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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Update 1: I am now entering my third week working with Texas Advocacy Project. These last two weeks have been full of learning and listening. I have spent the majority of my two weeks completing trainings, ranging from IT Security, the importance of social workers, to intimate image abuse. One of the key services Texas Advocacy Project provides are free legal line calls to individuals seeking legal advice. I have had the opportunity these last two weeks to shadow calls from several attorneys within the organization. These have been some of my favorite parts of working at TAP thus far. I have learned so much from just listening in on these phone calls. It has also been eye opening to hear stories from callers across the state, with callers seeking advice ranging from divorce cases, custody orders, to protective orders.

I also have had the opportunity to listen in on hearing preparations for clients TAP has elevated to directly represent. One of the cases I was able to listen to involved a client who is seeking a protective order against her ex-husband for sexual acts committed against their one-year old daughter. This has been the most interesting case I have sat in on and read the affidavit for.

I have also begun working on projects. I am currently working on two, the first being completing a partnership information spreadsheet by gathering information about TAP's many referral partners. My second involves a mock trial project, where me and my teammates are representing the respondent in a stalking case. This has been the most exciting thing I have done thus far, especially in curating direct and cross examination questions. I am also glad to have practice in representing the adverse party which TAP does not necessarily do. This week, I am also beginning drafting a final divorce decree which I have begun training for. I look forward to the next coming weeks and learning more about family law through my position with TAP. I have already learned so much in such a short amount of time, and I truly appreciate the work



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TAP does for Texas survivors. My time here has already solidified my commitment to civil legal aid towards low-income individuals.

Update 2: Since my last update, I have really settled into the work here at TAP and hit the ground running on several projects. I am still amidst preparing for my mock trial, which is set to be on July 15th. My team and I have finished writing examination questions, and I was also in charge of writing the opening statement. I had never written an opening statement before, so I did find crafting it to be quite difficult.

As for other projects, I have begun a bigger project surrounding the Texas Supreme Court case, *Noyes v. State*. My role in the project has been conducting research by referring to the historical analogies cited in the SCOTUS *Rahimi* opinion and finding if any can be valuable or useful towards the *Noyes* case. As someone who loves constitutional law, I have found this project to incredibly interesting. It is especially fulfilling to know that my research can help establish precedent on a state level if I am able to provide any information of value that TAP can use in trying to adhere to the decision established by SCOTUS in *Bruen*.

Additionally, I just completed two other projects this week. One of my projects was drafting a final decree of divorce for a client. This was my first time doing so, and I did find it to be quite difficult, especially since I was having trouble knowing what information to put on the WestLaw Form Builder. But, after trial and error, I was able to complete the decree. The hardest part of doing the decree was crafting the child support section due to the amount of children involved, but I was able to receive a lot of help from one of the paralegals. Drafting this FDD truly made me realize how documents of this sort can be quite lengthy, but every piece of information is truly vital and worth paying close attention to.

My second completed project surrounded a protective order case regarding a pregnant client who had been abused by her ex-partner. My task was to listen to several phone calls between the two parties, and to document any information from the calls that would present viable evidence for the protective order. I listened to over 12 phone calls that ranged from 5-18 minutes. Doing this project was also incredibly interesting and gave me a firsthand look into the world of evidence, especially for a case that is not an easy win for the client. I had to pay close attention to what the adverse party was saying and be able to pull if there were any admissions or denials based on the nature of the calls. The hearing is set to be in July near my current residence, so I am looking forward to potentially attending in person if I can!

Update 3: I just finished up another fulfilling two weeks here at TAP. Next Wednesday, the 15th, the clerks will put on TAP's annual mock trial. I am on the Respondent's team, which presents to be a challenge since TAP usually represents applicants in these kinds of circumstances. However,



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I am excited by such a challenge, and I do find it to be good practice to put myself in the other side's shoes. These last two weeks have been heavy preparation for the mock trial. I have finalized my opening statement, as well as met with our witnesses, one of whom I will direct examine. I have gone through trial and error curating the questions I will ask during trial, especially as our team develops new ideas each day. I have also learned more about the world of evidence, and how to present it during the trial. Our team has also learned about the different kinds of objections used during trial, and when each would be useful. I am very excited to participate in this trial next week and immerse myself in thinking on the fly and fighting for a client, albeit fake.

Outside of mock trial preparation, I have also assisted in a lot of hearing preparations. One of the most interesting cases I was able to listen into involved a polyamorous couple, in which the girlfriend was facing abuse from another boyfriend. In another case involving a client who faced physical abuse from her husband, the client was unable to proceed with hearing preparation after having a difficult time reliving and talking about her experiences. That hearing preparation in particular taught me the importance of meeting your client where they are at and approaching every interaction with empathy, especially in this kind of work.

