

Nora Hendricks

This summer, I have had the opportunity to work at the Baton Rouge office of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services as an Equal Justice Works disaster resilience summer fellow. I am grateful to have received a partial grant from PILF to help fund my summer work. Being a disaster resilience fellow, I had expected a lot of my work to be related to working with individuals impacted by recent hurricanes in Louisiana, but most of my work has been focused around the Covid-19 pandemic being the disaster.

My supervising attorney is a recent law school graduate and an Equal Justice Works fellow. He works solely on eviction defense cases, so I have learned a lot about the eviction process in Louisiana. Because Louisiana is a civil code state, it has been really interesting to learn and talk with my supervising attorney about how Louisiana statutes differ from common law states. I have also learned a lot about housing assistance programs and about Covid-19 related rental assistance that tenants have received. Our unit often has to look at rental agreements from when tenants received pandemic rental assistance and determine whether landlords properly applied the assistance and abided by the terms of the agreement.

My supervising attorney often has me research and write e-memos summarizing my research related to different legal issues he is encountering. I have gained so much experience with legal research this summer, which I have really appreciated because I was a bit worried that my legal writing courses during my first year of law school did not focus too much on the research aspect of legal writing. It has been very helpful to get my supervisor's feedback on my legal writing and to have the opportunity to continue practicing analyzing legal issues, writing case descriptions, and formatting citations.

Prior to law school, I spent two years working at a nonprofit law firm in Tennessee, and I found myself really appreciating having had that experience this summer. I found it helpful to already have an idea of how legal aid organizations run and to have had the experience of working with summer interns prior to becoming a summer intern myself. I feel like my experiences of both working with and being a summer intern helped me navigate when to seek out additional work and ask my supervisor questions and when to step back a bit when my supervisor was working with pressing deadlines. I also appreciated having experience with calling clients, as it made calling clients to collect information for my supervisor this summer seem much less daunting.

I have been completing this internship virtually and have really appreciated getting to participate in this fellowship while being able to stay in Seattle and take a summer class at Seattle U. However, as I know is the case for many people who work remotely, I have found it a bit isolating at times to not be around others in an office setting. I am traveling to Louisiana the first week of August, and I am very excited to get to see and work in the office for a week and to be able to meet my supervisor and others in the office in person. I am also excited to attend eviction hearings with my supervisor, since they have all been taking place in person. My supervisor also has his first case in district court scheduled for that week in rural Louisiana, so I look forward to continue helping prepare for that case and to observe the trial.

I have learned so much this summer and I cannot believe how quickly the weeks have flown by. I am very grateful for the opportunity to step out of the classroom this summer and to observe and participate in eviction defense cases and to also learn about disaster resilience law more generally. My experiences this summer have affirmed my commitment to practice public interest law, and I am confident that the skills I have gained will make me a better lawyer.