



Maida Public Interest Fellowships Program
2018 Report

Maida Public Interest Fellowships Program 2018 Report

Dear James and Sharon,

We are honored and grateful to present this report on the 2018 program year of the Maida Public Interest Fellowships Program. Your family sent 37 Rutgers Law School students to 31 public interest and government organizations this year; these students, both 1L's and 2L's, provided over 13800 hours of legal work in a range of areas of need, including Criminal, Immigration, and Disability Law.

Your third post-graduate fellow, Deanna Christian, who was a part-time student on the Newark campus, spent the 2017-2018 year providing direct representation, impact advocacy, and community education to protect the rights of charter school children with disabilities. As the mother of a child with disabilities, Deanna is passionate about this work, and plans to devote her career to it. You may recall that one of her recommenders said:

Ms. Christian is both “book smart” and “street smart” and this enables her to see the people and situations behind the legal and social issues, giving her a greater and more holistic understanding of and insight into her clients and the communities in which they live. She is an excellent writer and a passionate oral advocate. Her commitment to social justice and creating positive change for underserved, at-risk communities is unwavering.

Deanna finished out her year of service by filing a complaint against North Star, one of the largest charter chains in Newark, alleging that North Star does not adequately modify its discipline policies to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities — particularly those with behavioral challenges, who find it hard to follow the schools' strict rules. As a result, those students are unfairly punished, causing them to miss class and be separated from their general-education peers in violation of federal disability law. “These discipline policies have a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on students with certain disabilities,” according to the filing.

Deanna has accepted a position at the Office of Administrative Law, which is a unique and novel special education clerkship created just for her. Both Josh Bauers, who is still at Fair Share, and Alexi Velez, who moved to Perkins Coie with a focus on economic justice, have remained closely involved with the Law School and eagerly serve as resources for our current students. Josh was a member of the selection committee that chose Deanna Christian. He also has interviewed law students on behalf of Fair Share and hired Ariella Levine as a Maida Summer Fellow for 2017. Alexi has addressed the Social Justice Scholars and has helped the Law School recruit newly admitted students as part of Dean's Law Day. Her project at ACLU employed two law students, both Social Justice Scholars (one from each campus), as pro bono interns.

The Maida Public Interest Fellowship Program has clearly enhanced our local, regional and national reputation, and our ability to communicate the value and excellence of a law school education at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. The Maida Program undoubtedly had a major role in our ability to attract strong classes; we hear over and over again that getting “a Maida” is one of the primary reasons students choose Rutgers. The breadth of our students’ placements is breathtaking. The “Maidas” have served in legal aid and public defender placements, law enforcement, environmental protection, LGBTQ advocacy, disability rights, civil liberties and many others.

The Program also has had a central role in our building the Social Justice Scholars Program (“SJS”) that began in 2016 with a promise that each SJS would presumptively qualify for a Maida Summer Public Interest Fellowship each summer. SJS are high-achieving students with a solid sense of purpose, and they are very clearly improving the public interest profile at Rutgers. You may wish to view their biographies here. In fall of 2018, Joanna Gardner, Ariella Levine, Ashley Maddison, and Amelia Vangellow all submitted applications for post-graduate fellowships from national funding organizations. Each had earned two consecutive summer “Maidas” After your investment in these remarkable young women, we are confident that all four — and many of the others you support — will pursue careers in the public interest. We deeply appreciate the Maida Program’s transformative impact on Rutgers Law School, our students, and the public interest legal landscape in New Jersey and wherever Rutgers students and alumni carry the Maida name. We are grateful that you have decided to maintain the Fellowship Program as one of your primary family philanthropies, and we look forward to continuing to steward your powerful and sweeping investment.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael Cahill
Co-Dean



Jill Friedman
Associate Dean for Pro Bono
and Public Interest

2018 Maida Summer Fellowships

2018 Maida Summer Fellowships

Maryanne	Abdelmesih	Newark	AFSC
Priscilla	Abraham	Newark	ACLU - NJ
Tamara	Anaie	Newark	UN, Office of Rule of Law and Security
Nakea	Barksdale	Camden	Defender Association of Philadelphia
Michael	Berryhill	Camden	Civil Practice Clinic
Erica	Briggs	Camden	PA Innocence Project
John	Burkey	Camden	New Jersey Office of the Attorney General
Fitzroy	Campbell	Camden	Immigrant Justice Clinic
Victoria	Carvajal	Newark	New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
Katelyn	Chrisman	Camden	HIAS
Kelley	Collins	Camden	Child and Family Advocacy Clinic
Abigail	Cook	Camden	Community Legal Services
Diego	Cordero Gonzalez	Newark	American Friends Service Committee
Jo-Anna	Daly	Camden	PA Innocence Project
Samantha	DiTroia	Camden	Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office
Erin	Dolan	Newark	Legal Aid Society, Juvenile
Ebony	Garcia	Camden	Immigrant Justice Clinic
Joanna	Gardner	Camden	Justice at Work (Formerly Friends of Farmworkers)
Mychal	Giansanti	Camden	Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
Jhonattan	Gonzalez	Newark	KIND
Sara	Gray	Camden	Camden County Prosecutor's Office
Noha	Haggag	Newark	Legal Aid Society
Bryce	Hurst	Camden	Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations
LaNee	Isom	Camden	NJ Attorney General's Office
Hannah	Lee	Camden	Philadelphia VIP
Jessy	Leifer	Newark	Open Society Foundations, Justice Initiative
Ariella	Levine	Camden	South Jersey Legal Services, Inc.
Ashley	Maddison	Camden	Legal Clinic for the Disabled
Ryan	Malo	Camden	NJ Attorneys General's Office
Shayan	Mirzahaidar	Newark	Legal Aid Society, Criminal
Jocelyn	Mosman	Camden	American Friends Service Committee
Olivia	Nardone	Camden	Defender Association of Philadelphia
Jake	Novelli	Camden	ACLU-PA
Emma	Pallarino	Newark	Georgia Capital Defender
Lauren	Puglisi	Camden	Volunteer Lawyers for Justice
Kathryn	Robinson	Newark	UNHCR
Ashley	Rojas	Newark	Federal Public Defender, District of NJ
Christina	Schnyer	Camden	Community Health Law Project
Colin	Sheehan	Camden	Mazzoni Center

Maryanne Abdelmesih
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Hoboken, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University

American Friends Service Committee

This year, I spent the summer working at American Friends Service Committee, a pro-bono organization that represents immigrants. As part of their services, they represent both detained and non-detained immigrants. I was assigned to the detained team. My experience working with detained immigrants was beyond what I could have imagined. It was inspiring, heartbreaking, motivational, enjoyable, and challenging. Going into the summer, I had an expectation that I was solely going to be conducting legal research, a behind-the-scenes type of work. Fortunately, I was mistaken. I had the opportunity to meet with detained immigrants every Friday, hearing their stories, what led them to the detention facility, and most importantly, listening to what they wanted. I was humbled by their stories, many of which involved the desire to just be with their families. Many of these men and women didn't want anything unreasonable—they only want to be with their loved ones. Astonishingly enough, an immigrant who is represented by an attorney is three times as likely to succeed on their claim. That being said, that goes to show how crucial an attorney can be in immigration court. In an area of law where the number of immigrants who need counsel far exceed the number of attorneys who are able to provide help, I'm thankful I was able to provide aid. I was fortunate enough to work closely with clients who were seeking different forms of relief, including but not limited to cancellation of removal, asylum, u-visa, and special immigrant juvenile status. My experience working with these immigrants reinvigorated my passion to help those similarly situated, ensuring that they are adequately represented.



Priscila D. Abraham

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: New York, NY

Undergraduate Institution: NYU College of Arts & Sciences

American Civil Liberties– New Jersey

As a legal intern at the American Civil Liberties of New Jersey, I learned the important role that public interest lawyers play in a time where the federal government is encroaching on its peoples' civil and human rights and American fundamental values of democracy, equality, and fairness are eroding. While I planned to have a summer of intense legal research and writing on a variety of civil rights issues within the criminal justice and immigration systems, my primarily intern responsibilities shifted once the Trump Administration began to separate parents and children at the U.S.-Mexico border. The ACLU-NJ was brought into the class action lawsuit because potential lead plaintiffs were detained in the Elizabeth Detention Center. As the only Spanish-speaking legal intern with a passion for immigrant rights, I conducted the intake of fathers recently separated from their children. These survivors of persecution in their home country described their re-traumatization upon arriving to the United States and having their children ripped away from them. It was my job to convert their stories into affidavits to demonstrate the human cost of unraveling decades of international human rights norms forbidding torturing asylum seekers by taking away their children. Although my legal research about the immigration system was limited by the greater emphasis on providing direct services, I did draft a brief on the legislative and constitutional limits of pretrial home detention and twenty-four/seven monitoring within the scope of New Jersey's bail reform. I also created the immigration section of the ACLU-NJ's forthcoming students' rights handbook and I assisted with legal research on state administrative law regulations and sex discrimination issues. My summer internship, funded by the Maida Public Interest Fellowship, helped me solidify my interest in providing immigrant clients direct legal services. While I had not planned on visiting potential clients in immigration detention or coordinating the reunification of children with their family members, working with immigrant clients was the best experience I had this summer.



