



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION Center for Family Representation

Update 1: I have been interning for the Center for Family Representation (CFR) for the last couple of weeks. I was hired by the Civil Legal Defense to assist with housing and other public benefits, and I have gotten a fair amount of exposure to the day-to-day practice of housing law in NYC. I have also asked to get exposure to family court, which is the bread and butter of CFR.

CFR helps families who are being negatively impacted by the family policing system. When a family is inspected by the Administration for Children's Services, CFR represents the parents and advocates for the best possible outcome for both children and parents. In a system and world that often undervalues and strictly polices parents and families of color, CFR helps by applying the legal system to promote stability and dignity.

CFR Family Defense attorneys will refer clients to the Housing and Public Benefits team when they are in need of support. As an intern, I provide any support the attorneys require. So far, this has included performing legal research, preparing documents, and following the progression of cases. By doing so, I was able to help combat an argument that a client was not entitled to remain in her mother's apartment by providing an argument that she was entitled to be considered a remaining family member.

Update 2: Over the last few weeks, I have had the opportunity to expand my understanding of the work of the Center for Family Representation (CFR). CFR provides holistic assistance to families being investigated by the Administration for Children's Services. Officially, I have been interning with their Civil Defense department, which provides assistance with housing and public benefits. However, I wanted to learn more about the core of their work, which is Family Defense. I have therefore been splitting my time between the Civil and Family Defense units.

Last Wednesday, I was able to observe one of the CFR attorneys in Housing Court. There were two cases on, and neither client needed to show up; both cases were settled by stipulation. After



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that, however, I got to see exactly why CFR, and legal aid more generally, are so important. After several months and numerous delays, CFR was able to get a mother's children returned to her. While I hadn't participated in this case, I did have the opportunity to speak to her and comfort her before the hearing, and to share in her joy and celebration after she successfully got a court order reuniting her with her children. Supporting and uplifting those who are in need is exactly what providing legal aid is all about.

Update 3: My time at the Center for Family Representation is nearing its end, and it has been one of the most valuable experiences of my life. Little is more important in this world than the well-being and growth of children. In turn, the well-being of children is best served by supporting parents. By defending families in every way possible, CFR continues to be a valuable resource for those most in need of help.

I have also continued to assist attorneys with housing court cases and arguments. Also, I have drafted a motion to restore visitation rights to a parent based on his compliance with programs. By so doing, I have helped attorneys advocate for parents and promote their rights to housing and access to their children.

Also, one project I am particularly proud of having the chance to assist with is a research project into representation of those who are already represented in other cases. Doing this research involves researching decisions about the Rules of Professional Conduct, including case law and ethics opinions. Once this project is complete, I expect CFR will be able to use my work to effectively represent people with greater clarity on what constitutes ethical behavior.

Update 4: I have finished my internship at the Center for Family Representation, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to work with them. Little is more important in this world than the well-being and growth of children. In turn, the well-being of children is best served by supporting parents. By defending families in every way possible, CFR continues to be a valuable resource for those most in need of help. I am glad I had the chance to be part of that.

In my internship, I worked with attorneys who assisted parents in securing their housing. Mostly, this work involved researching defenses and putting together paperwork. I have had an invaluable opportunity to learn strategies to get cases dismissed and to find reasons why my client should win. I also worked with Family Defense, where I got to observe family court in action and help contribute to motion practice as well.

Also, one project I am particularly proud of having the chance to assist with is a research project into representation of those who are already represented in other cases. Doing this research involves researching decisions about the Rules of Professional Conduct, including case law and ethics opinions. I concluded that CFR should have no trouble representing those clients, which I anticipate they will find very useful.



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Final Reflection: When I accepted my internship offer with the Center for Family Representation (CFR), I was unsure how much I would enjoy it. CFR represents parents who are being investigated by the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), the city agency responsible for investigating suspected child abuse and neglect. It works to ensure that parents' rights are respected and that their needs are seen to during the process.

I was hired for a summer internship in the Housing and Public Benefits team, which primarily handles parent clients' cases in housing court. I had prior experience with housing law and liked it, and I have thought that maybe what I want to do for a career. I was unsure whether CFR was the best place to further develop my skills as a housing attorney, as that isn't what they specialize in. I found it to be an excellent place to develop my skills and refine my career ambitions, though not always in the way I expected.

While there was work for me to do on the Housing team, I was also interested in the main work CFR does—the work in Family Court. When the housing workload was low, I was able to observe Family Court and assist with research and writing. I found it fascinating and compelling, which I had not expected going in. Seeing the way CFR attorneys advocate for parents made me want to do the same. Little is more important than the well-being of children, and CFR is good at helping to preserve family structures in the face of government interference. This work spoke to me in a way little else has.

One particular story sticks in my memory. After visiting Housing Court in Staten Island one day, I went to the Family Court in Staten Island to observe what the attorneys there were doing. What I saw was the attorney team getting a parent's children back to them. I got to share in their joy as they got the decision and celebrated with the mother afterwards. I also got to see the process after the decision, as there were still logistical details to be worked out regarding the returning of the children. While I got some useful experience at the housing court that morning, it was not as interesting or fulfilling as seeing a parent's joy.

I am still undecided about what kind of legal work I will be doing in my career. However, I had never considered family law as a possibility before this internship. Seeing the benefits and importance of family defense work was invaluable and has given me a perspective I would not have had without working for CFR. I am grateful to CFR and its attorneys for this opportunity.