



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:

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Law School: UCLA School of Law

Organization: Public Counsel

Week of June 15th

I have been working as a clerk at Public Counsel for over three weeks now. I've been working on the Guardianship Project and helping pro se litigants file paperwork. These first few weeks I've been getting training on client skills, compassion, and insight into the different projects at Public Counsel. I am glad to be part of a group that worked on timely issues such as DACA, as the Supreme Court decision was just released. Public Counsel has also had events for the clerks to meet staff members. Over the past few weeks, we've had a virtual welcome fiesta, lunch gatherings, and played virtual bingo. In my specific role, I have worked on a training manual for practitioners regarding Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. I scheduled my first meetings with litigants and will begin talking to them next week. I've been shadowing the clinic team this past week and I am extremely excited to begin helping people.

Week of July 6th

As our country is undergoing a series of major policy and institutional changes, I am proud to work at Public Counsel, where many staff members are fighting for what is just. Over these past few weeks, the LA Public School District's police budget faced one of the largest cuts in the nation. Members of the education team provided support to the organizers and attended the protests. The team provided support, but Black voices were centered as the leaders of the movement. Over the past week, ICE implemented a policy that would force international students whose schools move fully remote because of the pandemic to leave the country. Days later, Public Counsel joined a suit challenging the policy.

It is great to be able to work with people who are making tangible changes on the biggest issues we are currently facing. Within my clinic alone we have seen many families devastated by the conditions of the pandemic and fearful for what is to come. It brings me some hope to see that the law can be used to create change and provide relief.

Week of July 27th

These past few weeks have been busier as my current litigants are starting to get their hearing dates. Throughout the day I get phone calls asking questions but it makes me satisfied to feel as though I am truly helping others. It's the primary reason I wanted to engage in direct service work this summer. I recently created a flyer



advertising the remote court hearings. My summer has shown me not only inequities in accessibility of the legal system, but how it is exacerbated by the pandemic. Many of the litigants who cannot do remote hearings have difficulties due to their lack of computer or email access. They are typically older and face the highest risk of getting sick. Although remote work has allowed for litigants to get help without taking time off of work, it has created extra burdens for others. Some people lack access to printers to print their petitions which can be over fifty pages long. Others struggle to understand directions when they cannot visually see the process of filing their paperwork. I went to a presentation from the Education Rights team and they noted that many students were having trouble getting their accommodations followed during the pandemic.

This was my last official week of work, but I decided to stay on for the next couple of weeks before I start school. The clinic has remained extremely busy and I did not want to leave them short as they have to train and find more volunteers. I am excited for this opportunity because over the next week I will get practice writing an opposition declaration to the termination of a guardianship. I said goodbye to all the other clerks and I am grateful for all the connections and friendships I made. Public Counsel had a farewell party for all of the clerks where supervisors announced what each clerk had worked on and showed their appreciation. It was great to hear about other projects as I've had little contact this summer with people outside of the Children's Rights Project. Overall, the organization has done amazing work and I am grateful to have spent my summer in a place where people value each other and their contributions.

Week of August 10th

Although my summer has come to an end, I am grateful for all the experiences I had at Public Counsel. One of the reasons why I came to law school was because I felt the legal system was inaccessible for people not from privileged backgrounds. I wanted to work to make the legal system more equitable. Over this summer, I was able to do work that allowed me to do that. I've seen cases where litigants recently lost loved ones, contracted COVID, and heard stories of abuse. For many of them, the legal system was something they were forced into interacting with. For most of my cases there was always a looming threat that the children could end up in the foster care system if they did not take immediate action. However, people who have more resources and access to lawyers typically do not have as urgent legal needs.

During my last team meeting we discussed how to shift our clinic practices now that it seems certain it will not reopen anytime soon. The recent threat of the US Postal Service closing directly impacts our litigants that do not have access to email and how people can receive their communication from the court. We are living in unprecedented times. The clinic team's ability to adapt and adjust to each changing situation has been amazing to witness. According to our records, we have helped over one hundred people in some capacity since I've been working there. This is a reflection of not only the need for legal services but of the team's perseverance. Every single member took on heavy workloads and rose to the occasion. Although I did not apply knowing that I would spend my summer working remotely, I could not have asked for a greater experience.