Tamara Anaie

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Baghdad, Iraq

Undergraduate Institution: Montclair State University



UN, Office of Rule of Law and Security

This summer, I had the privilege of interning for the United Nations Headquarters, in the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions. This Office's function is to strengthen and coordinate activities in the areas of police, justice and corrections, mine action and weapons/ammunition management, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and security sector reform. Particularly, I worked in the context of security sector reform, a core element of multidimensional peacekeeping and peace-building that is essential for addressing the roots of conflict and building the legal foundations of long-term peace and development. Its specific purpose is to rehabilitate the judicial and legal frameworks in countries post-conflict, through enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of security institutions controlled by civilians, while also ensuring the applicability of international human rights law. The Office's work is critical to the consolidation of peace and stability, promoting poverty reduction, rule of law and good governance, extending legitimate state authority, and preventing countries from relapsing into conflict.

In this context, my obligations this summer included supporting the lawyers and experts who are tasked with ensuring security sector reform in Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, West Africa, and Yemen. I attend meetings that report on the status of those countries and their efforts towards implementing security sector reform, and then draft briefs that provide an analysis of the meetings and contribute a legal examination on how the Office of Rule of Law of the United Nations can further support the rule of law in these countries and ultimately bridge the legal and political gaps that will ensure long-term peace and stability. I also worked on various legal research projects that help provide an expertise for the Office of Rule of Law, regarding specific legal issues the Office needs to further dissect.

Working with the U.N. has further validated my desire to work with the Organization upon graduation and to continue to work in public interest.

Nakea Barksdale

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Willingboro, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University – Camden



Defender Association of Philadelphia

“There can be no equal justice where the kind of trial a man gets depends on the amount of money he has.” As my internship with the Defender Association of Philadelphia came to an end, these words, quoted from Justice Hugo L. Black, resonated with me. This summer, I had an unparalleled opportunity to hone in on skills I acquired throughout my first year of law school. As the internship program rotated throughout different practice units within the office, I was able to apply my knowledge and skills to real-life situations. I observed courtroom proceedings, shadowed trial attorneys, conducted research and drafted legal documents, assisted in trial preparation, and even advocated on behalf of clients during the preliminary arraignments process.

I remember the first day on my own in preliminary hearings. I sat at the counsel table and prepared for every argument the District Attorney’s representative could possibly make. Not only did this experience allow me to improve my oral advocacy skills, but it also challenged me to think on my feet. This rotation also shed light on the importance of representation at bail hearings. For most people, bail hearings determine whether you will sit in jail for months until your case is decided – not because you were denied bail, but rather because your bail is so unreasonable and/or excessive that it serves as punitive towards you. During the last week of my internship, I also had the opportunity to explore the Mental Health Division, where I observed psychiatric examinations, mental health courtroom proceedings, involuntary civil mental health commitment hearings, and Veterans Court. I even had the chance to visit Norristown State Hospital and observe client interviews. I would not have had this experience elsewhere, and am thankful to have had the opportunity to do so.

Michael A. Berryhill
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Houston, TX
Undergraduate Institution: Drexel University

Civil Practice Clinic



This summer, I accepted a part-time position with the Rutgers Law School Legal Clinic, where I worked with homeowners on their foreclosure actions. This part-time position later became part of an ongoing project keeping homeowners from foreclosure and giving legal aid to those that are. Thanks to the Maida Fellowship Program, we were able to be involved in a program that grew from a couple of part-time students to a clinic, a pro bono project with eight students, and partnerships with local non-profit agencies. Through our most important partner, Clarifi Credit Counseling Solutions, we were able to understand how foreclosure actions work, what a client may do about a foreclosure action, and how to prevent future foreclosure actions. We additionally completed case review, document drafting, and legal research pertaining to foreclosure and civil practice cases. We were able to interact directly with clients and learned about an area of law tied to the economic and social health of our community.

The Maida Fellowship program once again allowed me to do vital work for our community. Through this program, Maida funding is helping stabilize our neighborhoods, for which I must give thanks. The work that we do is pulling our friends and neighbors out of debt while safeguarding against predatory lending by mortgage companies. Our program helped match state approved funding for qualified homeowners, and for some defend against frivolous mortgage actions by the lender. Community members who did not have a resource let alone a voice are getting that much needed help through our program. Our partnership with non-profit agencies, the Law School, local legal resources, and the State of New Jersey has blossomed thanks to the support the Maida Fellowship has offered.

The clients we work with still believe in the American dream, and it is my pleasure to help them keep it that way. I am gracious yet again for the opportunity to give back to the South Jersey area that has given me so much. With the Maida Fellowship's funding, we are helping rebuild the greater Camden area. Thank you.

Erica Briggs

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Ocean View, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Stockton University

Pennsylvania Innocence Project

When I was fifteen years old, the film *Conviction* was released. The movie followed the life of Betty Ann Walters as she embarked on an 18-year journey to overturn her brother's wrongful conviction. From the first time I watched the trailer, I knew that this was an issue I was particularly passionate about. This summer I had the opportunity to intern for the same cause that sparked my interest in law school. Working as a legal intern for the Pennsylvania Innocence Project has fundamentally impacted my perspective on the world. Although the work was tactile and distressing at times, there are not enough words to describe just how meaningful my time there has been. Throughout this Summer I had the chance to observe experienced litigators navigate complex criminal issues. I also had the opportunity to witness firsthand the different ways that a nonprofit can achieve policy reform, whether it is through social media outlets or even working alongside the District Attorney. Most importantly, I was assigned an individual case file and asked to conduct an in-depth investigation into an individual's claim of innocence. Through this process I not only determined this individual was indeed innocent, but I also had the chance to develop a relationship with this person. Working as the primary liaison to this inmate, I was given a bird's eye view of what life is like as a prisoner serving time for a wrongful conviction. In spite of all the tragedy that this individual has endured and the odds that are still stacked against him, he was one of the kindest and most hopeful people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. Above all, coming to know this individual was the most significant part of my summer as a legal intern. I can't express how grateful I am to have started my legal career with an organization that is dedicated to uncovering the truth and improving social inequality. While my summer at the Pennsylvania Innocence Project has come to an end, I fully intend to work toward achieving social justice for the rest of my career.



John P. Burkey

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Marlton, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: McGill University

New Jersey Office of the Attorney General

In the summer of 2018, I worked at the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General in the Division of Law in the Torts Litigation and Judiciary section. I received invaluable experience of how a case moves through the New Jersey and Federal courts as well as how to defend one's clients in those cases. I performed time sensitive legal research and prepared concise legal memoranda detailing the controlling law specifically focusing on New Jersey Title 59. I wrote motions in limine and motions for summary judgment and prepared deposition summaries to later be used in various briefs and motions.



The Maida funding made it possible to work this unpaid internship 40 miles away while living on dialysis. My condition makes it impossible to compete for paid jobs and also requires funding for medicines and transportation. Working at the AGs office with Maida funding allows me to work around this catch-22.

I plan on working at the AG's office next summer as well and I hope that I can receive this funding again so I can continue gaining real work trial experience while contributing to the greater good of my home state.

Fitzroy Campbell Jr.

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Sicklerville, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University –
Camden



Immigrant Justice Clinic

The Maida funding helped me while I was working for the Rutgers Law School Camden Immigrant Justice clinic. My official title was “legal intern”. My work evolved throughout the summer. My first tasks were to research specific questions about immigration law that my supervisors were unfamiliar with. After only doing research for a while I was allowed to accompany my one supervisor, professor Gottesman, to Immigration Court in Newark, New Jersey. After seeing this proceeding my work started to change to more writing based tasks. I wrote a summary of what happened during the proceeding. It highlighted arguments of both parties, suspected future moves of the parties and who was there. I then got the opportunity to draft a letter to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services for my other supervisor, staff attorney Sondra Furcajg. It was very interesting to be thrown into important immigration law matters without even taking a single immigration law class. Despite my apparent lack of knowledge in that field of law, I just tried to research and ask questions on how to effectively accomplish my assignments. This led to me looking at the National Immigrant Justice Clinic for guidance and reading the immigration literature in the clinic’s library. It was a long process but I finished all my motions and applications by my last day of the clinic. Again my unfamiliarity with immigration law was daunting, but this is one just many trials that I have to push through in my legal career. Thanks to the Maida funding, I got to explore my now passionate interest in immigration law.

Victoria Carvajal

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Jersey City, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Fairleigh Dickinson University -
Madison

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice

This summer, I spent my Maida public interest fellowship at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. There, I performed research and drafted memos in the three areas of interest at NJISJ: economic mobility, criminal justice reform, and civic engagement. In particular, I worked on pushing for legislation regarding felony disenfranchisement, removing immigration status to the United States 2020 census, the Newark Police Department consent decree, and the status of bail reform in New Jersey. In addition, I sat in on several meetings with coalitions that the Institute collaborates with. In this way, I was able to witness community lawyering in action. Community lawyering is a practice of lawyers putting the community first and relying on them, rather than having clients be beholden to the choices of their attorneys. In this way, lawyers hope to create more sustainable change by giving the clients the reigns and trusting that they are the experts on their own experiences. Through the Institute, I did not just do research on the Newark consent decree, I got out into the community and witnessed and moderated community forums between Newark residents and the police department. It is my hope that these talks create an open forum and create a dialogue that will continue even when there are no lawyers present.

