Abby Gwynn
National Labor Relations Board
Supported by Smith and Marjanovic, LLC

Working in public interest is important to me because I came to law school to serve those in my community. Access to legal services is far too restrictive and exacerbates a system where those without resources are driven into increasingly difficult and precarious situations. Public interest work makes the legal system more equitable by ensuring that access to justice is not dependent on financial status but is a universally shared right.

I am passionate about staying in New Mexico, having grown up here and experiencing how special and unique this state is. Because legal services can be especially inaccessible to many New Mexicans, having attorneys working in public interest here is particularly important. Having worked at a veterinary clinic for over 10 years, and periodically working with nonprofit organizations in Santa Fe, I have become eager to work in legal fields that directly affect New Mexicans and workers. I am beyond excited to be interning with the National Labor Relations Board this summer because this is exactly the type of work I hoped to do when I came to law school. At the NLRB, I will be assisting with investigations into allegations of unfair labor practices in New Mexico. Being able to serve New Mexicans in this capacity and explore an area of the law that I have such a specific interest in is a privilege and is possible because of the APIL scholarship. Because of this generous donation, I can invest myself completely in this work and make the most out of my internship.

Karyn Bloxham
New Mexico Supreme Court
Supported by the Western Environmental Law Center and Public Law Section of the State Bar

I grew up in Arizona on the Colorado River Indian Tribe reservation and in part on the Navajo Nation within New Mexico, shaped by instability, loss, and generational trauma. I initially believed that these conditions were normal and did not understand the deeper historical and legal forces that influence the community. Through my education in public health and Indigenous health, I have begun to understand how historical trauma continues to shape Indigenous communities. I recognize that my childhood was a symptom of trauma and that the law is a more powerful tool to create upstream change and improve community health outcomes.

The judicial system plays a critical role in public interest law, serving as a constitutional mechanism to advance justice and safeguard public rights, particularly for historically underrepresented groups. Indian Law spans many legal areas, reflecting the broad scope of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, which empower Tribal governments to address civil rights, environmental protection, education, and healthcare. Learning within a judiciary that respects this sovereignty is invaluable as a step toward using law as a tool to heal, protect, and promote equitable access to justice.

I want to help reshape a legal system that too often works against historically underrepresented and underserved people. I sought a position with a Justice in New Mexico because the New Mexican courts have had a uniquely positive impact on Tribes in ways that other states could learn from. Through this summer externship with Justice Thomson, I hope to learn from a Justice who navigates legal complexities with thoughtfulness, integrity, cultural humility, care, and respect for Tribal sovereignty.

This APIL Fellowship will meaningfully alleviate the significant financial sacrifice that comes with this career transition and the pursuit of a position within governmental frameworks to advance justice in the communities

Noah Passaris
New Mexico Legal Aid
Supported by Equal Access to Justice and the ACLU of New Mexico

My name is Noah Passaris and I am a law student born and raised in New Mexico, committed to a career in public interest law serving the communities that shaped me.

One of the most formative influences on my path to law school has been my close friendship with someone who grew up poor and homeless. Watching him navigate a world indifferent to his circumstances gave me a visceral understanding of what it means to lack resources, stability, and advocates. He did not lack intelligence or drive, what he lacked was access. That distinction has defined my commitment to public interest law ever since.

My undergraduate studies in political science and history gave that commitment an analytical foundation. An urban development course proved especially transformative, teaching me how zoning laws and land use policy constrain affordable housing and how the housing crisis is fundamentally a legal and political problem. That realization made clear how much the law shapes people's material lives, and how much lawyers can do to change those conditions.

This summer, I am working at New Mexico Legal Aid in both the tax and housing clinics, helping low-income New Mexicans navigate IRS disputes and fight eviction. New Mexico ranks among the highest in the nation for poverty and among the lowest for access to legal services, and NMLA is on the front lines of closing that gap. This funding means I can dedicate myself

fully to that work without financial pressure forcing me to compromise the time clients deserve. My goal after law school is to return to NMLA as a staff attorney. Public interest law is not a detour, it is the work that matters most, and New Mexico is where I will do it.

