



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Christina Kelly

**Law School:** University of Virginia

**Organization:** Legal Aid Justice Center

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### Week of June 15<sup>th</sup>:

This summer I am working with the Legal Aid Justice Center in Richmond, VA. My first major assignment involved helping a client navigate the grievance process with the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority. This client is a zero-income participant in the program. Prior to her annual reexamination meeting with RRHA, she had been receiving enough money to cover 100% of her rent. At this annual meeting however, a member of her household was not present because she was receiving treatment for substance abuse. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, substance abuse is considered a disability. Because this person was not present at the meeting, my client's housing assistance was reduced by almost \$200 and the family member with substance abuse issues was kicked out of the home. All of this is happening during a global pandemic where stable housing is more important than ever. This reduction rendered the housing unaffordable for my client and has created immense stress and anxiety for the family who is doing everything they can to support their disabled family member. The final hearing is next week, and I really hope RRHA does the right thing and reinstates the family member and the original housing assistance allowance.

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### Week of July 6<sup>th</sup>:

This week I found out that I won my first case as an almost lawyer. Working with my supervising attorney, I wrote a 12-page brief explaining to the hearing officer at Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority why our client's benefits should be reinstated. The hearing was conducted over the phone, but I was given many opportunities to advocate for our client. It's thrilling and rewarding to know that the many hours and hard work I put into that brief resulted in a favorable outcome for a deserving person.



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**Week of July 27<sup>th</sup>:**

I wrapped up my internship with Legal Aid Justice Center two weeks ago and it was an extremely rewarding experience! I helped write a brief arguing on behalf of our client that her housing benefit allowance should be reinstated since it was reduced because her daughter was absent from the household for substance abuse treatment. We won the case at the grievance hearing with the housing authority. It was such a great feeling to work so hard on something for a great cause. Knowing that the work I was putting in would help a family stay in their home was extremely motivating. The work Legal Aid does every day to help indigent people is so important and so needed.

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**Week of August 10<sup>th</sup>:**

Working at Legal Aid Justice Center this summer was an invaluable experience. I learned so much about the systems that keep people in a cycle of poverty, with evictions being a big piece of that puzzle. I loved working with clients and was motivated everyday knowing that I was helping people stay in their homes or get access to desperately needed benefits. Going forward, I want to take more classes that explore the root causes of poverty and the policies that are designed to alleviate many of the issues I've learned about. I want to understand exactly where the shortfalls are and study what other countries are doing to help poor people live dignified and happy lives.