



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2025

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Louisiana Center for Children's Rights

Final Reflection:

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as an Equal Justice America Fellow this summer. I spent my fellowship at the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights (LCCR) in New Orleans, supporting attorneys who represent indigent children involved in the juvenile legal system. I worked directly with a team of attorneys, social workers and policy advocates, learning about LCCR's wholistic approach to juvenile defense and alongside clients and their families. The experience was one of the most intensely formative of my time in law school. Below you will find a report on my fellowship experience and two of my LinkedIn posts about my experience.

Early-Stage Legal Research & Memoranda (Weeks 1–3).

After receiving training from the LCCR director, Hannah Van DeCar and LCCR staff about the juvenile justice system in Louisiana, the Louisiana Children's Code and LCCR's mission driven practice areas, I was paired with two LCCR attorneys and began by completing a series of case-specific research memos that informed active litigation strategy. Among them, the topics include:

- Fourth Amendment & Due Process Issues Arising from New Orleans Enhanced Security Zones: I analyzed the constitutionality of searches conducted within New Orleans' newly designated "Enhanced Security Zones," identifying suppression arguments and due process concerns related to ongoing stop-and-frisk practices and purported consent exceptions in ESZ areas—work that fed directly into a motion to suppress.
- Statutory Furloughs or clients in limbo: I researched the availability of furloughs for youth incarcerated in municipal facilities not governed by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, synthesized eligibility triggers and timing, and created a spreadsheet for counsel to use in client advisal and court filings.



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- Confidential Hearings & Early Release: I surveyed due process protections for youth seeking modification/early release and drafted a memo supporting a motion to restrict access to a confidential hearing to protect a client's privacy and safety.
- PREA & LGBTQ Youth in Adult Prisons: For a juvenile serving JLWOP in an adult state facility, I compiled Prison Rape Elimination Act standards, Louisiana DOC directives, and national advocacy resources to support counsel's efforts to address harassment, retaliation, and access to protective measures.
- Good Cause & Trial Recess Challenges: I researched good-cause and trial recess standards to protect a youth's fair-trial rights where the State's key witness was unavailable.
- I also assisted with trial preparation, including drafting a cross-examination outline, and participated in client and family interviews.

Motions to Dismiss for Failure to Timely Prosecute (La. Ch. Code art. 877)

Mid-summer, I focused heavily on Article 877 of the Louisiana Children's Code. For a set of cases, I audited records to calculate statutory deadlines and all tolling or "good cause" extensions, drafted detailed motions to dismiss for failure to timely prosecute, and, when motions were denied, researched and drafted interlocutory appeal filings.

Connecting with the Clients We Served

The most meaningful part of my fellowship was working directly with youth and their families. Two moments stand out:

- A client was eagerly seeking furlough to have more access to his family. He was very close with his mother and his siblings. His mother called him as much as she could but they only spoke one time per week due to the extreme restrictions on family contact imposed by the facility. Before being incarcerated, he had never been away from his family for more than a night. The family had moved out of New Orleans to try to put their kids in a safer neighborhood, and the move had put more stress on their bond. Now, he had been incarcerated for more than 9 months and wasn't being allowed to see any of his brothers and sisters. The facility was only intended for temporary detention, but was being used as overflow detention space for youth. With that in mind, I gathered documentation and drafted arguments about his eligibility, and helped the family prepare for the request before the visit. The supervising attorney sent me to the facility to speak with this and other clients to devise a plan. On my first visit, after explaining the statutory framework under 897.1 and DPS policies, we discussed his desire to see his family, how much he missed his siblings, and what he was planning to do on his first visit home. He just wanted to taste his mom's food and play video games with his siblings. He talked to me about facility policy and what worked and didn't work for him. Our goal was to argue that this youth and others were entitled to the visits and family outings they



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would have had in a state facility. The LCCR attorney supervising me explained that this was actually a legal argument that was devised by the youth. We worked on this motion, informed by the real desires and directives of the children we serve. While the decision was ultimately outside our control, helping the youth feel seen and heard within the process mattered.

- An LGBTQ client in an adult facility was experiencing sexualized threats and harassment from prison guards and other incarcerated individuals. Our client was afraid for his safety and was not sure of his options. He had reported several previous incidents and feared he would face retaliation from prison staff. He asked us to help him figure out what he could do beyond filing a formal complaint. The work involved testing the existing infrastructure's confidentiality and anonymity measures for 3rd party reports, pressing for protective measures, and documenting compliance failures. I also advocated for a state-run online legal resource library to feature PREA resources on its website to increase the accessibility of existing resources to incarcerated persons. Finally, I researched several national and regional organizations that support LGBTQ persons in prison to give our client some options for additional support. This case was extraordinarily difficult because there was no clear resolution or safety for our client. Still, I felt incredibly honored to provide the information our client requested and give the legal team a roadmap for raising safety concerns through systemic advocacy.

What the Fellowship Meant to Me

This summer gave me a front-row seat to juvenile defense in practice: fast-moving dockets, incomplete records, urgent deadlines, and constant balance between litigation strategy and client-centered communication are major themes that run through this work. I learned how to turn statutory text into timelines and timelines into persuasive motions; how to triage and prioritize in a resource-constrained environment; how to integrate trauma-informed advocacy into every interaction; and how to provide clear, useful, and ready-to-file work product. Above all, working at LCCR showed me how precision and care in research, writing, and relationship-building can materially change outcomes for children. I am grateful to Equal Justice America and to LCCR for making such a comprehensive experience possible.

Thank you again.