



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

**Summer 2025**

## EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Advocates for Children of New York

### Final Reflection:

I had a wonderful experience as an EJA fellow at Advocates for Children of New York (AFC) this summer, and I am so grateful to EJA and its donors for this opportunity. AFC is an organization that focuses on education advocacy for New York City families from under-resourced communities on the individual and policy level. I had the chance to work closely with a variety of attorneys from different projects including Robin Hood (which helps families in poverty), the School Justice Project, and the Immigrant Students' Rights Project. Alongside this substantive work, AFC provided opportunities for me and the other interns to attend trainings, staff meetings, school visits, outreach events, a courthouse tour, and a visit with a judge.

Towards the beginning of the summer, I conducted an intake interview with the parent (Mrs. J) of a student (RJ) who had just graduated from fifth grade at a public elementary school without knowing how to read. This became one of the main cases I worked on throughout the summer, and I submitted records requests, created a detailed timeline, drafted emails and other communications for the client, and wrote an Impartial Hearing Request (IHR) which will be submitted to the Office of Administrative Hearings. The IHR that I wrote was to sue the DOE for its failure to provide RJ with a free appropriate public education, and to get the DOE to pay for RJ to attend a private school that is equipped to teach students with dyslexia.

Mrs. J had been a fierce advocate for her child since Kindergarten and even had a job which put her in her child's classroom part-time, so she saw RJ's academic struggles first-hand. Mrs. J was dismissed by school staff time and again when she brought up concerns about RJ's lack of academic progress. Although it is the Department of Education's (DOE) responsibility to identify and evaluate students with suspected disabilities, the school district only had RJ evaluated in second grade due to pressure from Mrs. J. It was noted in the Speech Language Therapist's evaluation that based on many factors, RJ was at a high risk for Dyslexia. Despite this,



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the DOE let RJ continue to struggle and fall further behind in school. Mrs. J eventually started working with AFC and was able to secure an outside Neuropsychological evaluation.

RJ's story of being neglected by the DOE is not unique. Another IHR that I drafted this summer was for a 13-year-old immigrant student who had a similar story to RJ—he couldn't read because the DOE did not properly evaluate him for Dyslexia, despite clear signs. Most of my fellow interns also had at least one case with the same issue. I also worked on a couple of cases where students with Autism Spectrum Disorder were making no meaningful progress or even regressing at school, but the DOE still refused to find a proper placement. In another case I worked on that I will not soon forget, a teenage student with mental health issues received such poor care and supervision in a therapeutic school program that she stopped taking her medications relapsed into self-harm.

These stories were frustrating to witness, so I was glad to help in any way possible. I spoke to clients on the phone to explain confusing legal requirements, talk about school options, provide referrals, and to be an emotional sounding board. I attended a school tour with a parent and composed a rejection letter upon seeing how inappropriate it would be for her child. I composed legal documents which outlined exactly how horribly the DOE had treated students, to try to get some justice in the form of private school tuition or compensatory services. I feel good about the work I did this summer, and I am hoping to continue working in education advocacy after graduating from law school.