During my internship, I developed and refined my research and writing skills. Before my internship, I had never drafted a memo completely on my own. Now, I can create them quickly and with ease. I also learned essential legal office and email etiquette, which are small details but will likely spare me from rookie mistakes when I officially enter the legal field.

I appreciate that the Institute did not just place me in an office, but immersed me in the public interest sphere by introducing me to community leaders and attended large networking events, such as the NJISJ Gala and the 2018 Clement A. Price Lecture at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. They also encouraged the interns to go out into the community to experience Newark for ourselves. I am satisfied with my experience at NJISJ and feel that I will be a better lawyer for it.





Katelyn Chrisman
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Boise, ID
Undergraduate Institution: Pacific Lutheran University

HIAS Pennsylvania

I worked at HIAS Pennsylvania this summer, an immigration non-profit organization in Philadelphia. I was assigned to the youth team. There, I helped children complete applications for asylum and SIJS (special immigrant juvenile status). In addition, I performed general legal intake over the phone and prepared other immigration forms such as employment authorizations. Because I worked under a supervisor who primarily worked with detained children, I drove to the detention center “shelter” in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania each week to conduct legal screenings and determine which children we could represent. I then assisted with the process of completing immigration applications under the direction of my supervisor. I often returned to the shelter to work with clients on various materials for their applications. This could be difficult emotionally as the children ranged from 3 years old to 18, and many crossed the border alone for a better life. Some of the children were separated from their parents at the border. My time at the shelter was definitely the most impactful as I got to experience what happens to children who migrate to U.S. I also experienced the challenges and triumphs of assisting children through a complicated legal process in a foreign country.

The experience was definitely fast-paced. The office environment did not feel particularly stressful; however, the amount of work was intense. The moment the interns walked in the door, we had multiple assignments and clients that needed assistance. The work load was definitely a test of my ability to multi-task and employ effective time management skills. The interns were a team-oriented unit and we provided each other a lot of support both logistically and emotionally throughout the summer. Given our workloads were intense and the subject matter could be sad at times, it was very important to have a supportive group of colleagues nearby throughout each day to provide support.

Abigail Cook

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Dunbarton, NH

Undergraduate Institution: Quinnipiac University



Community Legal Services

This summer I had the pleasure of working at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia in the Public Benefits Unit. I had the opportunity to work under an entire unit of brilliant lawyers who have dedicated their lives to serving some of the most vulnerable communities in North Philadelphia.

The best way I can explain my summer is with the success of one case. A woman came in, having recently moved, and was struggling to get her benefits Pennsylvania because of a gap in the paper trail from her previous state's benefits. When she came to Community Legal Services her lack of benefits was impacting her ability to eat and pay for childcare which impacted her ability to go to work. She was forced to rely on family members who she was lucky enough to have in the surrounding area, but her family was struggling to provide the extra support. In short, this relatively simple paper fix was impacted four lives. In just a few days, I was able to advocate with the welfare offices of both states to work out the misunderstanding and ensure my client's welfare could be granted in Pennsylvania.

Every week I had cases like this. And every week, people's entire livelihoods were changed by the benefits they received. It was so incredibly rewarding to see the impact that I had on each and every individual who walked into my office. The food and healthcare that I helped them get was doing more than just keeping food on the table and giving them a doctor to visit, it was helping them stay in their housing and keep their lights on. Money they did not spend on food went to children's clothes and school supplies. Doctors visits for children relieved worried mothers who were not concerned at all with their own health, but only that they would be able to get the proper treatment for their children. It was a beautiful experience and I feel so honored to have been a part of it.

Diego Cordero Gonzalez

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Valencia, Venezuela

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University, School of Arts & Sciences

American Friends Service Committee



Thanks to being selected as Maida Public Interest Fellow and the stipend that came with that position, I had a very fulfilling Summer internship at American Friends Service Committee. Due to the outcome of immigration cases like the Matter of A-B and Pereira v. Sessions in conjunction with the current hostile climate of immigration law, I was able to work on many kinds of cases and legal problems in a very short amount of time. I was assigned legal research assignments like researching crimes of moral turpitude and which of those crimes may bar a foreign national from seeking relief from an order of deportation. I worked on two different stay of removals; one of which was for a foreign national that was attending an ICE check in that could have resulted in her detainment and a stay of deportation of a foreign national that was unexpectedly detained at an ICE check in. Additionally, I drafted motions to terminate deportation proceedings for detained and non-detained foreign nationals. I drafted motions to terminate for clients when they were granted asylum or visas. Moreover, I drafted motions to terminate deportation proceedings for detained clients while using a lack of jurisdiction argument due to a putative Notice to Appear, an interpretation of the holding of Pereira v. Sessions. Apart from legal advocacy, I participated in the political advocacy side of AFSC. I attended protests in front of the Elizabeth Detention Center, marches in front of the Newark's city hall and attended an all-day trip to Washington D.C. to advocate for a pathway to citizenship for TPS holders. Overall, the most rewarding and inspiring part of my legal internship was working with clients on their immigration matters and seeing the joy they got from someone simply trying to help them in a dire time. Direct legal services to vulnerable populations like undocumented immigrant people is invaluable and something that I could only be a part of due to the stipend I was given through the Maida Public Interest Fellows Program.

Thank you.

Jo-Anna Daly

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Northfield, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Saint Joseph's University



Pennsylvania Innocence Project

This past summer, I interned at the Pennsylvania Innocence Project as a Maida Public Interest Fellow. Working with the PA Innocence Project was an unforgettable experience for me as it introduced me to many inspiring clients and attorneys, taught me a lot about the criminal justice system, and encouraged me to pursue a career in criminal defense. The PA Innocence Project (PIP) is dedicated to helping those who have been wrongfully convicted. The Project constantly receives letters from those who are currently incarcerated and claim innocence. Much of PIP's work involves screening inmate requests and identifying cases with viable claims of innocence. As a law student intern, it was my job to review cases more in depth and create an investigative report that will eventually be presented to the Board of Directors for further approval. We were also able to visit current clients in prison to hear their stories in person.

I worked mainly on one client's case throughout the summer. The client had been incarcerated for nine years for an armed robbery before being released on parole. After reviewing trial transcripts, pleadings, and police documents, I presented the case to the Board as a potential case of eyewitness misidentification. The case was approved for further investigation and I am continuing to work on it during the school year. I am meeting the client in person this month and look forward to putting a face to the work I've been so invested in for the past couple months. I hope to present his case to the District Attorney's Office in the near future for further help solidifying his innocence claim.

I highly recommend this internship for anybody interested in criminal law, post-conviction work, and in helping those that have been victims of tragic circumstances.

Samantha DiTroia
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Marmora, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: Saint Joseph's University



Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office

Over the summer, I interned at the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office in Mays Landing, New Jersey. I was assigned to two trial teams and I was also later asked to help in the Major Crimes Unit. The trial teams handle a wide variety cases, from robbery cases to cases involving domestic violence. The Major Crimes Unit, on the other hand, handles mainly cases involving death.

With the trial units that I was assigned to, I conducted extensive research in order to write memoranda and briefs on a number of issues such as Sands/Brunson hearings and Miranda Rights. I was also able to go to court often to see trials, detention hearings, and other daily court matters for cases that I was assisting with. Further, I was able to help with the investigation process by reviewing evidence such as police body camera footage, prison phone calls, and 911 phone calls. I assisted with two trials involving domestic violence. Helping with these two trials was definitely the highlight of my summer because I was able to see what happens on the criminal side of domestic violencecases.

While in the Major Crimes Unit, I assisted with a homicide trial and a drug related death trial. In preparation for these trials, I helped pre-mark all of the state's evidence and put together PowerPoint presentations that the Assistant Prosecutor used during the trials.

Every week the intern director held a brown bag lunch where interns would get a chance to meet Chief Assistant Prosecutors, detectives, and other individuals in the office. One of my favorite experiences of this internship was observing Atlantic County's Recovery Court. Individuals who go through Atlantic County's Recovery Court have a staggeringly low recidivism rate. I have never seen a judge who cared so deeply about the individuals in his courtroom. He knew each individual by name, what was happening in each person's life, and truly wanted them to succeed. When an individual accomplished an important goal, or gave an excellent answer to the 'question of the week,' the judge handed out candy and prizes. It was a very uplifting experience to see the criminal justice system working in such a remarkable way in that court room.

Erin Dolan

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: New Brunswick, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University

Legal Aid Society, Juvenile

This summer I interned in the juvenile rights practice at the Legal Aid Society of New York City and gained very valuable experience. The juvenile rights practice acts as the law guardians for children in the child welfare system and as the defense counsel for juvenile delinquency cases for ninety percent of the children in NYC. I was able to get lots of hands on experience as I appeared on the record and in front of various judges in court proceedings involving abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and PINS. Aside from appearing on the record, I was able to spend a lot of time observing in court by attending hearings, conferences, and trials. Additionally, I feel that my internship greatly strengthened my ability to interview clients. I had a little bit of background with interviewing clients from working in the clinic at school, but this summer I had the opportunity to interview clients at least once a week. I now feel comfortable speaking with clients and learned various skills to conduct more effective interviews, such as building rapport at the beginning of the interview with your clients to make them feel comfortable, how to effectively explain your role as a lawyer to children, and asking open ended questions to get as much information as possible from your clients. Throughout my internship, I also conducted research and wrote memos and motions for the attorneys. I wrote a template motion for the office to use for various situations when the aid of the court is no longer needed. I also wrote memos to help attorneys prepare for evidence suppression hearings.



