



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Patricia Piaskowski

Law School: Chicago-Kent College of Law

EJA Fellowship: Center for Disability & Elder Law

Update 1: June 14, 2021

❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️ Happy Pride Month! ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

This past year has been unconventional in just about every possible way because of the pandemic. My internship, too, was impacted by it as I am doing it completely remotely. Nevertheless, the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL) has not skipped a beat in preparing my fellow interns and me for assisting older adults and/or people with disabilities in Cook County with their legal issues from the comfort of our homes.

For example, CDEL organized a cultural competency training for us so that we may better serve its diverse client base. While I am an LGBTQ+ ally, it would be ignorant of me to say that I know everything there is to know about this beautiful community. One incredibly important and valuable thing I learned, for example, is that if I ever inadvertently use the wrong pronouns or misgender a prospective client, I should apologize, acknowledge my mistake, admit that I am still learning, and move on. Making a lengthy apology and expecting forgiveness and/or understanding can make the other party uncomfortable! They should not have to make you feel better about making the mistake!

I have been able to incorporate that training already when speaking with prospective and current clients who are part of CDEL's "Proud to Thrive" program. Proud to Thrive provides legal services specifically to LGBTQ+ elders in Cook County, with a more attuned understanding of the additional challenges that such individuals face.

Update 2: June 28, 2021

Today was another truly rewarding day at the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL). I had the opportunity to assist attorneys with several estate planning document signings this morning. These documents included Last Wills, Power of Attorneys, Living Wills, and Transfer on Death Instruments. It was such a pleasure to see how relieved and glad our clients were to finally have their documents signed and their estate plans squared away.



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It was also quite bizarre, but so great, to finally meet some of CDEL's amazing staff in-person for the first time! Like many other "Zoom University" students, I was worried that meeting people that I have only spoken to over video would be awkward, but it was great!

Update 3: July 13, 2021

One thing that I really love about CDEL is that I get exposed to a variety of practice areas. I was particularly excited to work on a few property law matters because I had just taken Property Law last semester and could apply some of the concepts I learned to better understand the cases I was assigned.

For example, I had the opportunity to get the ball rolling on an adverse possession claim. I was tasked with obtaining proof of property tax payments to demonstrate color of title and finding potential owners and claimants in the matter. I was also assigned a landlord-tenant dispute over a security deposit. My job is to communicate with the client, collect information pertaining to the events leading up to the tenant's move-out date, and draft the necessary pleadings so that our client can recover the security deposit which they are owed.

It is such a privilege to be able to learn about a new practice area and to work with CDEL's wonderful clients!

Update 4: August 2, 2021

It is hard to believe that I have finished my internship with the Center for Disability & Elder Law (CDEL)! Where did these ten weeks go? It has been an amazing experience from beginning to end, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn more about CDEL and the various practice areas it handles as a legal aid organization.

I think that many of us, aspiring lawyers, seek out internships mainly because we want to get hands-on experience with the law. But I think that an equally important part of having an internship such as mine is learning how to interact and work with clients in the legal field.

More often than not, people contact attorneys because they are going through a stressful situation, and they urgently need legal help. I have encountered prospective clients who called in with anxiety and nervousness in their voices. I quickly learned during my first few calls that it is nothing personal. It is very likely that the person I was speaking to was having a very bad day up until the point that they picked up the phone and called CDEL.

The second thing that I learned was that it is very important that I, in the few minutes that I spend on the phone with a prospective client, make them feel calmer and establish that they could trust CDEL with their legal matter, regardless of if that meant that we would take them on as a client later or find other great resources for them to contact to resolve their issue.

I am very grateful to CDEL and its wonderful staff for giving me the chance to learn this incredibly valuable lesson. I hope to join them as a volunteer again in the future! I would also like to express my gratitude to Equal Justice America for supporting me in this incredible journey.