

Su Ly – Marutani Fellowship Reflection

This summer I served as a law-student intern with Fair Shake Environmental Legal Services (“Fair Shake ELS”), a nonprofit 501(c)(3) environmental law-firm headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, whose mission is to advance environmental justice efforts. Although I interned remotely, I supported the legal team by conducting legal research, assisting with client intake calls, and contributing to pending litigation matters for clients in and around the Appalachia area.

Specifically, I researched issues related to state and federal environmental statutes, for example, permit-review requirements, zoning and ordinances, making environmental complaints under the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. During intake sessions, I helped prospective clients address their environmental concerns by assisting with options packages for various issues (for example exposures to pollutants, air pollution reduction, waterway & game land access). Every week, I attended team meetings and strategy sessions where Fair Shake ELS attorneys and staff discussed community feedback, legal outreach strategies in the Appalachian Basin region, and explored novel legal approaches to environmental problems. This summer experience enriched my background in environmental law with the opportunity to work on so many diverse issues such as stormwater runoff issues, eminent domain, oil & gas contracting, non-profit organization and governance, property issues like trespass and right of way, and plaintiff-side environmental litigation. I got to work firsthand on natural resources law, touching upon Pennsylvania’s Donated & Dedicated Property Act and the Pennsylvania Environmental Rights Amendment. My work on the Donated & Dedicated Property Act helped me hone my legal research and writing on pending litigation matters, and helped me develop a better understanding of natural resources and land use law.

Working at Fair Shake reinforced my commitment to environmental law; I saw firsthand how the law can be a tool for community empowerment and for leveling the playing field in environmental decision-making. The experience confirmed my interest in pursuing a career where I can combine legal analysis with community outreach, regulatory advocacy, and education. Over the summer I also realized how important it is to translate complex legal concepts (permitting, environmental complaints, zoning) into clear guidance for the typical lay person. In the future I hope to work in an organization or role where I can continue blending legal research with community engagement, focusing on underserved regions. My summer with Fair Shake ELS was a formative and enriching experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to their mission of fostering equal access to environmental justice. A very warm thank you to APABA-PA, the Philadelphia Bar Association, and my APABA mentor, Suzanne Young, for their unwavering support in my journey to becoming an environmental lawyer.