



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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I am grateful for the opportunity to reflect on my experience as an Equal Justice America Fellow at the Center for Family Representation. Throughout my fellowship, I had the opportunity to gain firsthand experience in family law and to see the profound impact that access to legal representation can have on families navigating some of the most difficult circumstances of their lives.

During my fellowship, I participated in court appearances and observations, conducted legal research, attended client meetings, drafted legal documents, and worked on a legal memorandum. These experiences allowed me to see how the work of a public-interest attorney extends far beyond understanding the law. Attorneys must listen carefully to their clients, understand the circumstances surrounding their cases, and advocate for people whose lives may be profoundly affected by a single court proceeding.

One client in particular stayed with me. She was a survivor of domestic abuse who was fighting against her husband while also facing involvement from Child Protective Services. Her case made me think deeply about how difficult it can be for a person experiencing abuse to seek safety while simultaneously having to defend herself against allegations concerning her ability to care for her children. Rather than viewing the different aspects of her circumstances in isolation, I began to understand how interconnected they were. Her experience with domestic violence, her relationship with her husband, her interactions with the child welfare system, and her efforts to protect her family all became part of the legal case before the court.

During one proceeding, I heard a judge say that a person's past affects their future. That statement stayed with me because it captured one of the most difficult realities I witnessed



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during my fellowship: people are often judged not only by what is happening to them now, but also by the circumstances and experiences that brought them to court. For clients who have experienced trauma or other difficult circumstances, their past can become something they must continually explain and defend. Watching this process reinforced for me how important it is for attorneys to understand their clients as whole people rather than simply as the facts contained in a case file.

My fellowship also gave me a much deeper understanding of family law. Before this experience, I understood family law primarily as a body of legal rules governing matters involving parents and children. Through my work at the Center for Family Representation, I learned how much more complicated these cases are in practice. Legal issues are inseparable from the human realities surrounding them. A court decision can affect a parent's relationship with a child, a person's safety, and the stability of an entire family.

Most importantly, this experience strengthened my interest in public-interest law. I saw how meaningful legal representation can be for people who might otherwise have to navigate the legal system alone. I also learned that being an effective public-interest lawyer requires both strong legal skills and genuine empathy. Researching the law and drafting a memorandum are important, but so is listening to a client and understanding what is at stake for that person.

I am grateful to Equal Justice America for supporting my fellowship and giving me the opportunity to learn from the attorneys and clients at the Center for Family Representation. The experience has strengthened my understanding of the responsibility that comes with being a lawyer and reinforced my desire to use my legal education to serve people who need an advocate. I will carry the lessons from this fellowship with me throughout law school and into my legal career.