Joanna Gardner

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Haddon Heights, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: The Catholic University of America



Justice at Work (Formerly Friends of Farmworkers)

I was so grateful to be able to spend the summer at Justice at Work (formerly Friends of Farmworkers) through the Maida summer stipend program. Justice at Work's primary focus is assisting low-wage immigrant workers on a range of employment matters, such as wage theft, labor trafficking, and discrimination. One major issue that may impede clients' willingness or ability to fully pursue their employment law cases is often immigration status, and so, in addition to its employment legal services, Justice at Work also provides immigration legal representation to its clients.

Certain immigration legal remedies are especially applicable to Justice at Work's clients, such as the T-visa, which is available to survivors of human trafficking, and the U-visa, which is available to survivors of certain kinds of crimes, such as sexual harassment in the workplace. Given my background and interest in immigration law, my internship at Justice at Work this summer mostly involved assisting on T and U visa applications. I helped with interviewing clients to draft declarations, compiling evidence for visa applications, filling out complex immigration forms, and writing cover letter briefs that lay out the legal arguments for why the client qualifies for this form of immigration relief. I also was able to draft motions for immigration courts for some clients who were already in removal proceedings, and worked on lawyer correspondence through Justice at Work's Immigration Services Fraud project.

Because I am interested in pursuing a career in humanitarian immigration law, this summer internship aligned perfectly with my career goals. I had the opportunity this summer to learn a lot about the intersection of employment issues and immigration law, which was new for me. Last summer I interned with an immigration and domestic violence project, and so we approached T and U visas specifically for victims of these kinds of crimes. Approaching these same visas from the angle of immigrants who have survived certain kinds of crimes in the workplace was immensely helpful in broadening my perspective and helping me become familiar with different ways to advocate for immigrant clients.

Mychal A. Giansanti
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Lumberton, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: The College of New Jersey

Philadelphia District Attorney's Office



This summer I was fortunate to learn much and have a positive experience as a 1L intern in the Juvenile Division of the District Attorney's Office. This opportunity enabled me to gain valuable skills and information that I will continue to use in my commitment to public service.

Early this summer I shadowed Assistant District Attorney Catherine Smith. My first full week was enlightening, as ADA Smith certified a juvenile as an adult and tried the case in criminal court. Watching a jury trial from its inception was fascinating and educational, particularly as the Honorable Roxanne Covington sustained the Public Defender's Batson challenge. Seeing such legal concepts in action solidified their significance and real world implications. I would feel more confident speaking before the court as a 2L intern after viewing these proceedings.

During my time at the DA's office, I supported Assistant District Attorneys in preparing for trials and hearings, and accompany them to court and to interviews with victims and/or witnesses. I also drafted and prepared memoranda and briefs, transcribed organized and analyzed various documents and discovery, and observed the various aspects of juvenile and criminal case prosecution, including preliminary hearings, jury trials, dispositional reviews, and certifications to criminal court. Additionally, during this time I Shepardized the 86-page Legal Digest for the Prosecution of Juveniles. This project gave me a deeper understanding of the Juvenile system than I could have imagine. I feel as though I took a crash course deep in the latest case law. This research experience and information would definitely be valuable as a 2L intern.

I enjoyed the training and educational opportunities on the Juvenile Unit. Specifically, a clinical psychologist spoke on the unit about the latest research and best practices related to individuals who commit sexual offenses. Clearly, those on the unit seek to implement best practices into their work and strive to make a meaningful difference in the lives of victims and offenders, if possible. The speaker made valuable points, for example, about using person-centered language to describe offenders.

Overall, my summer experience was exciting, educational, and positive. I am grateful that Maida funding helped me meet my financial responsibilities throughout this internship.

Jhonattan Gonzalez

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: New Brunswick, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Fairleigh Dickinson University - Madison



Kids in Need of Defense

For my funded 2018 summer experience I interned with Kids in Need of Defense (K.I.N.D.) in Roseland, NJ. KIND is a non-profit that provides legal representation to unaccompanied minor children. The internship started on May 29th and ended on August 6th. I worked Monday through Thursday at the office and worked from home on Fridays. Throughout my internship, I worked on administrative and legal tasks, which I will detail below. I was paired with a mentoring attorney, who I primarily worked with. I also assisted other attorneys on other assignments.

I assisted my mentoring attorney with his caseload. This included calling clients to update their information, calling the EOIR hotline every week to confirm each client's case information, and photocopying documents pertinent clients' cases. I also worked on an asylum brief with my mentoring attorney. My primary task for the asylum brief was to analyze the Matter of A-B, which was recently issued by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and find ways to point out its weaknesses and distinguish it from our case. Some of the recommendations I made were implemented into the brief. I also helped prepare a brief for a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) case in which the basis for the application was that the applicant's father abused her and her mother. During my internship, I also took the lead in preparing a cover letter for a U-Visa application. This required me to gather necessary documentation that would benefit the client's application, interview the client and the client's mother, and write the basis for the client's application.

Throughout my internship, I also conducted multiple intakes where me and another intern would interview potential clients and their sponsors to assist the managing attorney decide as to whether the potential client would qualify for KIND's services. These intakes required me to translate in Spanish. Furthermore, I was tasked by the pro bono coordinating attorney with cataloging SIJS cases in NJ Family Courts with a focus on viability of reunification. Moreover, I also cataloged key NJ precedential decisions that interpreted key elements relevant to findings of no viable reunification with one or both parents. The two key elements that I was tasked with analyzing were abandonment and neglect. The purpose behind both projects was to provide pro bono attorneys with an outline of relevant case law. In addition, I attended monthly staff meetings, a family court hearing, and a master calendar hearing. Lastly, I assisted another attorney by writing a report on the family court filing procedures for Mercer and Middlesex county.

Noha Haggag

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Rutherford, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University – Camden



Legal Aid Society – New York City

This summer, I interned at New York City’s Legal Aid Society, specifically within their Juvenile Rights Division. I was involved in litigating cases concerning child welfare and juvenile delinquency. As someone interested in serving low income communities, working at the Legal Aid Society provided an in depth learning experience on the difficulties low-income communities face.

For child welfare proceedings, a minimum of three attorneys were involved, including the parents’ attorneys, the attorney for the Administration of Child Services (“ACS”), and the Attorney for the Child. Serving as the Attorney for the Child meant that the child was our sole client and our job was to represent their interests. In some cases, we sided with ACS, but for the most part, we found that the child’s interests meant staying with their parents. This was an eye opening experience as to how often ACS took children away wrongfully from their parents and primarily only targeted people of color. I researched and wrote several memoranda concerning childrens’ best interest in this regard.

Further, I was made aware of the injustices many children face when they are abruptly put in foster care against their own wishes to stay with their parents. I was responsible for researching and writing briefs concerning children who ran away from foster care. When this occurs, ACS gets a court ordered warrant for the arrest of the child, rather than using less aggressive alternatives, ultimately treating them as criminals and landing them in handcuffs. I was responsible for researching and writing a brief vacating these warrants. Our legal team ended up staying several of these warrants at the appellate level.

Overall, I had an incredible and eye-opening experience at the Legal Aid Society and am honored to have been a part of serving justice to low-income communities.

Bryce K. Hurst

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Ewing, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Brigham Young University



Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations

I spent this summer working with the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations, which is the agency that investigates claims of discrimination and enforces the city’s nondiscrimination laws. Over the course of the summer, I worked on issues that have received national attention, drafted sample legislative language to update city ordinances, conducted community outreach and education, and provided analysis disputing various motions to dismiss. Throughout the course of the internship, I received incredible support from the supervising attorneys which helped in furthering the development of my research and writing skills.

Within days of starting my internship, PCHR received nearly 2000 pages of documents from Starbucks detailing incident reports, employee handbooks, and general policies and practices. Working with my co-intern, we assembled a report detailing incidents where the police were called to a Starbucks in Rittenhouse Park and drafted recommendations for addressing a pattern of discrimination by certain employees. This report was then presented to the adjudicatory board of commissioners for consideration. Additional documents were requested via subpoena as a result of our analysis.

My largest project involved drafting a response to an employer’s answer in a religious discrimination claim. The employee had requested a religious accommodation to wear her hijab while at work; the employer, citing precedent, denied her request. I was asked to analyze the case law cited in the answer and respond in the event that the employer filed a motion to dismiss. Parsing the specific language of the circuit court’s opinions allowed me to develop several counter arguments that would distinguish the current claim from those already decided by the court.

Working with PCHR was extremely valuable and helped inform the direction in which I want to take my career. The supervision, feedback, and collaboration were incredibly beneficial to my growth and success in the internship. I am especially grateful to the Maida Public Interest Fund for the funding that allowed me to work with the Commission on Human Relations.

Hannah Lee

J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Mountain Top, PA
Undergraduate Institution: Temple University



Philadelphia VIP

This past summer, I worked as a summer legal intern at Philadelphia VIP. I received this internship through the Maida Partners Program, and I am so grateful that my first summer internship at law school with a public internship organization was able to be funded.

