



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Free Migration Project

Update 1:

I have learned a lot over the past month during my internship with Free Migration Project in Philadelphia. I had worked in immigration in the past, before attending law school, but this internship is providing many new experiences. I am involved in the public campaign and legal strategy for one client who is facing medical deportation or “medical repatriation.” I never knew about this practice before interning with Free Migration Project and I am now dedicated to fighting it. When an undocumented person is critically injured, for example in a car accident, and they require prolonged medical care, they can be removed from the United States to a hospital in another country. Of course, the treatment received in the country of removal is often insufficient to allow for recovery. And if the individual does recover, they will be unable to return to their family in the United States because they are undocumented. Free Migration Project has been successful so far in delaying the medical deportation of its client, but the work continues to ensure that the client may continue to remain in the United States and receive the healthcare that the client needs to recover.

Update 2:

Part of my internship entails attending trainings and webinars on issues that affect Free Migration Project’s client base or further FMP’s mission. One of these trainings that I found especially interesting was a multiday conference on the use of digital surveillance and its effect on migrants and refugees worldwide. Specific to the U.S.-based clients, was the discussion about surveillance both on the border and in the interior of the country. Details of private companies profiting off the sale of digital surveillance to ICE and other federal agencies was particularly concerning. I learned about the harm caused by digital surveillance and AI’s on immigrant communities and communities of color. I also learned that these issues are not isolated to the United States. Speakers from all over the world talked about the use of AI lie detectors, sound canons, and other technological weapons at many international borders. A very relevant issue that was brought up was the fact that white male perspectives from the west are imputed to the AIs. As a result, the AIs facial recognition is less accurate for



darker skin. The lie detectors also misread cultural differences as indications of lying such as avoiding eye contact with a border agent of the opposite gender.

After learning about these many alarming issues that target migrants and refugees, organizers discussed their advocacy efforts and various campaigns. I found the discussion on connecting local to global resistance efforts to be particularly important and inspiring. There is much work to do to make sure all people are protected from targeting by States and private for-profit companies. These trainings enabled me to understand the issues and begin to make connections with organizations that are pursuing local and global advocacy to fight these violations.

Update 3:

Free Migration Project not only provides immigration legal services, but also participates in immigration and border abolitionist advocacy. FMP utilizes both legal avenues and community advocacy to pursue relief for clients targeted by the immigration system. I am very much enjoying learning about working in a community-driven litigation space. I have never been involved in the preparation and organizing side of community involvement and I am learning a lot from observing the communications and organizing teams at FMP. FMP is a member of other broader coalitions fighting for an end to immigration detention in the United States as well. The Shut Down Berks coalition has a number of press events connecting to ongoing litigation to shut down the Berks County Residential Center that detains immigrant families. I have learned a lot through my participation drafting pleadings on some of those lawsuits and attending the various press events. FMP is also a member of the Family Liberation Abolitionist Network that is working with Senators and Representatives who sponsor bills that would end family detention and include language in appropriations bills to end funding for family detention.

Working on advocacy-related efforts in addition to immigration legal services has made a huge impact on me. Before applying to law school, I worked for an immigration legal services organization that did not engage in any advocacy. It was a great experience for learning how to provide legal services in the immigration context, but to me it felt frustrating and futile to assist clients every day without addressing any of the wrongs or underlying issues they all faced in the U.S. immigration and detention system. My involvement with FMP has exposed me to organizations that manage to help their clients through the system while also fighting the injustices that the system perpetrates.

Entry 4:

I have spent much of the summer working on a client's case who has been detained for over two and a half years. The client is a victim of human trafficking and a survivor of severe physical abuse. As a result of being kidnapped by a cartel, ICE labeled him a public safety threat and so far, have refused to release him while his case is pending. The client has serious mental health diagnoses which have been aggravated by his unreasonable length of detention. He has even been placed in solitary confinement which his doctor reported was



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tantamount to torture given his mental illnesses. The client has a team of attorneys representing him in his immigration proceedings. He has a sponsor who is willing to provide him with housing and financial support. The client has consistently articulated the desire to seek ongoing mental health services and to participate meaningfully in his immigration proceedings if he is released. He is not a flight risk and certainly not a danger to the public as a result of his kidnapping. It has been difficult working with this client on account of his mental health illnesses. He often verbalizes his depression and shares his thoughts of suicide. The client's team of attorneys, advocates, and his doctor are worried that his ongoing detention is potentially life threatening.

In working on this client's case, his advocacy team has undertaken a variety of efforts and tactics to seek his release. After the favorable guidance from the Biden Administration, the legal team has submitted a motion to remand, a parole request, and a bond redetermination. The community organizing team has circulated a petition calling for his release and is in the process of publishing an op ed about the client's situation. I have had the opportunity to work on the drafting of the parole request, the bond redetermination, the petition, and the op ed. I am very grateful for the well-rounded experience that I have gained this summer with an excellent team of attorneys and advocates to learn from. The client's case is ongoing and the team is hopeful for his release in the near future.