Brayden Gallimore
Public Regulation Commission
Supported by Singleton, Schreiber, LLP and Professor Emeritus Peter Winograd

I am a rising 3L at the University of New Mexico School of Law, where I am pursuing the Natural Resources and Environmental Law (NREL) certificate and serve as a member and incoming Manuscript Editor of the Natural Resources Journal, UNM's law review dedicated to natural resources and environmental law scholarship.

I grew up in Illinois and spent six years in the Tampa Bay area, where I completed my undergraduate degree in English. While living there, I experienced firsthand the 2021 Piney Point phosphate plant disaster, in which over 200 million gallons of contaminated wastewater were discharged into Tampa Bay, fueling the worst red tide event the region had seen in fifty years. I wrote an undergraduate term paper on the disaster and came away struck by the regulatory failures that allowed it to happen and the lack of meaningful accountability that followed. That experience drove me toward environmental law and public interest work, and I moved to New Mexico specifically to attend UNM School of Law.

This summer, I will extern with the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission, which regulates public utilities statewide and advocates for the public interest in proceedings before the Commission. The NMPRC's work sits at the intersection of energy regulation, environmental policy, and public accountability – the exact area I intend to practice in. I hope to gain hands-on experience in administrative law and regulatory advocacy while learning how the Commission balances ratepayer protection, utility viability, and the state's energy transition goals.

The APIL Fellowship, funded by Singleton Schreiber and Dean Peter Winograd, makes this work possible. My externship is unpaid, and without this award I would need to take on

additional student loan debt to cover my living expenses for the summer. I am grateful for APIL's commitment to supporting students pursuing public interest careers.

Damon Mehrdad Sohrabi
New Mexico Immigrant Law Center
Supported by Felix Rael

I came to the United States two and a half years ago and previously lived in Iran, Turkey, and Australia. I graduated from K. N. Toosi University of Technology (KNTU) in Iran and worked as a civil engineer before pursuing law. Becoming an advocate was one of the main reasons for my decision to shift my career.

At the University of New Mexico School of Law, I serve as a 1L representative for the ACLU Student Chapter and the Immigration Law Student Association. Through these roles, I have engaged with public interest work and developed a stronger understanding of the legal challenges facing New Mexico communities.

I am particularly interested in working with the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC) this summer because its mission aligns closely with my background and experiences. At a time when many immigrants in the United States face significant challenges, I feel a strong responsibility to contribute. Having personally navigated multiple immigration systems, I have seen firsthand how complex and difficult these processes can be, and I am motivated to be part of efforts that provide meaningful legal support. NMILC's combination of direct representation and broader advocacy, including work with individuals in immigration proceedings and ICE detention, is especially meaningful to me. As a Farsi and English speaker, I hope to help bridge communication barriers and support access to legal assistance

Katherine Castillo
Public Regulation Commission
Supported by Sheila Brown and the Public Law Section of the State Bar

I was born into a hard-working family that migrated from Panama. As a family, we were in the lowest income bracket. This made nature, public libraries, and SNAP benefits a big part of my upbringing since they were all free. After high school, I decided to major in horticultural science to learn how to grow plants and eventually feed people, especially children. Later, I minored in sustainability so I could create plans that considered economic, social, and environmental factors. My childhood played a big part in my decision-making as an adult. I am dedicated to being an asset to my community.

Last Summer, I worked with the City of Albuquerque's Office of Sustainability. This work consisted of collecting greenhouse gas information, attending Air Quality Board meetings, and holding public meetings for community members. Working with local municipal laws and regulations is important work, especially when the federal administration declines to acknowledge science and low-income communities.

This summer, I am working for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission. This commission is responsible for ensuring utility services that are consistent with the community's social, economic, and environmental values. Even though public utilities may seem disconnected from agricultural endeavors, the ecological connection does exist. For example, our current use of gas and coal is the prime source of greenhouse gases that contribute to climate change. Climate change has altered growing seasons and yields worldwide. In regions like New Mexico, the city's water use affects the availability of water for farmers in areas like Deming, NM. Investments in infrastructure that will allow more equitable lifestyles for both urban and rural constituents are important to me. As an intern for the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission, I hope to learn how the law can help shape energy standards