



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Tyler Demetriou

**Law School:** University of Virginia

**Organization:** Legal Aid Justice Center

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

I am incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to intern with the Legal Aid Justice Center's Economic Justice Program this summer, with generous financial support from Equal Justice America. It has only been a few weeks, but I have already been able to play a (very small) role in LAJC's efforts to combat a few of the countless racial and economic inequities that pervade our society. I have written an appeal for a denial of disability benefits, assisted with multiple federal class action complaints and a preliminary injunction, and interviewed clients facing evictions during the pandemic. I also will be representing a client at an administrative hearing about their Medicaid benefits in two weeks.

I have loved being a resource and advocate for the wonderful individuals who have been my clients. I am also thankful to work alongside community organizers and policy experts, who are focused on dismantling the racially structured and oppressive systems that leave our clients in a position where they need legal aid in the first place.

Please consider supporting Equal Justice America so more students like me can continue to do this work.

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

Last week, in my role as a Legal Aid Justice Center intern, I represented a family in an administrative appeal where their child's Medicaid benefits had been denied. The law is stacked against our clients in many of these cases, but we made the best case we could. Most importantly, our client had the chance to speak their frustrations and experience to an authority figure for the first time after years of not getting the services they needed, which was a powerful moment to witness. While I had oral advocacy experience from my LRW class



and moot court, it was a great experience for me to have the pressure of advocating for a real person with actual stakes. I could not have asked for a more understanding and collaborative client for my first hearing, which made my job easy.

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

My internship with the Legal Aid Justice Center ended Friday. I am grateful to LAJC for allowing me to work on so many different types of issues and legal actions. I argued a Medicaid benefits denial at an administrative appeal hearing. I wrote briefs for litigation challenging adverse Social Security and Medicaid decisions. I drafted motions, orders, and parts of complaints for several federal cases involving Section 1983 and fair housing claims.

But the highlights of my summer were my interactions with clients. So many were great advocates for themselves and their families, and just needed advice and support to guide them through the labyrinth of public benefits regulations or to fight housing laws so heavily stacked against them in Virginia. LAJC does a great job centering its clients and the community in its legal strategies, so I am thankful to have experienced that approach as a model to take with me going forward in my legal career. This summer was the perfect reminder of why I came to law school in the first place, after spending 1L year in the weeds of corporate-focused doctrinal classes.

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

Reflecting back on my internship at the Legal Aid Justice Center now that a couple of weeks have passed, I have realized how much more connected I now feel with the Charlottesville community. After working with so many of my neighbors this summer, I have a much better understanding of the problems many of them are persevering through; I now realize that my perspective before this summer was more abstract and removed. LAJC's commitment to community lawyering helps foster progress throughout the entire communities in which it works, in addition to supporting more immediate needs of individuals. I am committed to applying that same approach during the rest of my time in law school, and then in my public service legal career.

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