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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: It's hard to believe that it has been over a month since I moved to Cambridge, MA to work for Harvard Legal Aid Bureau as a summer student attorney in the Family Law unit. The past weeks have been a truly incredible learning experience. I have had the chance to conduct client meetings, observe hearings, review depositions and discovery, file appearances, and learn more about family law in Massachusetts. I have also had the opportunity to speak with some amazing and brave individuals whose stories I will get to represent in court this summer. The work has been tough, but it has further solidified my passion for working in family law.

One standout moment for me so far was making my first appearance in front of a Massachusetts Probate and Family Court judge this Monday. I spoke on the record for the first time in my career, presenting in a status conference for one of my clients. Though it was a nerve-wracking experience, I am proud of myself for presenting the case well and getting the chance to represent a client who has been through so much. I have had the honor of listening to her story and will have the chance to present her truth later this month during her trial. I am excited to see what else this internship has in store for me and helping out this community who need and deserve our legal services.

Update 2: The past few weeks at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau have been interesting and, frankly, difficult as a woman in family law. The fields of family law and reproductive justice are closely intertwined, and the impact that Dobbs has on family law clients is immense. I've worked on/learned about cases where the individual has to pay their abuser child support; custody battles with abusers; sexual violence towards the survivor and the abuser forcing the mother to have or abort the baby; etc. This decision further aggravates these family law matters, which are already traumatic for clients. I have worked within family law and with survivors of abuse since starting law school and can recall clients who were sexually abused and needed appropriate healthcare; healthcare that is already so insufficient for womxn of color, who are the majority of our clients in legal services work. These individuals, who were controlled and silenced by their abuser, continue to be controlled by the government; helping clients throughout this is something I'm still working on. I've had to quickly learn how to work with clients in a trauma-informed manner, acknowledge their feelings towards the court system that's



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harming them, and how to present some hope for them to continue pursuing the case.

For the past few weeks at work, I have been preparing for a trial that will take place later this month. I have learned so much about the process of discovery, writing direct and cross examination questions, and reviewing information with clients. I've had the privilege of working with a client whose has dealt with so much trauma and abuse, and it is admirable to see them still fighting not only for themselves, but for their child. I'm excited to really get into trial prep and present her case in trial in a few weeks.

Update 3: It feels like I just started my summer internship, yet I have less than a month left at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. These past 2 months have taught me so much about myself, work ethic, and abilities. I have definitely faced my challenges at this job, and I am slowly learning what works best for me as a public interest, family law advocate.

Preparing for a trial, talking with clients, and being a primary handler on cases have always terrified me. The nerves and fears are still there. But as we get closer to trial, I'm getting more comfortable and confident in my abilities to succeed in public interest. Building that level of trust with a client, especially those who have survived abuse or other traumatic experiences, has been the most rewarding part of the trial prep experience so far.

I'm excited to see what else this internship has left for me and what else I will learn as I head into this last month.

Update 4: For the past two months at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau I have been immersed in intense trial prep, and last Friday was the first time I got to present in a trial. I got to examine witnesses, object on cross examinations, and think of questions on the spot. I presented our case in chief along with my other student counsel and supervising attorneys. Prepping for a trial, nonetheless a custody dispute, has been one of the hardest things I have done in my career so far. I have learned so much about the process and amount of trial prep in a family law matter: including how to request discovery, impeach a witness, objections, write direct and cross examination questions, introduce exhibits on the records, and write a closing argument. Though the trial is still not over, it has been an incredible experience just learning everything that goes into being a trial lawyer.

I went into this summer unsure if I wanted to pursue a career in litigation or what my role as an advocate would look like. After this experience, I still cannot say for sure I want to be a trial lawyer. However, I at least now know that I can handle a trial and presenting a client's case.

Update 5: This will be my final EJA Fellow Update as I have ended my time as a student attorney at Harvard Legal Aid Bureau. I have nothing but positive things to say about HLAB and the community I gained from this summer. I was able to accomplish all my goals I set out for myself this summer, including going to court, speaking in front of a judge, and representing clients in family law court.



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My biggest accomplishment, by far, was representing a client in trial. This was an incredibly complex custody battle that spanned over ten years, and we had roughly 2 months to familiarize ourselves with the case and prepare. I went through weeks of intensive trial preparation, including hours-long witness interviews, submitting subpoenas, and combing through over dozens of exhibits. At trial, with the help and support of my co-student counsel and my supervising attorneys, I was able to successfully conduct direct examinations of three witnesses, including the examination of our client. I handled procedural issues, argued evidentiary issues, and navigated negotiations and other discussions with opposing counsel. The idea of trial was always scary to me and something I always dreaded. Even the morning of the first day of trial, I was filled with nerves. However, by the second day of trial, I had gained a new level of confidence and comfortability of presenting in front of a judge and talking to witnesses that I would have never achieved had I not had that experience.

I am so grateful to the friendships I made at HLAB. A true, friendly, honest, and open work environment truly does make a summer experience go from great to exceptional. I was able to truly collaborate with the other student attorneys, learn from them, and create memories in that office that I will cherish forever. I learned so much about myself and the type of lawyer and advocate I want to be from my supervising attorneys. Their careers and skills in trial and client communication were admirable and I gained so much from just observing their work ethic.

The work I did over this summer showed me the highs and the lows of working in public interest, specifically family law. Working as just a legal intern before in these areas, I now realize I only experienced a small portion of the exhaustion and overwhelm of being a family law attorney. Being the primary advocate and case handler for multiple different cases with their own complexities was incredibly difficult to manage, but throughout the summer I learned more about myself and what management techniques worked best for me to keep track of everything.

I intend to carry skills and experiences I gained at HLAB throughout my career, especially as I start as a student attorney again in the Gender Justice Clinic at American University Washington College of Law.

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