



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: Although I've only been at the Family Justice Law Center for just over a week, I've already become immersed in the world of complex civil rights litigation and family defense cases against New York's Administration of Children's Services (ACS). In my first few days, I've had the opportunity to observe oral arguments in the Second Department and a 1027 hearing in Brooklyn Family Court, to participate in team meetings regarding cases at all stages of litigation, to be involved in intakes and plaintiff recruitment, and to conduct legal research on challenging, novel family law issues. I'm also learning about the critical importance of partnerships between legal aid organizations, impact litigation groups, and pro bono representatives from firms in doing this work. Having done direct services last summer, it's an exciting opportunity to see how individual clients' stories can come together to inform institutional change. I'm really looking forward to seeing FJLC's cases develop over the summer, and to getting more engrossed in the work!

Update 2: Over the last two weeks, my summer at the Family Justice Law Center has really picked up and I am getting a real sense of what it means to be a civil rights litigator. It's been exciting to work on cases at all stages of litigation — complaint drafting/plaintiff litigation, ongoing discovery, preparing for settlement discussions/trial, assisting with an opposition to a motion to dismiss, and more. I've received meaningful feedback on my writing, have had the opportunity to attend status conferences in federal court, and have helped conduct intakes for potential new clients. The work is both slow and fast at the same time; the arc of litigation is long, but the day-to-day is always busy with new research projects, memos, and motions for the court. I feel really grateful to be doing this work that I truly believe in, and to be fighting for parents across New York who are regularly having their civil rights violated by agencies who are supposed to be protecting children and their families.



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Update 3: As I dive deeper and deeper into my work at FJLC, I continue to grow in gratitude for the amazing team and for the breadth and depth of legal experiences that I'm having this summer. I like that in a single day I can do all of the following: reach out to potential clients to do intake calls, speak one-on-one with impacted parents about their cases and help them draft affidavits, work on motions and discovery requests for large-scale federal class actions, and contribute to complaint drafting/plaintiff recruitment. The work feels dynamic and collaborative, and it's been especially exciting to see how legal aid/family defense orgs, pro bono teams at firms, civil rights organizations, and impact litigation nonprofits can all work together on a case. I'm really eager to see how my projects continue to play out over the rest of the summer, especially with the iterative process of getting feedback from so many different people on my ideas and writing. I can feel myself growing as a lawyer, advocate, and person through this experience.

Update 4: As my summer at FJLC winds down, I feel very lucky to get to be working on long-term, impactful assignments — briefs and motions that will actually be submitted to the court, as well as research projects that will influence the future of the case(s). I've gotten really amazing feedback on my writing, and one thing I've learned this summer is how important written advocacy can be in the civil rights context. I feel grateful to be building on the work of prior groundbreaking cases, and using the work of advocates before me to try and make novel, innovative legal arguments in the family law context. One particularly impactful day in the last couple of weeks has been shadowing the Bronx Defenders — it really demonstrated to me how tangible the impacts of civil rights litigation can be in families' lives, and showed me the importance of the public interest ecosystem: direct representation, strategic appeals, impact litigation, policy advocacy, etc. are all essential pieces of the puzzle. Each has a specific, essential role to play, and when advocates from across these practice areas work together, the impact is only magnified.

Final Reflection: During my ten weeks at the Family Justice Law Center, I took on a wide range of projects contributing to cases at various stages in the litigation process, ranging from complaint drafting and plaintiff recruitment to drafting witness affidavits and an opposition to a motion to dismiss. I observed status conferences at the Eastern District of New York and § 1027 hearings in Bronx Family Court; I participated in litigation team meetings with firms (including Paul Weiss), other civil rights organizations, and family defender services; I conducted client intake with impacted parents. I learned an immense amount from FJLC's fantastic attorneys about what it means to be a zealous advocate, a meticulous and thorough legal researcher, and an impactful written and oral advocate. This summer placement contextualized and strengthened my commitment to public interest work, particularly advocacy for families who



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have been the victims of gender-based violence and whose rights have been abridged by the very institutions claiming to protect them.

A few moments that will stay with me from my time at FJLC include watching a family learn that their two-week-old baby would get to come home with them at the close of a Family Court hearing challenging an unfounded ACS removal of their child, thanks to the advocacy of family defense attorneys; watching my coworker's oral argument in the Second Department, where she argued that Family Courts are not a second-class court and should be subjected to the same discovery rules as all other courts; and receiving over ten rounds of substantive feedback on a piece of my writing, knowing that it would eventually be submitted to the court. By the end of the summer, I truly felt like I was a part of the FJLC team, and like my work and opinions were valued as much as any of the attorneys. I feel grateful to have been a part of several sub-committees whose work I could track and contribute to over the course of the full summer. Even though federal class action litigation can move slowly, particularly in civil rights cases, I learned how to celebrate small wins and how to see the long arc of justice playing out in the everyday. I often found myself reflecting on *Floyd v. City of New York*, a groundbreaking case that served as a model for much of the work I did this summer. Patience, creativity, and listening to the voices of impacted communities in that case led to a decision that shaped the field of civil rights litigation—I trust and believe that FJLC's work will one day do the same.

More than anything else, this summer I learned what kind of attorney I'd like to be. Compassionate, relentless, collaborative, humble, able to find the joy and humor in dark moments, optimistic, thorough, and able to see the legal landscape for the way it should be, rather than the way it is. I am endlessly grateful for the connections I have made, lessons I have learned, and experiences I have gained through my time at FJLC this summer.