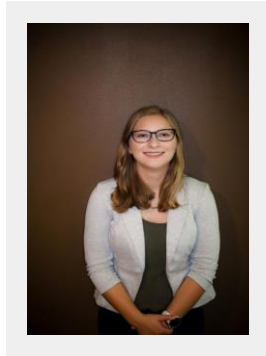




Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Michigan State College of Law

Organization: Legal Services of South Central Michigan

Update 1: I am very excited to share that I have been selected as one of this summer's Equal Justice America Fellows! EJA is an organization dedicated to ensuring that legal help is available to those who need it most. As a part of my fellowship, I will be posting updates on my work throughout the summer to help raise awareness of the importance of civil legal work! This month, I began my legal internship with Legal Services of South-Central Michigan. LSSCM is working especially hard to address the housing crisis caused by COVID-19. The majority of the cases I am seeing are low-income individuals who are facing eviction cases because they fell behind on their rent for COVID related reasons. Not only does an eviction cause immediate homelessness or doubling up for many people, but an eviction on your record can make it extremely difficult to secure housing in the future. The good news is that there is a Michigan Covid Emergency Rental Assistance Program for Michigan residents who have fallen behind on rent and/or utilities during COVID-19. (*You can fill out an application here: <https://ceraapp.michigan.gov/>). So far, I have been helping individuals navigate the requirements for this program, as well as making sure that tenants understand their rights when it comes to the eviction process. Overall, it has been quite the experience learning housing law at such a crucial time!

Update 2: It's time for my second EJA Fellow Update! The last couple of weeks have been very busy. I have been meeting with clients and tenant unions, as well as attending court hearings! While it is a relief that the COVID vaccine has allowed people to come together safely, at Legal Services of South Central Michigan I am constantly reminded of the lasting effects of COVID. In court, I meet with individuals who are facing evictions for non-payment of rent. Most of these tenants have lost income or experienced extraordinary medical expenses because of COVID. My least favorite part of the intake is where I have to ask, "Where would you go if you were evicted." It is too often that I watch the client come to the realization they have nowhere else to go and admit that an eviction would cause them (and their family) to be homeless. Some good news: there is a CDC Eviction Moratorium. This prohibits tenants from being evicted for nonpayment until July 31, 2021, if certain requirements are met. (https://www.cdc.gov/.../CDC_Eviction_Extension_Order...) Originally, the CDC



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Eviction Moratorium was set to expire June 30, 2021, but it was extended to July 31 a few days ago! This extension was a huge relief for everyone at Legal Services as we were bracing for a wave of eviction cases. Also, what most people don't realize is that the areas with the highest rates of eviction lawsuits are also the areas with the lowest rates of vaccination. The extension of the moratorium will provide more time to connect people with resources so that their eviction cases can be dismissed, more time to increase vaccination rates (currently, more than 53% of the population 12 years or older have been fully immunized) and will prevent increased stress on the homeless service system.

Update 3: My third EJA Fellow Update is due! This week I have been working on lots of expungement cases! Tens of millions of Americans have criminal records. Individuals with conviction records face significant barriers involving employment, housing, and various other opportunities. These persistent obstacles can overwhelm an individual's efforts at reintegration and can aggravate poverty, inequality, and racial disparities in our society. For one of my clients, an expungement of their 1992 conviction means that they can pursue their dream job. For another, an expungement is the key to passing a background check so that they can work and support themselves. Initially, this was an area of law that I overlooked. I always knew that our society treated individuals with criminal records very harshly, but I certainly did not understand how extensively a criminal record could derail a person's life. Setting aside an individual's old conviction(s) is a simple way to help them move past their old mistakes.

Entry 4: It's time for my last EJA Fellow Update! It's hard to believe my summer is almost over. While I have worked in a legal firm before, my position at Legal Services of South Central Michigan was my first glimpse of what it would be like to work full-time at a non-profit. There was so much support, meaningful collaboration, and more cases than I have ever seen at once! There is so much work to be done when it comes to housing law. Everyone deserves to be housed. Even though this is a simple notion, I can assure you that navigating housing assistance programs could not be any more complex. On top of this, tenants' rights are constantly being violated through discrimination and/or unimaginable living conditions. So far, I've worked on cases involving flooding, black mold, bedbug infestations, exposed wires, and sewage backups. It's bad enough that landlords allow these conditions to happen in the first place, but tenants often have to fight tooth and nail just to get the necessary repairs. For most of my clients, they are forced to live with these conditions because they have no where else to go. While most landlords have attorneys, tenants usually cannot afford one. Working at Legal Services has put me in a unique position where I can fight for individual's rights regardless of their income, while also ensuring that they have a roof over their head. This is exactly the kind of work that motivated me to go to law school in the first place. I can't wait to see what next summer will bring! If you are interested in supporting this kind of work, please consider donating to Equal Justice America so that my work, and the work of other students engaged in equal justice work, may continue. Thank you!