. While this summer looked so much different than what so many of us expected it has been an incredible experience.

Over the past few weeks, a lot of the work I have been on is interfacing directly with clients on troubleshooting issues with both UC and PUA claims. It was those interactions that I found incredibly valuable and meaningful in so many ways. And of course, one of those ways has definitely been gaining more comfort with direct client services. Something that I was very nervous about going into this summer, and am so grateful to be ending this summer with experience managing 34 clients at a time and handling intake lines on top of that and knowing how to connect and help clients through stressful times. I am looking forward to staying on to represent a client at a hearing in a few weeks - and am excited to continue doing work that is more client-facing.

Week of August 10th

I finished my internship with Philadelphia Legal Assistance a few weeks ago and am still feeling the immense impact that experience has had on me as both a legal scholar and a person. An invaluable lesson that I learned this summer was the importance of empathy, and how sometimes "winning" or "losing" a case can come secondary to helping a person feel seen and known. This felt especially important in legal services work when so often folks are dissuaded or intimidated by the legal system - one that can be impossibly unkind and inaccessible to folks of marginalized identities. Moments of kindness in the legal field can go a long way to breaking down accessibility barriers. One of the final hearings I was part of emphasized this lesson over and over again - the importance of patience, sitting and listening to your client, and the ways in which that only strengthens your ability to advocate for them. While this summer I learned a lot about unemployment law and gained incredible litigation experience, what has felt the most resounding has been the experiences talking and working directly with clients. Empathy only makes us stronger as advocates, and I hope to not lose sight of that. Please consider donating to Equal Justice America!