



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## SUMMER 2024

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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<b>LAW SCHOOL</b>	Stanford Law School
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Brooklyn Defender Services, Family Defense Practice

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#### **Update 1:**

After finishing my first year of law school at Stanford, I am interning in the Family Defense Practice of the Brooklyn Defender Services. We represent families facing removal of their children or separation in Kings County Family Court. In this internship, I'm receiving intensive legal and practical skills training in family law specific to our context as well as in effective oral advocacy and writing. I'm working under the close supervision of 3 attorneys. My responsibilities include legal writing and research, drafting motions, pleadings, and briefs, interviewing clients at intake, preparing client and witness affidavits, and helping attorneys prepare for trial, including developing case theory and strategies. In only a few weeks, I've already gotten so much hands-on and observational work experience, and I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity as well as to my supervisors. I'm seeing so much of how a plethora of issues result in one's day in family court and understanding the many creative and hard-working strategies that our attorneys engage in every day to help parents faced with the removal of their children and trying to navigate a legal system on top of the many other things in life.

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#### **Update 2:**

In about my first full month at the Brooklyn Defender Services, I've gotten exposure to a wide range of legal tasks, including brief and motion writing, preparing client affidavits, writing discovery digests in which I looked through evidence submitted by opposing counsel, and conducting research into available social services in Brooklyn. I've gotten to see more firsthand the issues baked into the foster care system and the failure of social systems to provide remedies that appropriately address our client needs. I'm currently working on a motion for expanded visitation and am excited to see how my work shapes out for the rest of the summer.



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## **Update 3:**

Last Wednesday, I filed my first motion with the Brooklyn Defender Services (and while as a law student)! My supervising attorney and I were filing for a trial discharge for a client, which would allow her to have her children back for a period under supervision by the Administration of Children's Services. Through writing the motion, I was able to get experience with a variety of legal skills. I gained valuable direct services experience in communicating back and forth with my client to write her affidavit while also getting more legal research and writing skills through case law research and statutory interpretation. Later that week, I was able to see a case from a more top-down perspective by putting together a discovery digest for another attorney and including our best arguments and a potential theory of the case. I'm putting together another motion this week and observing various trials as I have been doing all summer, and I'm very excited to see where the next month takes me.

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## **Update 4:**

In my closing time at the Brooklyn Defender Services, I have been able to get a wide range of experiences with Family Court proceedings. I've continued to participate in motion writing, including in some creative areas such as using case law to qualify an expert in the subfield of grief. I'm also able to continue a great amount of direct client services. I'm currently working with my attorney with a client in Rikers on a motion for his Family Court proceedings. One particularly rewarding part of the summer has been able to see cases that I'm working on throughout the summer come to fruition or judges issue a favorable ruling for our client. The other day, ACS agreed to what we were asking for in a petition, and the judge granted it while giving a glowing appraisal of our client's participation in services thus far.

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## **Update 5:**

I had an incredibly educational, insightful, and meaningful time working in the Family Defense Practice at the Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) this summer. We worked in Kings County Family Court defending indigent parents from allegations of abuse or neglect from the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). I worked under the supervision of three attorneys and assisted them in various tasks.

My tasks included motion and brief writing, helping my attorneys prepare for cross and direct examination, speaking with and preparing client affidavits, doing caselaw and other legal research, and working with our social services teams on referring clients to various local programs. One highlight of my summer was a hearing after I had submitted a motion for a trial discharge, or temporary release of children to her custody on ACS supervision, and ACS agreed to the trial discharge before the hearing appearance. The judge praised at length our client's hard work in completing all of her required service, and it was wonderful to see an outcome of



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family reunification. Given the pace of how everything moves in family court, there was a lot of rapid turnaround and change. For instance, I wrote a motion for a client that the judge initially did not ask the opposing attorney to write a response to. The attorney later wanted to go to trial instead of settling the case but wrote to the court a day before the hearing date that he had an emergency and needed more time to prepare. I am also very grateful to my attorneys for their supervision and generosity of time and feedback, as well as to my other interns, and to everyone at the organization.

Much of my time was also spent in court watching various proceedings. One of my fellow interns also reached out to someone in Housing Court, and we were able to watch proceedings there as well. Usually, I was taking notes, but on one occasion, I wrote an oral motion for one of my attorneys that she read aloud and presented to the court. In court, I was able to see firsthand the ways in which the system shapes our clients' lives. I am very grateful for this summer and hope to return to the field of family and criminal defense in the future.