



"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

*Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963*

Martin Luther King, Jr.  
Summer Internship and Fellowship Program

Pennsylvania  
**Legal Aid** Network, Inc.

Summer 2020 Newsletter

## Martin Luther King, Jr. Internship Program Update

This year marks the 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our successful summer internship program. The program, which is designed to promote and support minority attorneys' work in the Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) programs across the Commonwealth, has hosted a total of 382 law students to date. The goal of the program is to initiate future attorneys to the lifelong commitment of providing access to justice for all individuals regardless of their ability to pay and to promote diversity in PLAN programs. Ten paid internships are awarded each summer to law students, who participate in legal services work over a 10 week period. This year, PLAN remotely hosted 10 interns. A one and a half day poverty law training is provided at the beginning of the internship. At the end of the program, interns are also asked to complete an essay sharing their summer experiences, which are compiled into a booklet called the MLK Intern Drum Major Essay Collection. Booklets are distributed at our annual recognition reception and shared on our website. To read this year's essays, click here: <https://bit.ly/2020-MLK-Drum-Major>.

## Class of 2020 Martin Luther King, Jr. Summer Interns



Top Row Left to Right: Zane Gates, Widener Commonwealth Law School; Jason Sullivan-Halpern, Penn State Law; Jessica Maharaj, University of Iowa Law School; Kendra Barr, Wake Forest University Law School; and Bingran Li, Penn State Dickinson Law. Bottom Row Left to Right: Juliana Muhaj, Drexel Law; Gabrielle Tock, Penn State Law; Ashley G. Reyes, Widener University Delaware Law School; Sharai V. Bryan, Penn State Law; and Iman Woodyard, Penn State Dickinson Law.

## Meet Our Newest Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellow

Congratulations to our 2020 Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Fellowship Recipient Shalisa J. Brunson. In August, Shalisa will join the staff of Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA).



### About Shalisa

**Shalisa**, a former MLK Intern Class of 2019, received her JD in May 2020 from Texas Southern University, Thurgood Marshall School of Law, earned her Masters at Strayer University and graduated with a B.A. in Business Administration in International Business and Legal Studies in Business from Temple University, Fox School of Business. Shalisa's upbringing and life experiences solidified her commitment to public interest law. Her work at PLA will involve helping low-income individuals throughout Philadelphia preserve their homes while stabilizing families and neighborhoods in the process. She will also represent clients facing a variety of tangled title legal issues arising out of probate, adverse possession, and fraudulent deeds.

## Current Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellows Continue to Shine

In our previous newsletter, we introduced you to **Kyle Watson**. Kyle began his fellowship at Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Services (SPLS) in August 2019. Kyle provides representation in a number of different areas including public benefits, unemployment compensation, Social Security, bankruptcy, custody, and protection from abuse matters. One of Kyle's most memorable cases to date involved securing Social Security Disability benefits for a formerly incarcerated client who was transitioning back into the community. The client, who spent over a decade in federal and state prison, suffered from several mental health-related issues. He was overwhelmed by both the administrative process and prospect of facing a hearing alone. With very few resources or other income to survive, the client was also concerned about sustaining himself financially as he transitioned back to life in the community. After appealing his denial notice, the client came to SPLS for help. Kyle worked with the client to obtain his medical records and provided representation at his appeal hearing. The hearing was a success. Not only was the client awarded on-going benefits, but he also received retroactive benefits. The client's relief was palpable and his outlook on returning to community life improved. Kyle was pleased with the results and looks forward to working towards other victories, big and small, on the behalf of PLAN clients.



**Queenette Echefu**, a former MLK Intern Class of 2018, began his fellowship at North Penn Legal Services (NPLS) in August 2019. Her casework at NPLS involves housing and public benefits-related matters. One of Queenette's most memorable cases to date involved the reestablishment of Social Security benefits for a client. The client received Social Security benefits as a child. However, once he became an adult, his benefits ceased. After



reapplying for benefits, the client contacted NPLS for assistance. Being that this was her first Social Security case, Queenette was nervous. However, with help from seasoned NPLS Social Security advocates, she learned the process of how to prepare for and present arguments for her case. The judge granted the client’s benefits based on the brief she submitted to the court. When asked how she felt about this case result, Queenette said, “It was exhilarating to receive a favorable response especially when this was a new type of case for me. To some, it may seem like a small gesture but, to me, it was an opportunity to change someone’s life and to develop myself as an advocate. As I continue my