Philadelphia VIP helps low-income clients in civil matters where clients are at a severe disadvantage without an attorney. I managed a caseload and the goal was to have these cases placed with volunteer attorneys that worked outside of VIP to take on the case pro bono. The types of cases I worked on included custody, probate, torts, collections, wills and estates, and guardianship. I was able to receive a vast amount of client interaction, which will be useful for current pro bono projects that I am involved in, such as mediation and the domestic violence project, and it will be beneficial for my future as a family law attorney. During my client interactions, I would conduct informational interviews as well as explain expectations and certain legal processes to the client. Depending on the type of case, I worked with the clients to gather the necessary legal documents and prepared the case file for a volunteer attorney to take on with ease. I found the work extremely rewarding, especially the interaction with clients.

Philadelphia VIP trained me heavily the first week, so I felt very prepared for my first call with a client. The staff overall were so helpful and approachable. I believe that those that work in public interest truly love what they do and helping others, and this explains the welcoming atmosphere at VIP.

I am extremely grateful that I received my first internship through the Maida Partners Program. I highly recommend Maida to those with an interest in helping their surrounding communities through the law.

Ariella V. Levine
J.D. Candidate, 2019
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Haddonfield, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: Siena College

South Jersey Legal Services

During my summer at South Jersey Legal Services (SJLS) I was able to realize my passion for direct service legal work. I was able to learn and work closely with the attorneys at SJLS to serve the vulnerable Camden community.



At SJLS I worked closely with Abigail Sullivan on her Domestic Violence final restraining order cases (FRO) and her collections cases. Abby allowed me to interview the domestic violence clients on my own. Based on the interview I would assess what the next steps should be for us and for the client. I helped multiple clients to amend their restraining orders at the Hall of Justice. Before I would go to the courthouse I would explain to the client the necessity to amend. I explained that all the Judge will see is this restraining order, and due process requires that the Defendant have a chance to know what the Plaintiff is going to testify to before trial. Another reason to amend is because if it is not listed on the TRO the judge has the discretion to not allow the testimony. After this explanation and making sure the client was okay with amending I would work with the client and type up the things we wanted to add. After this was done I would go with the client to the courthouse and help her with the court process of amending. I also conducted witness interviews and gave Abby my opinion on whether we should use the witness or not. I also prepared subpoenas for officers for trial. After all of the interviews I helped Abby prepare for trial. I made sure she had all of the case law, statutes and facts that were applicable in an organized chart. We also prepared the client for court. Although I did not ultimately try a domestic violence case I did prepare to try one. I did not end up trying the case because there was no service. I argued that the mother was served, but the court held it was not proper service. Because this was the second time our client appeared the Judge issued an indefinite restraining order.

I also assisted Abby with her collections cases. I did research for Abby with the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act, to see if there were any claims for the client. I also helped clients file pro se answers.

I assisted Michael Perez and Sandra Passaro with their Landlord Tenant cases. I conducted client interviews with them, and also did research on LT law and options for victims of Domestic Violence. I worked with Michael Perez on two non-payment cases, he allowed me to meet with opposing counsel. For both of those cases I was able to negotiate settlement. I assisted Sandra Passaro with an eviction based on issues with a dog, and I was able to negotiate a settlement with opposing counsel in that case as well.

Ryan Malo

J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Georgetown, MA
Undergraduate Institution: B.A., Williams College; M.Ed.,
University of Virginia



United States Attorney’s Office – District of New Jersey

Thanks to Maida funding, I was able to work this past summer without sacrificing my personal interests in improving the criminal justice system. As a summer intern with the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of New Jersey in the Camden vicinage, I had the great fortune of working on both criminal and civil projects. Additionally, a large part of my time was spent observing different hearings in federal court and discussing the intricacies of these hearings with my supervising attorneys. My time in the office allowed for both substantive experiences writing and conducting legal research as well as exposure to the multi-faceted goals and mission of the attorneys representing the United States.

The work of the office was especially interesting for two reasons: Firstly, the scope of representation that the office provides the government is incredibly broad and requires attorneys skilled in far more areas than just criminal law. Secondly, the attorneys within the office worked closely with federal agencies and had the discretion to prosecute cases that they felt best represented the interests of justice. The role of a federal prosecutor involves much more than just criminal prosecution, and my experience this summer allowed me to work alongside attorneys committed to improving the public good.

A substantial portion of my summer was spent researching issues related to Veterans Administration hospitals, and the liability associated with doctors that practice and perform surgeries at these facilities. The US Attorney’s Office represents doctors and litigates issues that arise from accusations of malpractice. From a defense perspective the attorneys in the office zealously represented the interests of the government, but also worked to negotiate fair settlements that accurately addressed instances of accidents and malpractice.

Regarding criminal issues, I found that the direct cooperation between the office and the FBI allowed for especially thorough and well-investigated cases, something I had not necessarily always witnessed at the state and local level. Many of these cases arose out of community concerns regarding misuse of force by police officers, and the US Attorney’s Office took great pride in pursuing justice on behalf of the citizens of southern New Jersey.

It was an honor to work and learn alongside such fantastic attorneys this past summer, and it would not have been possible without funding from the Maida program and Rutgers University Law School. I’m incredibly appreciative of the opportunity and look forward to more students embracing public interest opportunities through the good works of this program.

Jocelyn Mosman

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Gardendale, TX

Undergraduate Institution: Mount Holyoke College



American Friends Service Committee

Through the Maida Public Interest Fellowship, I was able to work at American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) this summer in Newark, New Jersey. As someone who has been interested in pursuing a career in immigration law, this experience allowed me hands-on interaction with clients and gave me a real taste of what it means to enter this profession.

At AFSC, I worked as part of the detained team, which meant that all of my clients are currently detained at the Elizabeth Detention Center. I personally worked on six different cases and assisted with several others. I filed an asylum application for a client seeking political refuge from his home country, a VAWA application for a young woman who had been abused by her step-father, and a DACA application for a young man. I also appeared for three clients at their master calendar hearings and at one client's bond hearing. I was also able to work on a client's appellate brief for the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA). Additionally, every Friday, our entire detention team went to the Elizabeth Detention Center and conducted intakes for all new arrivals to provide them with representation.

Throughout my time at AFSC, immigration law has undergone several changes. To name a few, the U.S. Supreme Court case *Pereira v. Sessions* fundamentally changed the way the Department of Homeland Security was notifying immigrants that they were about to be in removal proceedings. Additionally, Jeff Sessions wrote an opinion, *Matter of A-B-*, that drastically limits asylum claims based on domestic violence by private actors, and in dicta, claims involving gang violence. Both of these new cases impacted our clients and how we represented them in immigration proceedings.

I have very much enjoyed my experience working at American Friends Service Committee this summer and I am so grateful for the opportunity that was provided to me through the Maida Public Interest Fellowship.

Olivia Nardone

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Lincoln Park, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Widener University



Defender Association of Philadelphia

I began this internship with an interest in public defense. I left this internship with a passion for public defense. My summer experience at the Defender Association of Philadelphia was nothing short of amazing, eye-opening, thrilling, and challenging. The twelve weeks I spent at the Defenders, helping attorneys protect and advocate for the indigent clients of Philadelphia, was my most fulfilling career experience yet.

My internship at the Defenders consisted of an intensive twelve-week program where law students rotated through several departments. Before rotations began, we sat through a week-long training session where staff attorneys lectured us about their specific areas of expertise. We were taught how to conduct a client interview, basic search and seizure laws, common defenses, pre-trial procedure, the social services that are available to clients, and much more.

The departments I rotated through included: office interviewing, prison interviewing, mental health unit, juvenile unit, motions court, problem-solving/ “AMP” (accelerated misdemeanor program) court and detainer (violation of probation) hearings.

I made my first official appearance in court during early bail review hearings. There, I successfully argued to remove monetary bail for three clients so that they could get out of jail while they awaited trial. I was also able to negotiate, out of court, with an assistant district attorney to expunge a client’s past criminal record.

By the end of the summer I conducted over 60 client interviews. These interviews were conducted at the office and at prisons located on State Road in Philadelphia. I also visited Norristown State Hospital to meet clients who are in the mental health unit and attended civil commitment hearings at Girard Medical Center in Philadelphia.

Through this internship, career doors have been opened and the possibility of becoming a public defender after graduation has become more achievable. I have decided to dedicate my career to becoming a successful public defender. I have seen the impact and necessity of public defenders in the criminal justice system and I want to continue to be a positive force for indigent communities.

