



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** East Bay Community Law Center

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### July 2020:

This past year has been a year of personal reflection, challenge, and discomfort as I find my place in a tumultuous moment. I'm learning to be an actionable accomplice while unlearning the ways I contribute, passively and actively, to forms of oppression. I'm sitting with my own privileges and learning what it means to do better and be better.

Part of that reflection has come from learning what my place in the 'law' has been. I came to law school with the hope that I could make a difference, whatever that may look like. I'm fortunate to be an Equal Justice America (EJA) Fellow for the Summer of 2020. With their support, among others, I'm fighting unjust evictions with the East Bay Community Law Center. Now, more than ever, injustice in the housing world is rampant. Part of my journey as an EJA Fellow is reflecting on the work I am doing and publicly sharing my experience.

In the short time I've been here, I've reflected a lot. Among what I've learned are two lessons about my place and belief of the 'law.'

**Lesson #1:** The law is not where systematic, critical change happens. I once thought that becoming a lawyer was becoming an agent of revolutionary change. I now realize that my capacity is limited. Working with clients who have been frustrated, abandoned, and mistreated by a never-ending system of poverty and oppression has made me realize that I won't be some 'savior' because I 'know the law.' Seeing the work first-hand has made me realize what I had learned over the past few years: lawyers are NOT at the front of revolutionary change. At times, it feels incredibly disheartening to not be able to support those who need support.



Lesson #2: But lawyers are still so incredibly important to support those in need. Although in the long run, I don't think lawyers and the law are the keys to change. That doesn't mean that this work is for naught. I firmly believe lawyers are crucial for immediate relief. I've struggled to feel useful, but I realize that doing what I can through the law can make the difference for another person. I'm hopeful that, perhaps I can't change the world as a whole, but maybe I can change one person's world through the work that I'm doing.

I'm thankful for EqualJusticeAmerica and others who've invested in folks like myself to do this work. Listening to clients, I hear my own story, my family's story, and my peers' story echoed in their struggle. It reminds me that I, too, have a role to play in fighting against a broken system.

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### **August 2020:**

This summer was super formative – it pushed me a lot to grow, taught me so much, and made me feel like I could be helpful. On the flip side, it made me confront my imposter syndrome and a lifelong series of baggage that coincided with that imposter syndrome. At times, it was really hard, and I wasn't sure how to always process it. While I felt very comfortable in my strengths for a lot of it, there were multiple times I felt very small and unable to be helpful.

Towards the end, my depression and anxiety peaked with other non-work issues coming into play (although now I feel much better!) What am I proudest of this Summer?

- I didn't fail anyone. To tenants, I was able to be helpful to most tenants and was able to be helpful to my supervisor and my co-intern.
- I felt like I learned a lot and was able to use that knowledge.
- I learned a lot about civil procedure and how the system really works.
- I was able to draft several products that, with some editing, came out to useful work quality.

What was my biggest take away? I struggled with finding my purpose and role in the legal system. My imposter syndrome was strong, and I felt like I wasn't helpful. But the law isn't about sweeping reforms that change history - it's about the lines in a statute that can be read to help someone keep their home. It's about reassuring someone who has been told they are crazy that they aren't crazy for thinking their landlord has been abusive. It's about helping those who have been disadvantaged by systematic poverty fight for a reasonable amount of rent so that they may live. I felt terrible when my success was defined by people I "saved." But when I realized saving others was not my role, but rather giving them the tools to tackle obstacles, then I realized that I was, indeed, successful this summer. I'm thankful for EJA because it's a difficult balance to manage the work I did and the financial realities of affording my



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own housing. In many ways, I was able to secure others' housing by having my own secured."