



## Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Alexandra Bruns-Smith

**Law School:** Northeastern University

**Organization:** Greater Boston Legal Services,  
Employment Law unit

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### Update 1:

I am happy to announce that I have been selected as an Equal Justice America Fellow for Summer 2021. I will be spending 15 weeks working as a legal intern in Greater Boston Legal Services' Employment Law Unit. So far, I have been working directly with low-income clients across Boston to help them with their unemployment claims, represent them at hearings, and work with community partners to create institutional changes to our current unemployment system. I hope to use the experience from this internship to create stronger protections for workers and non-workers who are most harmed by systemic barriers. Greater Boston Legal Services provides these services free of charge because all people deserve to live and thrive in our community.

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### Update 2:

As part of my fellowship with Equal Justice America, I have to share regular updates on my work at Greater Boston Legal Services. Over the past two weeks, I represented a client at an unemployment hearing, appealed numerous unemployment benefit denials, worked on a wage theft case, and conducted research on racial and economic disparities in internet accessibility caused by systemic racism and classism.

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### Update 3:

Writing for my third EJA Fellow Update!

Early in June, I represented a client at my first unemployment hearing, in which I examined my client in front of the review examiner (judge), cross examined the client's employer, and gave a closing statement. This week, we found out that we won the case! This means that my client is entitled to receive thousands in back benefits and can receive them going forward.



Unemployment is thought by many to disincentivize the unemployed from going back to work, but this is the opposite of my experience working at Greater Boston Legal Services. My clients frequently tell me how much they want to get back to work and UI benefits let them get by until they can do so. Making sure all people have the means to live, regardless of employment status, makes our society stronger as a whole.

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**Entry 4:**

Over the past 12 weeks I have been working at Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) through the generous funding of Equal Justice America. Today I am writing with my fourth and final #EJAFellowUpdate required by the program.

In the Employment Law Unit, I have had the opportunity to write multiple research memos that GBLS has used to advocate for stronger policies for workers and unemployed people. In my latest memo, I researched the background of punitive language in the Social Security Act and the negative impact it has had on unemployment claimants in order to advocate for legislative reform.

I have also continued working directly with clients to get them the legal benefits they deserve. For example, I won an appeal on an unemployment denial for a client who was being underpaid and misclassified by her employer due to the immigration status of herself and her family. Currently, I am working on an appeal for a formerly incarcerated man who was denied benefits because of his lack of work history.

GBLS advocates on the individual level but also uses those experiences to fight for systemic changes to laws that were never designed to protect workers. Please consider donating to EJA to allow law students to participate in this kind of work.