Jake Novelli

J.D. Candidate, 2020

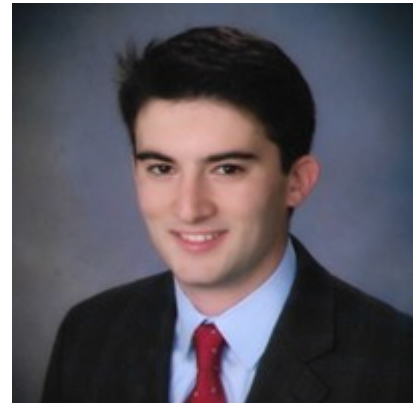
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Haddonfield, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: University of Maryland

American Civil Liberties Union–Pennsylvania

Via the Maida Public Interest Summer Fellowship program, I enjoyed an internship at the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania (ACLU-PA) this past summer. From May 21st to August 2nd, I spent Monday through Friday at the ACLU-PA's Philadelphia office usually from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. At the office, my primary duty was providing assistance to the ACLU-PA's attorneys by conducting legal research and writing memoranda based on this research. The largest research project I worked on related to the ACLU-PA's case *Center of Investigative Reporting v. SEPTA*. The ACLU-PA is suing SEPTA, a state-owned entity, for violating the First Amendment by allowing some advertisers to post messages inside transit vehicles but denying other similar advertisers the same right to speak. The memo I prepared for this case looked specifically at how the federal circuit courts (except the Third) handle transit ad cases of this sort. My research and memo revealed that there were serious inconsistencies across the circuits and inadequate guidance from the Supreme Court over how to conduct transit ad forum analysis and the other tests relevant to this area of law. Most importantly, based on a dissenting opinion by Justice Thomas in a SCOTUS denial of cert, I concluded that our now more conservative Supreme Court might be willing to clarify and expand First Amendment protections of speech in transit vehicles, if a case like *CIR v. SEPTA* reached the Supreme Court. In addition to conducting legal research, the other interns and I also observed arraignment court proceedings at the Criminal Justice Center in Philadelphia. As the older interns in the office, we were tasked with observing the midnight and 4:00 A.M. arraignments. The arraignments were disheartening. The magistrates arraigning the defendants cruised through the hearings at a high speed while the defendants struggled to hear what the magistrate was saying over the video screens from the various jails they were being held in. Defendants are supposed to get individualized hearings and assigned bail according to their specific economic circumstances, but in practice, the hearings are generalized and bail is often assigned based on the severity of the crime rather than defendants' ability to pay. Overall, I had great experience at the ACLU-PA. I made friends with the other legal interns and still talk regularly with them. The staff informed me that they were pleased with my work and that I should use them for references when applying for other jobs. Through interning, I was also able to observe arguments in front of the Third Circuit and attend various law-related events around the city. The ACLU-PA's attorneys even held brown-bag lunches for the law interns to give us advice in pursuing legal careers. I am extremely grateful for the internship and for the Maida funding that accompanied it.



Lauren M. Puglisi
J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden



Hometown: Toms River, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: Pace University

Volunteer Lawyers for Justice

Through the Maida program, I spent the summer of 2018 at Volunteer Lawyers for Justice in Newark, NJ. This was an enormously valuable experience in the following ways.

Writing

I specifically requested of my supervisors to be given writing assignments so that I could hone my skills as a writer. I wrote two or three lengthy, formal memos and a number of smaller, less formal research and writing assignments. Interestingly, I was also given writing assignments that required formats I was unaccustomed to. This allowed me to learn how to customize my skills for the particular supervisor or area of law, as required. For example, one staff attorney needed a 50-state survey of how the states handle child support payments during incarceration. She needed to be able to find this information at a glance, but also needed quite a bit of deeper information in case she should need it. My finished product wound up being an excel spreadsheet, as well as a folder for each of the 50 states on VLJ's server, each containing a 3-4 page memo on the topic for that state and PDFs of the supporting authority. This was a very tedious project, but it also helped me to learn how to research faster and more efficiently.

Fun

The staff at VLJ went out of their way to make my experience fun and enjoyable. Everyone took an interest in me, they invited me to their meetings, baby showers, a walking tour of Newark, social and networking events after hours, even to their book club! They also set up a series of "lunch and learn" events during which outside attorneys came to speak with the interns about the practice of law.

Variety

I completed work in many different areas of the law (divorce, veterans issues, tenancy, education, human trafficking, etc.) and that work was performed in a variety of different settings. For example, while I spent most of my time completing writing assignments, I had the opportunity to attend tenancy court, the opportunity to learn how to track down court documents from different cities and decades and to spend time actively helping real clients in the clinic setting.

Thank you so much for this opportunity. Again, it was enormously valuable.

Emma W. Pallarino

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Morristown, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers University, School of Arts & Sciences

Georgia Capital Defender

This summer, I worked in Atlanta, Georgia at the Georgia Capital Defender, a state office that provides defense to all indigent defendants facing the death penalty. I worked for three clients this summer: one in the pre-trial phase, another post-sentencing seeking parole, and another in a retrial. I met my first client in jail. I truly believe I will remember it for the rest of my life. My supervising attorney and I went through a metal detector, multiple locked doors, and past numerous guards into a small concrete room with metal chairs and a table. We heard our client's chains clink down the hall as an officer escorted him into our room. I shook his hand and looked into his eyes and the overwhelming feeling I had was gratitude. He did not choose us as representation, but he entrusted us with his life. I felt an immense sense of responsibility. We talked for hours about what I was doing on his case, his love for his children, and how he tries to draw and meditate to survive 23 hours per day in solitary. It was powerfully human in a very inhuman environment. I am very fortunate that my supervising attorney, Lisa, spent significant time working with me on my personal and professional growth. We talked extensively about our race, gender, and socioeconomic status and their impact on the power dynamics between us and our clients. One thing Lisa said that I have imprinted in my brain is, "we are here to serve, not save." I want to use my privilege to guide less versed people through a complex, oppressive system that is rigged against them. I will take everything I have learned at this internship, both law and service centered, to my role as a Kinoy-Stavis Fellow and student in the Constitutional Rights Clinic at Rutgers and a public defender in my future career.



Kathryn Robinson

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Tacoma, WA

Undergraduate Institution: State University of New York at Purchase College



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

This summer, I had the opportunity to work as a legal intern with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its U.S. Protection and Solutions Unit based in Washington D.C. The U.S. Protection Unit addresses issues affecting refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless individuals in the United States, at the border, and at ports of entry. Part of its work includes monitoring and reporting on changes in U.S. immigration law or policy; issuing official UNHCR public statements regarding those changes; providing information, training, and financial support to advocacy organizations; and providing information directly to detainees on the asylum process. UNHCR's reputation as the leading moral voice in refugee and asylee protection allows the organization to often work in partnership with the U.S. government to advocate for enhanced protections.

As a legal intern, I provided information on the U.S. asylum process and UNHCR's role to asylum-seekers in detention who called on the UNHCR hotline; monitored and analyzed proposed legislation and regulations affecting refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless individuals; drafted internal memoranda on U.S. policy and practice and compliance with international refugee and human rights law; attended and reported on conferences and Congressional hearings addressing emergency policy changes in the wake of the family separation policy at the border; assisted in the preparation of an amicus brief for submission in federal court.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience working at such a highly respected international organization and to witness its internal operations. It was a very different perspective for me, coming from a direct services background, and was an invaluable experience to learn how a large institution like UNHCR has an impact on its stakeholders both directly and indirectly. Additionally, I was able to improve my policy analysis skills, research and writing skills, and to observe some of the internal operations of Washington D.C. politics.

Ashley Rojas

J.D. Candidate, 2020

Rutgers School of Law | Newark

Hometown: Queens, NY

Undergraduate Institution: Stockton University



Federal Public Defenders Office

My internship at the Federal Public Defenders Office was excellent.

Coming straight from my 1L year, I did not know much about any federal criminal procedures. I learned so much extremely fast and it was thanks to the constant feedback and assistance that I got from all the attorneys in the office. Every time I was given an assignment, any question that I had was answered to its fullest extent. Also, since the office is located so close to District Court in Trenton, I was able to observe all of the court proceedings that the attorneys in the office were involved in and sit in on client conferences.

Substantively, I believe that my legal research and writing skills improved. I wrote memos, different motions, and informal summaries of smaller research assignments. Part of my summer also included going to observe magistrate court at Fort Dix. This was interesting because as a misdemeanor court on a military base, proceedings were handled quite differently than District Court. One of the motions I wrote over the summer was a motion to dismiss for a case being handled at Fort Dix. I had the motion prepared earlier than its due date which allowed me to become very familiar with the case. The attorney on the case told me since I did the work that I can handle the conference with the judge and prosecutor in chambers. During the conference I was able to highlight the legal problems with the case and my arguments that I made in the motion to dismiss, which prompted the judge and the prosecutor to agree to dismiss the case in its entirety. Being able to assist in the dismissal of a case was the highlight of my summer, along with developing great professional relationships with everyone in the office.

Christy Schnyer

J.D. Candidate, 2019

Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Collingswood, NJ

Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers-Camden



Community Health Law Project–Collingswood Office

For my summer 2018 internship, through the Maida Partners Program, I was matched with Community Health Law Project in their Collingswood Office. While there, I was able to help by researching case law on Special Education matters, Substance Use Disorder and discrimination in Oxford Houses, and Medicaid rules on dentures. I was exposed to a wide variety of areas of law that I have not yet focused on in the context of individuals with disabilities, allowing me to expand my concept of how those individuals may really need and want to be helped. This experience also allowed me to consider the long list of ways the system pulls those individuals with disabilities in many directions at once, easily overwhelming them in their fight to seek support where they need it. Clients may be dealing with mental or physical health issues all while trying to expunge their record, find affordable housing (and not be discriminated against in the process), apply for SSA benefits, and facing homeless and hunger. Sometimes, it might have appeared as if what we were doing was just one small problem on their list. However, if there was any way we could help make the list shorter and more manageable, I can only imagine how helpful that must have been.

This summer was also different in that I learned to appreciate this sense the clients have of being overwhelmed even more than I did last summer. Last summer, I worked with parents of individuals with disabilities – they were very responsive to phone calls, meetings, and requests for paperwork, making this summer seem wildly different. When you are dealing directly with the population of individuals with disabilities, you have to approach them with much more empathy and patient persistence in addressing their problem. “Rome wasn’t built in a day” and these problems will not be solved overnight. Keeping a positive, clear-headed attitude is important to effectively communicate with clients who have potentially three or more important tasks on their lists ahead of your legal matter.