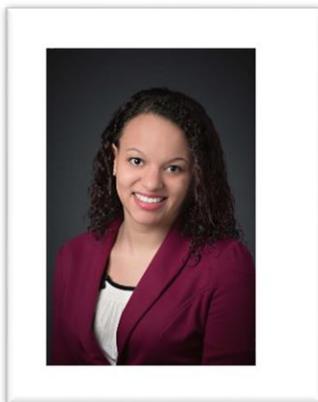
journey, I am eager to grow, learn, and sharpen my skills as a well-rounded professional. This fellowship program focuses on engaging in poverty law work, diversifying the profession, and encouraging the need for individual and community growth. I am truly grateful to be a part of this program and community.”

**DeJonna Bates**, began her fellowship at Community Justice Project (CJP) in August 2019. Her casework involves immigrant rights and systemic advocacy work impacting rural populations in northeastern Pennsylvania. DeJonna represented a Limited English Proficient (LEP) client against a counseling center where the client received treatment. The client was unable to call the counseling center for assistance because the center’s phone tree system was only available in English. DeJonna sent a demand letter to the counseling center and worked with the center’s vice president to update their phone tree system.

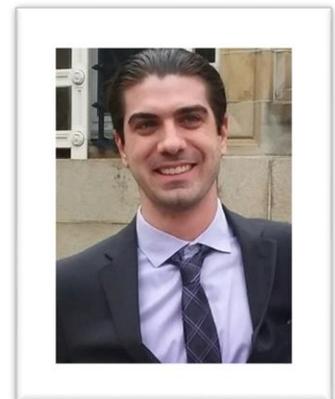


The current system now provides LEP individuals with the option to hear messages in Spanish. They also have the option to leave a voicemail in their native language and receive a return call from an interpreter. Finally, in the event of a crisis, LEP individuals can now reach an interpreter immediately.

### **Martin Luther King, Jr. Fellowship Graduates**



In 2018, we introduced you to **Marissa Lawall** and **Joel DeMary**. Both Fellows will complete their respective fellowships in August 2020. We are happy to share that both will continue their employment as permanent staff attorneys at Pennsylvania Health Law Project and Northwestern Legal Services, respectively.



We thank them for their continued commitment to legal services.

## Fellowship Program Success

We are extremely pleased with the success of the MLK Fellowship Program. Since its inception in 2004, 26 lawyers have been placed as fellows with PLAN legal aid programs and scores of other former interns have entered other public interest careers. The Fellowship Program is an integral part of PLAN, Inc.'s goal to initiate new lawyers into public interest law careers. PLAN, Inc. partners with a sponsoring regional or specialty legal services program and pays 50% of the Fellow's salary, benefits, and student loan assistance up to \$5500 each per year of the two-year fellowship. Salary is commensurate with that of the sponsoring program.

In the past fiscal year, PLAN programs handled over 73,000 client cases, saving their homes from foreclosure, protecting them from domestic violence, securing health insurance, establishing custody stability for children, and helping clients in many other ways.

The Fellowship Program has a proven track record of launching minority law students into careers as public interest lawyers and legal aid attorneys and has generated a reliable recruitment pool for legal aid organizations. PLAN, Inc. appreciates the financial support and sponsorships it receives from Pennsylvania law firms, businesses, and individuals to help support this program. PLAN, Inc. does not realize any of these sponsorship funds, but funnels them directly to the salary and benefits of our fellows. PLAN, Inc. also appreciates the financial support of this program from the Department of Human Services and the Pa. IOLTA Board. Our goal is to place at least two fellows per fiscal year. You can help by donating to our Fellowship Program. Contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by the law. On the behalf of PLAN, Inc., we thank you for your support.

## Thank You

PLAN, Inc. wishes to thank and acknowledge the following for their generous support of the MLK Fellowship Program since its inception.

Allentown Branch of the NAACP  
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To learn more about PLAN, Inc.'s MLK Summer Internship and Fellowship Programs or to donate, please visit the PLAN, Inc. website at <https://palegalaid.net/internships-fellowships> or contact:

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