



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

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**Update 1:** I'm so grateful to receive funding through Equal Justice America to support my legal work at Neighborhood Defender Service Harlem (NDS) with the Family Defense practice. Though I will be spending the majority of my summer at Bronx Defenders, it has been a privilege to begin my 2L summer at NDS! This internship has been a valuable introduction to family defense practices in New York.

The family defense practice at NDS provides full representation in family court cases with the goal of keeping families together and communities intact. It has been a pleasure to learn about how to protect parental rights and preserve family bonds. This month I've learned so much about supporting parents' legal goals while under investigation by the family regulation system. I look forward to continuing to identify structural changes that can be made at a policy level to protect family unity and parental rights.

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**Update 2:** Last month, I had the privilege of attending a Family Advocacy Day with NDS, JMAC for Families, and other organizations invested in protecting the rights of parents involved in the family regulation system.

I had the opportunity to visit New York State Assembly offices and speak with lawmakers about four policy proposals including: The Family Miranda Rights, The Informed Consent Act, The Anti-Harassment in Reporting Act, and the Preserving Family Bonds Act. Each of these pieces of legislation are important steps that can be taken to better protect and promote parental rights for NDS clients and parents across New York. It was a privilege to participate in this day of action alongside parents who have been impacted by the family regulation system and family defense attorneys.

For more information on Family Miranda Rights, see [here](#). If you want to support the push for this bill to pass, use this script to call New York State lawmakers or post on social media to spread the word!

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**Update 3:** I gained valuable experience in family defense and holistics representation at NDS. I learned how involvement in the family regulation system often overlaps with involvement in other punitive legal systems. Family defense practice helps parents navigate these processes and aims to protect their rights to privacy and contact with their children.



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Consequences of the family regulation system can often lead to serious, unjust repercussions in a family structure. In the long term, serious negative effects can include unnecessary removals or children and intrusive Family Court proceedings that often fail to prove wrongdoing by the parent. As a family defense intern, I gained valuable experience observing family court and shadowing attorneys in these proceedings.

The holistic representation model acknowledges that contact with the criminal legal system often leads to consequences in family, housing, or immigration court. I learned so much from observing this model in practice and will bring these lessons with me as I move forward in my career. I am so grateful for the support from Equal Justice America that made it possible for me to pursue this opportunity and learn from family defense attorneys.

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**Update 4:** At the end of my internship with the Neighborhood Defender Service, I had the opportunity to speak as a representative of an impacted parent in an administrative hearing. In preparing for the hearing with the parent, I learned how the family regulation system impacted her family life. Even when an investigation does not lead to a case against a parent or a separation from their children, there can be lasting, harmful effects. It was a privilege to participate in the hearing and help the parent tell her story.

Following this experience, I began a summer internship at the Bronx Defenders. This experience has been valuable as I continue to work in and learn from a holistic representation setting. Many parents involved in the family regulation system are impacted by other legal systems, requiring representation that accounts for the different needs that arise from this intersection.

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**Update 5:** My experience in family defense at the Neighborhood Defender Service taught me how the family policing system often unjustly separates parents and children. As I've begun my time with the Bronx Defender's Immigration Practice, promoting family unity has continued to be at the forefront of my professional goals. While interning in immigration and family defense practices, I have reflected on the overlaps between the immigration legal system and family regulation system. Both systems often punish families through separation, cut ties with loved ones, and permanently alter family structures. Disentangling the family regulation and immigration family separation systems strengthen communities and promote healthy families.

I am so grateful for the opportunities I've had to defend family unity in both the immigration and family justice context. Both experiences have contributed to the other and have helped me understand the greater context of what family unity can look like in our communities.

This is my final reflection as an Equal Justice America fellow. Again, I am grateful for the support I received to help me pursue this opportunity and explore my professional interests this summer. My posts have been a valuable tool to reflect on my experience. If you are interested in supporting public interest law students like me, please donate to Equal Justice America.