



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Paige Whitaker  
**Law School:** University of Virginia  
**Organization:** Central Virginia Legal Aid Society

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

Hello friends! As some of you may know, I am working at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Inc. (CVLAS) this summer, helping provide preventative legal education and free civil legal services to low-income folks here in Charlottesville. CVLAS does not have the resources to pay me, but I have been fortunate enough to receive support for my work from University of Virginia School of Law and Equal Justice America.

As part of my fellowship with EJA, I will periodically be posting updates on the work I am doing. For this first update, I figured I'd share a bit about what legal aid is and what exactly my organization does. Many people may be surprised to hear that the right to an attorney is limited to criminal cases. This often leaves low-income people fending for themselves or foregoing legal action altogether when they are confronted with civil legal problems. Civil legal issues include evictions, consumer fraud and scams, and domestic violence. You might be thinking, "Hey, those all seem like problems that are especially dire and exacerbated during the pandemic!" And you would be absolutely right. This is where legal aid organizations like CVLAS come in.

My day-to-day for the past four weeks has included conducting research on the new COVID-19 laws, assisting with evictions and consumer law cases, and putting together legal educational presentations for formerly incarcerated people. I am grateful to be able to work with attorneys so dedicated to their community and advocating for fairness within our legal system, which, as we all should know by now, reserves justice only for the wealthy and white all too often. The tremendous wealth inequality in our country, shaped by systemic racism that has been perpetuating inequity for centuries, creates an access-to-justice gap that legal aid attempts to fill.

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

It's time for my next EJA Fellow Update! Last week the eviction moratorium in Virginia was lifted and many people were left panicked and fearful of becoming homeless during the pandemic. Yesterday, I helped a client with an emergency petition to stop an illegal lockout. I've also had the chance to draft



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pleadings, advice letters, and research memoranda on housing law issues. I am grateful to be able to work with some incredible housing law attorneys at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society to help those that face evictions, which directly threaten individuals' livelihoods and health.

If you would like to support attorneys and law students like me in providing legal services to those who need it the most, please consider donating to Equal Justice America.

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

Time for my third EJA Fellow Update! My time at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society has come to a close. This experience reminded me that I went to law school not just to read case law and analyze statutes, but because I believe that every person deserves the tools to access justice.

*Shared post from Central Virginia Legal Aid Society:*

“Our CVLAS Charlottesville office had the pleasure of working with a second year UVA Law student, Paige Whitaker, who interned in their office this summer. Meet Paige.

Hi! I'm Paige and I'm a rising second year law student at the University of Virginia School of Law. I graduated from the University of Oregon in 2016 and taught English in Spain after graduation. I then worked as a legal assistant at an immigration law firm before coming to law school. Interning at CVLAS this summer has been such an educational and rewarding experience, which was made possible through a grant from Equal Justice America. I have had the chance to draft pleadings, advice letters, and research memoranda for cases in housing and consumer law. I am especially grateful for the opportunities I have had to help clients out with housing law issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope to continue to work to close the access to justice gap and advocate for the importance of this work in my career after law school.”

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

This summer, I had the privilege of working with Central Virginia Legal Aid Society. One of the highlights of my experience was getting to research the new laws involving COVID-19 as they related to housing.

My experience was made possible through a fellowship with Equal Justice America. If you would like to support attorneys and law students like me working toward justice for low-income folks in the civil law space, please consider donating.