

Hello everyone. I am humbled and really excited to be among so many of my heroes, mentors, friends and family. I am here because you all have allowed me to learn from and lean on you over the years.

I'd like to thank the Sax family and the Prize committee for supporting the Berkeley Law clinical programs that both empower clients to advocate for themselves and enables students to engage in meaningful community work. I'd also like to congratulate Hannah Flannery for her exceptional housing advocacy work - it was privilege to work alongside you and it is an honor to share this award with you.

My interest in social justice started at home with my parents, who are here today and are immigrants from India. Witnessing their struggle to make the US home in the face of cultural barriers and discrimination pushed me to learn more about systems of inequality. Their perseverance inspires me and their support is really the only reason why I am able to do work that I care about. But it was only after years of public interest work, especially through the clinical programs, that my understanding of my family's relative privilege to other communities of color was deepened. My parents were able to achieve stability and so much more not only because of their hard work but also because the institutions they sought to be a part of were not built explicitly to exclude us.

During my time in the clinical programs I have had the opportunity to support the incredible advocates fighting for justice for *all* marginalized communities, and I have learned so much along the way.

### **East Bay Community Law Center**

As a 1L I started out volunteering at East Bay Community Law Center's Tenants' Rights Workshop, an after-work hours clinic for low-income tenants facing situations like landlord harassment, illegal rent increases and inhabitable living conditions. While I often felt lost and sometimes uncomfortable in theoretical discussions in Berkeley Law's classrooms, I instantly felt at home at EBCLC. There I was surrounded by a community of compassionate problem solvers who taught me tangible ways to use our legal knowledge to keep people in their homes. More than anything, I enjoyed listening clients, who were often facing so much more than their housing challenges, and exhibited more courage and resilience than they should have to.

Working directly with people in our community energized me and reminded me why I came to law school. So, during my 2L year I helped direct the Tenants' Rights Workshop with my fierce co-leaders Ary Smith and Jono Rosenthal, and I spent both semesters in the EBCLC housing clinic helping defend tenants facing evictions lawsuits. At EBCLC I learned how to use the law to negotiate settlements that kept evictions off our clients' records, and allowed our clients to remain in rent-controlled units and subsidized housing programs. But I also learned the limitations of the law and was pushed to find ways to support our clients in achieving health and stability even after their eviction cases ended. Through this work I learned just how intentionally unnavigable our systems have been made to be for low income communities and people of color. But seeing how the EBCLC housing team continuously showed up every day to

fight like hell for our clients made me hopeful. Progress is slow, but I saw that these daily efforts were bringing us closer to changing these systems and keeping our communities intact.

I'd like to specifically thank my housing clinic supervisors. Meghan Gordon has the most energy of anyone I know and goes above and beyond to make sure her students are prepared to support our clients and Marc Janowitz is a housing legend who has the California Civil Code memorized by heart. The EBCLC housing team models what thoughtful direct service lawyering looks like, and are the reason why I will be continuing to do tenants' rights work just a few miles away after graduation.

### **Death Penalty Clinic**

While I found my passion and future profession at EBCLC, in the Death Penalty Clinic I learned, grew and found community in ways I could not have imagined.

This year my wonderful clinic partner Sydney Royer and I were tasked with writing the social history for our client's state habeas petition. We had the opportunity to visit our client on Texas' death row three times and each time I was consistently struck by the ways the system intentionally seeks to break our client's spirit and discount his humanity. Outside of the prison, guards ride horses and lead packs of hunting dogs around the buildings to intimidate the people incarcerated inside. Within the prison our client lives in solitary confinement 23 hours a day. We were not allowed meaningful contact with him, but instead were required to speak with him through a glass partition using phones that we could barely hear him on. During our visits we were prohibited from using the bathroom. Our client would fast starting the day before, just so he would not have to cut the five hour long visit short to use the facilities.

In spite of these obstacles, our client's humanity and complexity shone through in every visit. We learned that he's a proud dad who's excited for his son to start college. That he loves bacon and egg breakfast tacos. That he's an avid NPR listener who is rooting for Bernie Sanders for president. That he remembers my name "Nirali" by thinking of "Muhammad Ali." And each time we'd leave he'd press his hand up against the glass window to say goodbye, the closest he's allowed to get to anyone outside of the prison.

As we learned about the generations of trauma that plagued our client's family, it became clear that his circumstances, and those of really everyone on death row, are the culmination of institutions targeting and failing our communities. Our clinical work solidified my understanding that a true commitment to social justice requires us to go beyond responding to the most obvious instances of injustice, and taking collective responsibility for the harm that our actions, or inaction, inflicts on others.

I'd like to thank the DPC supervisors Lis Semel Ty Alper, and Katy Miller for both zealously fighting against the most punitive and cruel aspect of our criminal justice system, and also putting that same zeal toward building and nurturing a community of thoughtful public interest lawyers. Katy, my direct supervisor, singlehandedly transformed my law school experience. She taught me everything I know about our case and capital defense work, but was also my most

important source of career support, and created only of the only law school spaces where I always felt accepted, and capable. Because of Katy and the DPC team I feel excited and ready to be a public interest lawyer.

Lastly, I'd like to thank all of my friends in the EBCLC and Death Penalty Clinics, in the law school and beyond. All of you could have and should have received this award. Your energy and passion make me feel optimistic about the future, and your friendship nourishes me. I am so grateful that will have each other to lean on as we continue questioning our relationship to systems of power and fighting against oppression far into the future.

Thank you!