Colin Sheehan

J.D. Candidate, 2020
Rutgers School of Law | Camden

Hometown: Gibbsboro, NJ
Undergraduate Institution: Rutgers-Camden



Mazzoni Center

My summer internship at Mazzoni Center Legal Services both sharpened the skills that I will need as a law student and public interest lawyer and provided me with a better sense of my future as a public interest lawyer.

At Mazzoni Center, I managed anywhere from twenty to thirty clients at any given time, with cases closing and new cases opening every few days. I worked directly with clients on a daily basis and developed my ability to sensitively discuss details of clients' cases and lives, obtain important facts from clients, and explain how clients' situations fit into often-complicated legal frameworks. From working with these clients and listening to their experiences I've come to better understand the overarching issues affecting their communities. I also learned to work with clients often facing many challenges both related and unrelated to their cases.

My primary focus at Mazzoni was assisting in discrimination cases in employment, public accommodations, and housing on the basis of gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation. For most cases, I performed intake and interviews to learn about a client's circumstances and research if their claim was viable. If viable, I was able to strategize with my supervisor on potential venues for the complaint and other solutions beyond filing a complaint. I sharpened my legal writing skills drafting complaints and rebuttals to file with agencies and advocacy letters asking the discriminating party to cease their behavior. I worked closely with clients in preparing all documents to ensure that the information was accurate and sensitive to client's gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

While mainly involved with discrimination cases, I was given the most responsibility over gender-affirming name change cases. For these cases I performed intake, collected documents, drafted representation agreements and petitions, led client meetings, filed said petitions in court, and conducted judgement searches. I also walked clients through all of this to clients. It was incredibly fulfilling to have ownership of these cases and work with clients on every step of this process. Client's excitement over their name changes was a huge motivator every step of the way.

I'm very thankful for the experiences and skills I gained interning at Mazzoni. I not only gained practical lawyering skills, but a greater appreciating for the challenges and satisfaction of working closely with clients. I hope to continue to advocate for members of the LGBT community and other marginalized groups moving forward in my career in public interest.

2018 Maida Post- Graduate Public Interest Fellowship

Dear James and Sharon Maida,

Thank you for sponsoring this wonderful opportunity to serve as the 2017-18 Maida Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellow. As a result of the funding I received through your foundation, I was able to directly and positively impact the lives of my clients through legal representation, to spread awareness within the community regarding the rights and obligations of charter schools to children with disabilities and to highlight the inappropriate and discriminatory discipline policies and practices of a major charter network in Newark. Through my work as a Maida Fellow, I have also made long lasting connections to the community in which I served. I have built strong ties with colleagues at Education Law Center, Advocates for Children of New Jersey, Partnership for Children, She Wins (a group that promotes women’s empowerment to girls who have experienced trauma in Newark), and of course Rutgers Education & Health Law Clinic. This fellowship has strengthened my resolve to address disparities in education and renewed my passion and commitment to the families and children of Newark.



At the conclusion of my fellowship year, I made a difficult personal decision to temporarily remove myself from legal advocacy to pursue the experience and increased opportunities of a legal clerkship. I am pleased to announce that I have accepted a position at the Office of Administrative Law, which is a unique and novel special education clerkship created just for me. Next year, I intend to clerk for a U.S. District Court. I will use these opportunities to strengthen my knowledge of special education law, sharpen my legal research and writing skills and position myself in a place to affect the most change in the public interest field. I am looking forward to bringing my expertise back to Newark and casting a wider net in community which I have grown to love.

It has been a great pleasure to serve as a Maida Fellow. Without your generosity, none of this could have been possible. Please accept my sincere gratitude for your commitment to my project and to public interest work.

Sincerely,

Deanna Christian, Esq.

Below I have listed my project goals and accomplishments during my fellowship year. I have also attached various documents as review of my yearlong work.

MAIDA POST GRADUATE PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWSHIP

My project for the 2017-18 Maida Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellowship examined the intersection between charter schools and special education. With the expansion of charter schools in New Jersey and throughout the nation, significant concerns have arisen regarding their compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and many parents are unaware of their rights. My project goals during the fellowship year were three-fold: representation of parents of children with disabilities who attend charter schools in the Newark area, community education and engagement, and policy advocacy regarding charter reform.

Representation: *Provide direct legal representation to at least twenty low-income families of children with disabilities attending charter schools.*

Based on need, I have provided full and limited representation for approximately twenty parents of children with disabilities who attend charter schools in the Newark area. As part of my direct legal representation, I have advocated, both orally and in writing, to have children evaluated for special education and related services and to increase supports and services to children who are already classified. I have represented clients in IEP meetings, mediation and settlement conferences. I have also assisted clients to secure compensatory education packages and independent evaluations and have successfully worked with school districts to provide children with modifications to discipline codes to account for their disability. For many more families, I was able to provide consultative advice and referrals.

Education: *(1.) Create and distribute an IDEA-Charter School Informational Pamphlet (2.) Offer at least three education and self-advocacy workshops to parents and community groups about parental rights and charter school obligations to children with special needs. (3.) Train health care professionals on the front lines on how to screen for these issues and address them without resort to legal involvement.*

I created and distributed an informational pamphlet about charter schools to health care professionals at Rutgers Medical School. I conducted an informational session about the obligations of charter schools for children with disabilities for all the pediatric medical residents at the medical school, and provided advocacy advice to assist with their patients.

During my fellowship, I conducted various workshops and trainings for parents, health care providers, county and community organizations and other legal advocates. I led information sessions about the role of charter schools in the educational landscape for parents and administrators at Ironbound Community Corporation, in Newark. I organized a panel of professionals in the education field and presented a symposium to local charter school parents regarding discipline in public charter schools. I presented for the care management organization (CMO) for Essex county, Partnership for Children of Essex, to inform care managers about

charter schools and their obligations to children with disabilities. I presented at a continuing legal education (CLE) for attorneys in the education field regarding disparities in school resources and discipline, in which I discussed problems unique to charter schools, particularly for inner city poor children. I provided a phone presentation to members of the public policy committee for CHADD, the leading national organization for ADHD education and advocacy, on the disproportionate impact of charter school suspension policies on children with ADHD. Finally, I presented at a conference hosted by Rutgers School of Public Policy and Planning regarding the intersection of educational reform, communities and social justice, in which I presented state data on the disproportionate rate children with disabilities are suspended at charterschools.

Policy: *(1.) Collect and analyze data from my cases and from those of local area organizations to examine trends in charter school's treatment of students with disabilities. (2.) Report this data to local and state government representatives to advocate for policy changes and charter school reform.*

During my fellowship, I contacted various community and advocacy groups, local organizations, charter proponents and parents to establish a comprehensive perspective of key issues and challenges involving special education students who attend charter schools. I requested and acquired special education suspension data for charter and traditional schools across the state from the department of education. I amassed a collection of parent/student handbooks from both charter and traditional schools in New Jersey and compared disciplinary policies. As a result of the data collected and based on an increase in disciplinary referrals from one of the leading charter school networks in New Jersey, I filed a complaint investigation (endorsed by the Education Law Center) with the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education Policy and Procedure, encouraging the state to investigate inappropriate suspensions and exclusions of special needs students attending North Star Academy Charter School. The department of education has opened the complaint for an investigation.

I formed an informal collaboration with the Los Angeles teacher's union and education researchers at the University of Indiana to discuss and share data regarding special education suspensions rates in charter schools nationally. I joined the public policy committee for CHADD, the leading national organization for ADHD education and advocacy, to address the disproportionate impact that charter school suspension policies have on children with ADHD. I am currently working on a blog for the CHADD policy group, which will highlight national issues regarding charter schools to parent with children with ADHD.

I have also reached out to various local and state legislators to provide them information about my research and raise concerns regarding whether charter schools are appropriately serving children with disabilities. I intend to write an article about disciplinary policies at charter schools and the impact on children with disabilities based on state and national data and anecdotal experiences.

Maida Fellow to Advocate for Disabled

Children Attending Charter Schools

May 15, 2017



Deanna Christian '17 has just been named a Maida Public Interest Fellow.

For Deanna Christian, earning a Maida Post-Graduate Public Interest Fellowship that will allow her to advocate for children with disabilities, is a deeply personal accomplishment.

Christian said she was inspired to go to law school after learning to advocate for her son, who was diagnosed with a disability at the age of 5. She said she shared her knowledge about navigating the school system with low-income families in her community who also needed advocacy for their children.

“I did not grow up wanting to be an attorney,” she wrote in her fellowship application essay. “It was the road of adversity that led me to this calling and my choice to pursue a career in public interest law.”

Thanks to the generosity of James and Dr. Sharon Maida, Christian will provide direct representation, impact advocacy and community education around the rights of children with disabilities in charter schools during her year-long fellowship. She was chosen by a committee of professors, alumni and former Maida fellows.

According to Jill Friedman, associate dean for pro bono and public interest, the Maida Public Interest Fellowships Program was established to acknowledge, support and sustain public interest legal work by students and graduates of Rutgers Law School. “Our fellowship students help the most vulnerable people in our society, while the Maidas have advanced an already outstanding program into the very top echelon of public law schools for support of public interest lawyering.”

