



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Rachel A. Harrington

Law School: University of Michigan

Organization: PA Institutional Law Project

Update 1:

After finishing my first year at University of Michigan Law School, I'm fortunate to be an Equal Justice America fellow working at the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project for the summer. PILP provides free legal aid to institutionalized and incarcerated persons throughout the State of Pennsylvania. As a summer intern, I have the opportunity to review documents, assist on briefs and motions, and research legal issues that impact the lives of primarily members of marginalized communities.

Only 5% of the world's population lives in the United States, but 20% of all incarcerated people are located here. PILP fights to defend the rights of indigent incarcerated and institutionalized people and ensure that they receive the services they deserve. The work being done by PILP and organizations like it could not be more important, but funding is scarce.

Update 2:

As part of my Equal Justice America fellowship this summer, I'll be keeping you up to date with my work at the Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project.

Why did I choose to work on behalf of incarcerated people? Well, there's really one clear answer: incarcerated and institutionalized people are human, just like you and me, and they deserve to be treated with the respect and dignity afforded everyone else.

Two million people are incarcerated in this country. That's roughly 700 out of every 100,000 people in the United States, a higher rate of imprisonment than any other country in the world. Over 400,000 of them were charged only with drug crimes. One out of three Black men will spend time in jail, compared to one in 17 white men. Some people spend years in jail without ever being convicted of a crime. Incarcerated people frequently suffer abuse, rape, and maltreatment, including violations of their constitutional rights. In short, our criminal



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justice system is broken, and funnels people into prisons that do little, if anything, to end violence in our communities or reduce the rates of recidivism.

In the United States, there is no civil right to free counsel. Studies show that 80% of the civil legal needs of low-income Americans currently go unmet. Once in prison or jail, incarcerated people - most of whom are indigent - rely on legal aid organizations to protect their rights and ensure their needs are met. PILP provides free civil legal aid to institutionalized and incarcerated persons throughout the State of Pennsylvania. This work is meaningful, impactful, and incredibly important, but it is also seriously underfunded.

Update 3:

Hard to believe I've reached the eighth week of my summer internship at Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project. I continue to be awed by the attorneys, paralegals, legal assistants, and others who do this important work day after day. These cases aren't easy, but the rights of incarcerated people, of ALL people, are worth defending. I consider myself fortunate to be a part of this incredible organization, if even just for a summer.

Update 4:

Next Tuesday marks the end of my summer internship at Pennsylvania Institutional Law Project. Before I leave and prepare for my second year of law school, I'm writing a second draft of a brief in support of a motion for summary judgment, drafting a statement of material facts, and finishing up a couple of research assignments on novel legal issues. It's hard to overstate the difficulty of being remote for all of 1L and my first legal work experience, but I've learned so much from this organization, from my attorney supervisor, and from the work I've been trusted to do on behalf of indigent incarcerated people. My research and writing skills have improved, of course, but I also come away from this experience assured that providing legal services to low-income folks is what I want to do in my future legal career.

My summer working with PILP was made possible by Equal Justice America, an organization that raises money for law students and young lawyers to practice civil legal aid work across the country in order to help meet the massive need for legal assistance for low income Americans. After my first year at University of Michigan Law School, I was fortunate to be awarded an EJA Fellowship.