



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: One week into my summer at the Exoneration Justice Clinic, and the thing that has stayed with me most is not a case detail or a legal argument. It is the weight of the stack of files on my desk. Each file represents a person sitting in an Indiana prison who wrote a letter claiming they did not commit the crime they were convicted of. My job, alongside the team of undergraduates I am supervising, is to read those claims to assess whether there is evidence of Brady or Giglio violations, whether counsel was constitutionally ineffective, whether any avenue of post-conviction relief remains open.

Most people do not know what those terms mean, and that is part of the problem. Brady violations are constitutional violations whereby the government is required to turn over evidence favorable to the defendant. Giglio extends that to witness credibility. When those rules are broken, people go to prison and stay there, and the system rarely holds itself accountable for it. What I did not fully appreciate before sitting with these files is the sheer scope of prosecutorial power. The state's ability to charge, to withhold, to shape a narrative before a defendant ever sees a courtroom is enormous. The EJC functions, in a real sense, as a watchdog. Not just pushing individual claims of innocence but advocating for the policies that would make those claims less necessary in the first place. Indiana recently passed legislation banning police from lying to underage suspects during interrogations. The clinic helped push for evidence preservation laws that prevent the kind of lost documentation that makes exoneration nearly impossible. That policy work sits alongside the case work, and seeing both together makes clear that you cannot fix one without the other. I came into this summer knowing I cared about this work. One week in, I understand why it is necessary.

Update 2: Since the last update, my team and I have presented our findings around an intake case to recommend further investigation towards an inmate that maintains their innocence after being convicted of murder. This recommendation doesn't come lightly as our clinic has limited



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resources and manpower to be able to dedicate time and effort to further investigate a case that could end up not being fruitful. Similarly, we are one of the only clinics and innocence projects in Indiana to be able to take on the potential clients case in the first place so if we were to deny his application, he is practically guaranteed to pass away surrounded by bars and the walls of the prison.

Update 3: Over the past week I've gotten a chance to conduct legal research into precedents for newly discovered evidence and how it'll impact our active client's case where it was found that the police and prosecution suppressed evidence of alternative suspects to falsely convict our client. Even though we won the trial stage post-conviction relief, the state pushed for an appeal arguing that even though they suppressed evidence, that the evidence was not material. My legal research directly contributed to our response brief for the appellant and now will go to Indiana Appeals court for decision pending.

Update 4: Over the past week or so, I prepared my team for the final intake memo and presentation for a potential client. I also went to Indiana State Prison for an in-person visit to an active client of ours and updated him on his case and where we are at. It was heartbreaking to see someone who was wrongfully convicted of having to deal with an already inhuman treatment within the prison system itself. Despite every obstacle and the facts of the case being so outrageous, he maintains a friendly and personable demeanor, and we chatted about what he would first eat when he gets out of prison. I feel for him on a person level; I don't know if I have the strength or conviction to maintain my innocence in the face of an oppressive system like this for as long as he had. It made me realize just how critical the work I am doing can be and how it impacts the people around them.

Final Reflection: By the time this semester ends, the stack of files that sat on my desk in June has thinned in a few places and grown in most others. New intake files of different sizes sit in my assigned google drive. But even before it reaches my desk, it passes through the reviews of the head attorney, the trial transcript pulled and OCR by the legal assistant, and filtered to be more manageable. This process is critical because while every week someone writes from an Indiana prison insisting the system got it wrong, and every week these pre-review steps are taken, we are a clinic with limited resources and are forced to be strategic with our intake, whether that claim deserves the hours it would take to test. We made one of those calls early this semester. A man convicted of murder had maintained his innocence for years, and we recommended the clinic open a full investigation into his case. The decision carried more weight than any legal memo I've written this year. Our clinic is one of the only avenues this kind of case has in Indiana. Turn him down and there is nowhere else for him to go. The case I've spent the most hours on this semester moved further than I expected. After we won post-conviction relief on a newly discovered evidence claim built around suppressed alternative-suspect evidence, the state



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appealed, arguing the suppression didn't matter because the evidence wasn't material. I spent weeks in Indiana case law on materiality and newly discovered evidence, and that research became part of our response brief. It is now before the Indiana Court of Appeals. That decision belongs to three judges, not to me. None of that research prepared me for the prison visit. I sat across from a client who has spent years insisting on his innocence inside a system built to ignore him, and I expected anger. Instead, he asked about my summer and told me, cheerfully, what he plans to eat first when he gets out. I don't know if I could hold onto myself the way he has, for as long as he has, against odds this stacked. That conversation has stayed with me longer than any brief I've written. I came into this clinic understanding Brady and Giglio as doctrine. I leave it understanding them as the difference between a man walking out of prison and a man dying inside one. The research matters, and so does knowing whose life sits behind each citation. That is what I will carry into every case I touch after this.