



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: This summer I have the incredible privilege of living out my NYC dreams working for the Special Education Unit at New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) as an Equal Justice America Fellow! Leaving the classroom to pursue a career in law after five years as a public school teacher in my hometown was an arduous decision, but my experience so far in my first foray into the legal world has been nothing but affirming.

The Special Education Unit at NYLAG is committed to providing free legal services for children who have been denied access to a free public education. I am beyond grateful to be in a position in which I can continue serving vulnerable families navigating the special education system. Over the past three weeks, I have joined parents on tours of potential schools, participated in intakes for potential new clients, and assisted in the preparation of exhibits and affidavits for hearings in which my team secures compensatory education services for the children they represent. I have learned so much already and am excited to see where my summer at NYLAG takes me!

Update 2: Halfway through the summer and I am still feeling energized in my work as a legal intern in the Special Education Unit at NYLAG! I have spent the last few weeks intently researching various legal theories in support of my team's ongoing litigation efforts to secure children the special education services to which they are entitled. For example, I prepared a research memorandum addressing the legal authorities permitting an award of prospective private school tuition under a compensatory framework. My supervising attorney quoted my research in her closing arguments at the hearing in which she successfully argued her client's case, securing a favorable decision.

Update 3: I can't believe there are only three weeks left of my time as an intern in the Special Education Unit at NYLAG! Since my last update, I have gotten more involved with informal advocacy for clients who call our intake line seeking support with ensuring their children are receiving the special education services to which they are entitled.

After the last day of the 10-month school year last week, many students who are on a 12-month school calendar due to their educational needs are transferring campuses for their summer programming. With that change there has been a slew of NYC parents reporting that their children's



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transportation services have been terminated as a result, giving them no way to get their children to school. Through many calls and emails to a myriad of people in the NYC Department of Education, our team has been able to reestablish transportation services so that their children can continue receiving the services they need to thrive.

Update 4: As I am nearing the end of my summer in the Special Education Unit at NYLAG, I am overjoyed to share that research I conducted in support of a due process complaint against the New York City Department of Education resulting in over \$10,000 of cost reimbursement for that family! The Interim Hearing Officer agreed with the argument I formulated supporting reimbursement for daycare costs. Generally, reimbursement is reserved for private school tuition, but because this parent was unable to afford such tuition for her young child, I successfully argued that the denial of such reimbursement would obfuscate her rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act solely due lack of resources. This was a huge win for the family, and I am so proud of our team's efforts to secure this favorable decision!

Final Reflection: My summer in the Special Education Unit at NYLAG has come to an end and I couldn't be more grateful for my experience. Over 10 weeks I worked on a range of legal issues for our clients. Our clients are parents seeking relief for the NYC Department of Education's failure to provide the appropriate special education services for their children. The relief can come in many forms. Some relief may be provided as compensatory hours of special education services like speech and language therapy, physical therapy, tutoring, and more, provided by independent therapists at no cost to the families. Other cases we worked on resulted in the parents securing independent evaluations for their child after they disagreed with the evaluations conducted by the DOE. The relief could also be the funding of private school tuition when no DOE school is appropriate for that particular child's needs.

In support of these efforts, I drafted affidavits for service providers, prepared exhibits for litigation, and went on tours of public and private schools with parents. However, my most impactful experience this summer was working closely with one client to advocate for her two children, both of whom were receiving special education services. Over the summer we worked together to secure bussing for their summer programs, find an appropriate non-public school to suit their needs, and surmount countless other barriers she and other parents in her same situation face while trying to navigate the school system in NYC. I loved speaking with this parent daily and fiercely advocating as a team.

While all of my work this summer supported efforts on behalf of families, my direct experience with this particular parent really affirmed my commitment to direct legal services. It also highlighted how systems like foster care, public benefits, and policing are deeply intertwined. Through many instances of informal advocacy this summer—sending emails every day until we got a response from the DOE, remaining on hold for hours to try to find the correct person to initiate transportation, and speaking up for my clients in meetings—I appreciate the importance of uplifting my client's voice rather than interjecting my own.