Additionally, I have been working on cases that range from being obvious successes in court to the opposite. It is interesting to see the range of these kinds of cases and how the attorneys approach them. It is also enlightening to see how important a client's composure, stature, and personal background can affect the outcome of their hearing in court. Other projects I have been working on are my ongoing Noyes research project, as well as developing an extensive checklist for attorneys to utilize when speaking with victims of human trafficking. As always, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here at TAP and I can't wait to see what these last few weeks bring!

Update 4: Last week, I finally completed my mock trial that my team and I have been preparing for since the beginning of my internship. Participating in the mock trial was so much fun and truly gave me a firsthand experience as to what a real trial looks like. I thought I was going to be a lot more nervous, but once I started giving out my opening statement the nerves cooled away. What I enjoyed the most was hearing from witnesses and cross-examining one of the parties. I was also surprised at myself for how much I had and was able to think of questions on the fly based on how the individuals I was questioning responded. However, the most trouble I faced was trying to offer objections, since a lot of the times I could not think of a basis to ground my objection in. Additionally, since the mock trial was over Zoom, there was a bit of a lag that interfered with being able to object the opposing party. However, this mock trial was an amazing learning experience and has inspired me to hopefully try out for my school's very own this upcoming school year.



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Other than the mock trial, I have continued working on projects given to me by the attorneys and attending hearing preparations. One of the projects I completed was an affidavit for a client that I had to complete the same day due to the immediate nature of how fast TAP was trying to seek a protective order for the client. The client had only been with her ex-partner for just a month before he committed domestic violence against her. I really loved writing the affidavit and being able to tell the client's story in a concise and thoughtful manner. Having the ability to transform these clients' stories into written legal documents that can change their life for the better has been incredibly rewarding. In writing these kinds of documents, I have learned it is much better to be concise and to the point as judges will read a plethora of these a day and do not have time to get into the nitty gritty details. It is also important to be very specific, especially when writing about the certain kinds of domestic violence involved. For example, my supervising attorney gave me a note to change my wording from "he put his hands on me," to "he strangled me on my neck." In this way, it paints a clearer and harder hitting picture for the reader. Overall, working at TAP has been such an amazing experience and I have learned so much from the attorneys and the clients themselves.

Final Reflection: This summer at the Texas Advocacy Project has been an incredibly formative experience of my legal education. I came in expecting to learn family law procedure and left having witnessed what it actually means to fight for clients.

My internship largely started with listening, whether it was shadowing legal line calls, completing trainings, or meeting and learning more about each department of the organization. From there, I began getting my hands dirty in the work, whether it was building a referral partner spreadsheet, assisting with hearing preparation questions, drafting final divorce decrees, or combing through recorded phone calls and text messages to pull evidence for a client's protective order case. I also researched historical analogies from a SCOTUS opinion for a TAP's work on *Noyes v. State*, hoping to help ground Texas precedent in the framework SCOTUS set out in *Bruen*. I also received extensive experience in drafting same-day affidavits for clients, ranging from relationships that had turned violent within a month, to 10-year-long relationships that suddenly became violent unexpectedly. No matter the story, I learned that precise, quality, and thoughtful writing that remained true to the client's story mattered the most.

The mock trial was the centerpiece of my summer. Representing the respondent in a stalking case (a role TAP rarely takes) pushed me outside of my comfort zone in the best way. Writing my first opening statement, preparing direct and cross-examination questions, and learning to think on my feet with objections and new questions during the actual trial gave me a genuine feel for the mechanics of a courtroom. Moreover, it made me incredibly interested in wanting to participate in my school's mock trial this year.



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However, not every moment was a clear win. We had several clients who ghosted our attorneys, and those who were not the best or as articulate in answering hearing preparation questions. We also had clients who couldn't finish hearing preparation because the reliving and retelling of abuse was too painful. However, these challenges taught me more about this work than any successful case could have. Meeting clients where they are, with patience and empathy, is inseparable from good lawyering, especially in this line of work.

By my final two weeks, I was the last intern remaining, and the shape of my role changed accordingly. My supervising attorney leaned on me more heavily to help carry preparation, draft affidavits, put together examination questions, and complete other miscellaneous projects the other interns had left over. However, I completed each project with more independence and responsibility than I had carried all summer and reminded me of how much I had grown since my worst week at TAP.

TAP taught me more than just the mechanics of family law. It has taught me how to be a good lawyer and how to behave accordingly in every legal setting. Moreover, my summer with TAP has confirmed to me that civil legal aid for marginalized communities, such as low-income Texas, is the kind of work I want to utilize my legal career for.