With the expansion of charter schools throughout the state, significant concerns have arisen regarding their compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),” Christian said. “There is a critical shortage of free legal representation for low-income parents in New Jersey special education matters overall. During my fellowship year, I will provide free legal representation, community education and policy advocacy for low-income families of children with disabilities who attend charter schools in Newark and the surrounding areas. And, in fact, we are exploring ways to expand some of the work throughout the state.”

For the past 1 ½ years, she worked with the H.E.A.L. Collaborative, a medical-legal-social work partnership with Rutgers Biomedical and Health Sciences Outpatient Pediatrics Department and Rutgers Law School's Education and Health Law Clinic. HEAL brings together the disciplines of law, medicine and social work and aims to reduce poverty's adverse impacts on the health and wellbeing of Newark's children and their families. Professor Jennifer Rosen Valverde is the legal director of HEAL and will continue to supervise Christian during her fellowship.

"Ms. Christian is both 'book smart' and 'street smart' and this enables her to see the people and situations behind the legal and social issues, giving her a greater and more holistic understanding of and insight into her clients and the communities in which they live," said Rosen Valverde. "She is an excellent writer and a passionate oral advocate. Her commitment to social justice and creating positive change for underserved, at-risk communities is unwavering."

Christian, a top academic performer, served as a summer intern in the chambers of New Jersey Chief Justice Stuart Rabner, while attending law school part-time. She also was a teaching assistant for Professor Steve Gold's Administrative Law Class.

Christian grew up in Monmouth County and graduated from Rutgers University in New Brunswick. She is a wife and mother of two boys, and during her first year of law school belonged to the Christian Legal Society. "I believe that all children should be given the resources that they need to be successful and reach their potential. When we invest in the life of a child, we make a lasting impact on society as a whole."

Students with disabilities improperly suspended at Newark's largest charter school network, complaint says

BY PATRICK WALL - AUGUST 30, 2018



Newark's largest charter-school network suspends students with disabilities at a disproportionately high rate, violating their rights, according to a new complaint filed with the state.

The complaint alleges that North Star Academy gave suspensions to 29 percent of students with disabilities during the 2016-17 school year. The network disputes the complaint's allegations and says the actual figure was 22 percent.

North Star removed students with disabilities from their classrooms for disciplinary reasons, including suspensions and expulsions, 269 times that school year, according to the complaint filed by an attorney at the Education & Health Law Clinic at Rutgers Law School in Newark. The complaint is based on state data and reports by parents who contacted the clinic.

Those numbers stand in sharp contrast to ones at Newark Public Schools, where students with disabilities were sent out for disciplinary reasons just 87 times that school year, according to state data. Overall, just 1.3 percent of special-education students and 1.1 percent of all students were suspended in 2016-17, according to the attorney's analysis of state data. Excluding North Star, the city's charter schools together suspended about 9 percent of students with disabilities, the analysis found.

North Star serves roughly 5,000 students in 13 schools across Newark. Founded in 1997, it is New Jersey's largest charter-school network and one of its highest performing, with its predominantly low-income students routinely outscoring their peers in the state's wealthiest districts.

Its students are also suspended more often than their peers at many schools. At North Star, 23 percent of students received suspensions in 2016-17, compared to 6 percent of students statewide, according to publicly available state data.

The complaint, filed on Aug. 17, alleges that North Star does not adequately modify its discipline policies to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities — particularly those with behavioral challenges, who find it hard to follow the schools' strict rules. As a result, those

students are unfairly punished, causing them to miss class and be separated from their general-education peers in violation of federal disability law, the complaint alleges.

“These discipline policies have a disproportionate and discriminatory impact on students with certain disabilities,” according to the filing, which was addressed to the state education department’s Office of Special Education Policy and Procedure.

A state education department spokesman confirmed that the complaint is being investigated.

North Star denies the allegations, saying it properly adjusts its discipline policies based on the needs of students with disabilities.

The allegations add to an ongoing nationwide debate over school discipline and the harmful impact that punitive policies can have on black and Hispanic students and those with disabilities, who tend to be suspended at higher rates. Across the country, many district and charter schools alike have tried to move away from suspensions and toward an approach known as “restorative justice,” which pushes students to try to repair any harm their behavior has caused.

Nationally, students with disabilities are suspended at about twice the rate of their non-disabled peers — a disparity that is slightly higher at charter schools, according to a recent analysis of 2013-14 data. Meanwhile, new research suggests that students do worse academically after being suspended, adding to prior research showing that students who have been suspended are more likely to get caught up in the criminal justice system and drop out of school.

North Star is part of the Uncommon Schools network — one of several large charter-school organizations whose reliance on strict discipline and demanding academics is sometimes called “no excuses.” Some of the schools have softened their discipline policies in recent years, but others have held firm, insisting that their no-nonsense approach to misbehavior creates a safe, orderly environment where students can focus on academics.

According to the complaint, North Star continues to take an exacting approach to managing behavior. Each week, students receive behavior points in the form of “paychecks.” They can lose points for even minor infractions, such as not paying attention in class or violating the school-uniform code. If their points dip below a certain level, they can be sent to detention or suspended, the complaint says.

The complaint alleges that some students with disabilities struggle to follow the rules, and wind up being punished at a higher rate than non-disabled students. Federal data from the 2014-15 school year appear to support that claim. In that year, students with disabilities made up 7.2 percent of North Star’s enrollment, yet they received 16.5 percent of in-school suspensions and 12.9 percent of out-of-school suspensions, according to data compiled by the U.S. Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights.

Barbara Martinez, a North Star spokeswoman, said the network’s suspension rates have declined since 2015. She added that network officials “would be surprised to see a meaningful discrepancy” in suspension rates today between students with and without disabilities.

She also said the network believes the suspension rate for North Star students with disabilities cited in the complaint is incorrect. The network has asked the state education department to

provide “the underlying data source so that we can understand where any confusion may have arisen,” she added.

She also noted that the department has repeatedly renewed the network’s charter, a process that involves on-site inspections and a review of school data — including data related to special education. She added that North Star students with disabilities perform in the 75th percentile on the state PARCC exams among all New Jersey special-education students.

“We take great pride in the high-quality instruction and support that we provide to all our special education students to meet their individualized learning and behavioral needs,” she said in a statement. “North Star has a 20-year record of success in delivering on its mission of preparing all students to get to and through college — including our special education students.”

The complaint was filed by Deanna Christian, an Education & Health Law Clinic attorney who has represented parents in arbitration cases against North Star. She said she filed the complaint after several parents raised concerns about the network’s discipline policies. (The Education Law Center, a Newark-based advocacy group that has represented parents in lawsuits against North Star, endorsed the complaint, saying that it has received complaints from North Star parents about students with disabilities being “inappropriately” suspended.)

Christian, who is doing a yearlong fellowship focused on the rights of students with disabilities who attend charter schools, requested suspension data from the state for general- and special-education students in district and charter schools. She found that North Star had one of the highest suspension rates in the state for students with disabilities, even though the network’s share of special-education students was far below the state average, according to the complaint.

Federal law requires that students with disabilities be taught alongside non-disabled peers whenever possible. The complaint alleges that North Star violated disabled students’ rights by improperly suspending them, which reduced their learning time and separated them from their peers. It relies on parent reports and North Star’s written policies, saying it is the clinic’s “understanding” that the discipline code is applied “without regard to a student’s disability status” and that the code is rarely modified for students with disabilities.

The complaint calls on the state to investigate North Star’s discipline policies and their effect on students with disabilities, including whether those students are held back more often than non-disabled students. It suggests several remedies, including additional training for teachers and administrators in “positive interventions” to manage the behavior of students with disabilities.

“These exclusionary disciplinary policies are keeping kids out of class,” Christian said in an interview. “And when kids are not in class, they’re not learning.”

North Star made a parent available to interview for this story. The parent, Crystal Williams, has four students at North Star, including Jayson, an eighth-grader at the network’s Valisburg Middle School.

Williams disputed the complaint’s claim that North Star does not modify its discipline code for special-education students. She said school staffers have gone out of their way to accommodate

Jayson, who has been diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.

For instance, the school allots Jayson extra behavior points at the start of each week and teachers give him three warnings before deducting points, Williams said. A dean has even allowed Jayson to run laps in the school hallway and do pushups in the gym when he is having trouble focusing, she added.

Still, Williams said that Jayson was suspended about 10 times last school year for infractions that included throwing a book and giving the middle finger to a teacher. She also picked him up from school several times after he misbehaved but before he was suspended, she said.

However, Williams defended Jayson's multiple suspensions, saying they were only for "egregious" violations and that the policy keeps all students safe. She added that he was given work to do whenever he was suspended, and that he was always given a "fresh start" when he returned to school.

"It is a little inconvenient not to have your child in school," she said. "But the greater lesson is that for us to be a community, your child has to behave correctly."

By Patrick Wall

“Deanna's charter school work, thanks to generous funding from the Maida family, had a significant impact not only on the individual children with disabilities and families she represented directly, but also on the larger charter school community. Her research and subsequent class complaint regarding one particular charter school's inappropriate discipline of and discrimination against students with emotional and behavioral disabilities has shed light on a major systemic issue, and some higher-ups in the charter school movement have taken notice. The Education and Health Law Clinic will continue to push the issue to the forefront, and is grateful that the Maida family invested in this worthwhile project to get it off the ground.”

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