

September 10, 2021

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America
Re: Summer 2021 EJA Fellow Update

Dear Dan Ruben,

Please allow me to take this moment to thank you and your staff for all the work that goes into making this fellowship possible. This fellowship made it financially possible for me to work as a summer legal intern this past summer with Boulder County Legal Services (BCLS). When I joined BCLS I knew I was getting the opportunity to do meaningful work in the community I am living in, but I never expected it to be the most meaningful internship experience I have ever had.

My first day working with BCLS I was given a crash course on Housing Law, Family Law, Consumer Law, and Public Benefits. These are the areas of law that our office handled and the ones most important to our clients in the community. In less than five hours on my first day I learned substantive Colorado law. My second day I was given my first set of cases. One client was a monolingual Arabic speaker who was brought to the United States by her husband. For the duration of her marriage, she faced emotional and physical abuse from him. She arrived at our office after learning that her husband had filed for divorce and had left her financially and socially vulnerable. He had also withdrawn her immigration papers from USCIS; that case was being handled by the immigration unit in the Denver office. Her husband has been representing himself but since our client speaks no English, she had more trouble than the average person dealing with the court system. Other cases that I had been assigned my second day included two housing cases, a public benefits case, and another divorce case. The other divorce case was closer to being finished but I was added because the parents could not agree on the dates to exchange the kids for the summer. I was also added to the case because the parents' native language was Spanish so there were message exchanges that I was responsible for translating. Aside from divorce cases, the majority of my caseload dealt with housing law and public benefits. Some of the housing cases dealt with landlords mismanaging the property but most of my cases, due to COVID, involved the eviction moratorium. Due to COVID, our office saw an increase in the number of public benefits cases. There had been a lot of issues and confusion

within the Department of Labor because of their overburdened system which led many individuals to receive confusing information from the Colorado Department of Labor. Many of our clients who had received unemployment benefits were either mistakenly getting their benefits rescinded or were being required to prove that they actually qualified for unemployment benefits in the first place. As a result, our clients would receive notices or communications from the unemployment office claiming that they owed thousands of dollars. Of course, this terrified many of our clients because they thought they were being required to pay money that they did not have when in reality it was a government mistake.

Through my caseload I was able to work with clients and speak with them on a daily basis. One of the reasons I pursued law school was because I wanted to be able to help people navigate the legal system and make sure they had proper communication about their case to understand the process and any implications. I have worked with attorneys before, and I have seen them communicate with clients and provide them with some ease and comfort by simply explaining what the law is and how it applies to their specific situation. For the first time since I have entered the legal field, I have been able to do the same. In addition to working directly with clients I was able to gain exposure to new areas of the law, write briefs and memos, draft and file motions with the court, and attend a hearing in person.

The work I got to do with BCLS was meaningful and exciting, but it would not have been possible without the Equal Justice America (EJA) fellowship so again, thank you for making my internship with Boulder County Legal Services possible.

Sincerely,
Grace Rosado
University of Colorado