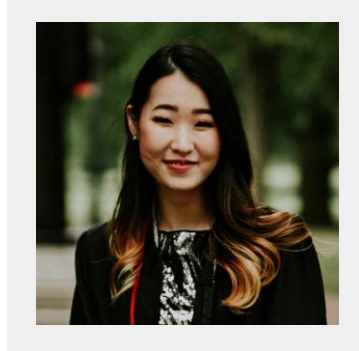




Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Boston College Law School

Organization: Greater Boston Legal Services

Update 1: In college, I faced various legal issues in housing and immigration. If it had not been for the free legal services provided by non-profit organizations, I would not have been able to finish my college education as I did. Thankfully I was able to and now as a law student I wanted to give back to the community in a similar way. This month, I started working at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). For a week and a half, I was in multiple trainings, learning about barriers (bureaucratic disenfranchisement, life circumstances, structural inequalities), relevant laws, and how to work with our clients. Remembering how comforted I felt as soon as I was able to speak with a lawyer when I was going through those complicated issues, I started working in the Welfare Law Unit. I will be focusing on the three Economic Impact Payments (Stimulus payments) and the newly expanded Child Tax Credit.

Update 2: I have started working with many clients on their Economic Impact Payments. Most of the cases I work on are for the people who need help filing their tax return so they can claim 2020 EIP as Recovery Rebate by filing a 2020 tax return. Some cases are relatively simple. After our unit's legal assistant does an intake, I call the client for a thorough interview. During the interview I gather information about their situation to have a full picture. Although filing a tax especially for a no income earner is straightforward, we always try to get every piece of information correct and never file a wrong return. Sometimes one call does it. (Sometimes I have to call multiple times as the facts are tricky. Sometimes the interpretation makes it take it twice as long.) Throughout the process, I keep all the information organized in our legal server and SharePoint. I also do the double, triple checking with the documents our clients send me to make sure the information we have on hand is correct. Once our evaluation of their eligibility is complete and they are good to go, I prepare the information neatly for our accountant. Two of my cases were this simple at least for people with some amount of tax knowledge. To many, especially those who need these Economic Impact Payments or Child Tax Credit the most, they often lack the resources or skills to go through IRS material to figure out what they can do even if it's as "simple" as filing their tax return. There are some cases I am working on currently that are so incredibly complicated that we need multiple lawyers and answers from the Treasury directly. Although IRS developed a portal for those people, it has been developed with Intuit (the very company that wants to make filing taxes complicated) and none of these portals are easy to use because it requires many steps including having an ID.me account. I will write more about what efforts have been made regarding this difficulty in my next post!



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Update 3: As I gave a little preview in the previous update, I will give an update on what our unit is doing to get more help. Unfortunately, there are not many attorneys around the country who help individuals get their 1st, 2nd, 3rd Economic Impact Payments (also known as Stimulus Payments) and the newly expanded Child Tax Credit. Even within our organization here at Greater Boston Legal Services, we have a very small group working on this matter (my supervising attorney, me, and one other intern). Compared to the demand of the legal help on this subject, we have an extreme shortage of staffing. Therefore, GBLS is trying to work with Horizons for Homeless Children and United South End Settlements on a possibility for them to use their staff to do similar things as us. We would be able to help so many more people get these very needed payments if they could do interviews as I can only work with so many clients a day. (We also tried to work with more than these two but organizations with no capacity couldn't work with us.) Recently a website Find Your Funds (also with the help of GBLS's Welfare Unit) has opened with a goal of guiding people through it if they want to do it on their own. I'm doing a lot of research and writing as I am drafting a document (compiling all the information scattered in many different places) to serve as a reference in the future after I leave. I am also updating an interview form to guide the interviewers through. Working with clients is definitely rewarding on its own but working on a project that would have a greater chain effect gives me even greater satisfaction. My summer flew by while I was thinking about this mission!

Entry 4: I just wrapped up my 11-week long internship at Greater Boston Legal Services last Friday. It was a unique internship due to COVID-19 both logistically and substantively. Because I was working remotely the entire summer, I did not get a chance to be in the office or meet any of my colleagues or clients in person. While that can sound terrible and challenging to some people, it worked out very well for me. One positive thing that came out of it was I was more eager to call clients to give them updates or ask additional questions because I was never worried that someone in the office was going to hear the conversation and think I stumble over my words too often or that I don't sound friendly enough and so on. This pushed me to develop my client service skills quickly as well. I did not have a supervising attorney sitting next to me to take over the call if it goes around the circle or if the client doesn't understand something. I had to find a way to gently approach certain sensitive topics as well as a way to rephrase more complicated questions. Substantively, thanks to COVID, I was able to work on the legal topics that were developing throughout my internship in real time rather than researching something ancient. I really enjoyed this aspect of my internship. Throughout this summer, I worked on about a dozen cases and created documents that compile information on Economic Impact Payments (two of which are Recovery Rebate Credit now) and Child Tax Credit. I truly felt respected by my supervising attorney every day and enjoyed being treated like her colleague than an idiot intern. I could not have asked for a better legal assistant either. This legal experience taught me so much and I am even more excited to start my 2L year to be one step closer to being an attorney.