



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Joseph Kim

Law School: UCLA School of Law

Organization: Public Counsel, Community
Development Project

Update 1: My name is Joseph Kim (he/him) and I'm a rising 2L at the University of California, Los Angeles - School of Law. As I begin my third week at Public Counsel's Community Development Project, I am seeing concretely how the law is both a mechanism for disadvantaging marginalized people and a means to support sustainable local economies and communities.

These first two weeks have laid bare the inaccessibility of the law and legal remedies for low-income communities and communities of color, who face overlapping barriers to justice. In particular, I have seen how overpolicing and punitive enforcement mechanisms are disproportionately deployed against these communities under the guise of public safety or public health. I witness many landlords' discriminatory treatment of early childcare providers who play critical roles in community development, and I recognize the numerous hurdles people must jump through to establish small businesses and nonprofits to assist their local communities.

But in the face of such daunting realities, I repeatedly observe the resilience and adaptability of these communities and the power of organizing and community-led efforts to push policy change. For example, the LA Street Vendors Campaign was largely responsible for the 2018 passage of SB 946, which decriminalized street food vending across the state of California. I recently sat in on my first coalition meeting, listening as community organizers expressed their needs and goals and set the direction for the movement.

These past two weeks have thus far been a confirmation that my pursuit of public interest law has been the right decision; I am continually reminded of the lawyer I hope to be—community-focused and community-led. Throughout the rest of the summer and in my future career, I look forward to continuing to support community-led movements and being a tool in organizers' arsenal which they can use to advocate for their communities and increase access to justice.

Update 2: As I close out my fifth week at Public Counsel's Community Development Project (CDP), I'm grateful for the opportunities to work directly with individuals and community coalitions in the push to create a more inclusive Los Angeles.

I've learned quite a bit since my last update. I'm beginning to understand the breakdown of California state law,



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and I'm gaining exposure to how local legislation functions. I've continued to work on a wide array of issues, from writing letters asserting the rights of family childcare providers against landlords and Homeowner's Associations, to providing transactional support for local nonprofits and businesses, to supporting the LA Street Vendors Campaign and Keep LA Housed Coalition.

But more importantly, I've gained a greater understanding of the backdrop against which these issues have emerged. I am learning the myriad ways this "progressive stronghold" is, in fact, not progressive. For example, California's Costa-Hawkins Act prohibits local jurisdictions from imposing robust rent control measures to combat outrageous housing prices; the Ellis Act is often exploited by landlords to bypass remaining rent control measures and evict tenants in order to maximize profit at the expense of human life.

The current situation in California, exacerbated by COVID, highlights the importance and necessity of organizing efforts which inject community voices into local legislation. I've been thinking about the contours of community-led lawyering and what my role is in supporting community organizations.

In an ideal world, lawyers wouldn't exist. The law shouldn't be couched in inaccessible language or grounded in elitist, convoluted, culturally biased concepts. The current reality creates a massive power imbalance that encourages lawyers' self-glorification and the suppression of marginalized voices. In a profession where most have been shielded from such repressive policies, true understanding of the failures of the system lies with the individuals and communities we serve. Their daily lives navigating such policies have created lived expertise.

As a result, I've been reflecting on how I can listen more. How can I create space and ensure I am guided by the direction of local communities? I'm grateful to have supervisors who set examples of putting client and community needs first. I am reminded to consistently ask for community direction and solicit feedback.

There is power in community. In moments of doubt, I remember that hope is a discipline. Bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice means actively committing and recommitting to choosing community over self-gain. I'm grateful to be attending University of California, Los Angeles - School of Law, where I can remain local and continue supporting these coalitions in any capacity I am able. I look forward to what this second half of my clerkship has in store.

Update 3: As I write this, I realize my time at Public Counsel's Community Development Project (CDP) is quickly coming to an end. I'm feeling a sense of urgency to learn about the work I haven't yet been exposed to. This week, I wanted to highlight what I've learned regarding the treatment of family childcare providers.

California is facing a critical shortage of family childcare providers. Early childcare and education improves future outcomes for children in nearly every aspect of life, and it supports working families by providing safe care for their children while they're at work. Given this importance, California has codified protections for family childcare providers in the law.

However, childcare providers continue to be harassed in Los Angeles. For example, landlords and Homeowners' Associations will often impose rules infringing on providers' right to run child care facilities. Many will try and find ways to evict what they perceive to be disruptive and damaging tenants who have a codified right to remain in their unit and run their childcare facility.



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Such mistreatment is not surprising given the history of childcare in America. 1 in 5 childcare providers is a Black woman, and Black women have historically been relied on, undervalued by, and underpaid for their childcare by white families. The "mammy" stereotype was created in part to minimize the work involved in childcare and erase child care from labor and employment discussions. Childcare providers continue to be predominantly women of color. Here is an informative and important read: <https://thehill.com/changing-america/opinion/559457-the-roots-of-our-child-care-crisis-are-in-the-legacy-of-slavery>.

I am continuing to learn how pervasive racism and anti-Blackness are in our society. They underlie the distribution of stigma and the allotment of access in this country. I'm grateful to learn about manifestations of racism which I hadn't considered before, and I look forward to continuing to take a critical perspective in analyzing the legal issues present in community development work. Luckily, I will be at University of California, Los Angeles - School of Law, where I can continue to listen to and learn from those who have worked in the community development space for a long time. Here's to these last few weeks.

Entry 4: As I wrap up my last week at Public Counsel's Community Development Project (CDP), I feel incredibly grateful for the opportunities I've had to work directly with local community members, organizers, coalitions, and other staff attorneys on issues that directly impact marginalized communities.

Through direct intakes, I have been able to listen as people voice their concerns and struggles trying to live and work and build their lives in systems designed to benefit the wealthy white elite. Through meetings with organizers, policymakers, and attorneys, I have been able to understand the broader community development landscape and contribute to larger-scale policy development in the vending and housing spaces.

This summer has reinforced for me how American society, driven by capitalism and shaped by racism, is designed to create and maintain poverty. Why else would we make struggling people's situations exponentially worse? Why else would Los Angeles criminalize the very existence of unhoused people through LAMC 41.18? Why else would Los Angeles close their rental assistance applications, eliminating even a chance that renters might access relief in the midst of the fallout and current exacerbation of COVID-19? Apparently, second chances in America are only reserved for those who can afford them.

Time and time again, low-income communities and communities of color face the consequences of these and many other failures of the state. But this summer has given me renewed hope. Amidst all these failures lie glimmers of hope—pockets of advocacy and unexplored territory to push for broader change, led by local communities and coalitions dedicated to progressive action.

This fall, I will continue my legal education as part of the University of California, Los Angeles - School of Law's Critical Race Studies Specialization and its David J. Epstein Program in Public Interest Law & Policy. I'm grateful to be surrounded by like-minded individuals, each passionate about moving towards equity and increasing access to justice. These next two years, I look forward to experiencing the same support, challenge, and humility I've experienced this summer. I can't wait to continue my journey to becoming an effective public interest lawyer in the future.