



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2026

EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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Please see below for summaries of two of my favorite cases that I worked on this summer. I spoke about one of these stories at the EJA social earlier this summer.

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The most fulfilling case that I have worked on this summer was a contested restraining order. The petitioner was a 13 year old girl, and I'll call her Emily. Emily's mother passed away after battling cancer for 5 years when Emily was just 6 years old, at which point her father became her primary caregiver. Unfortunately, he struggled with alcoholism and his erratic behavior eventually escalated into physical abuse. There were multiple referrals to Child Protective Services from concerned adults, and it led to Emily being placed with a legal guardian while her father was hospitalized for complications from alcoholism. Her legal guardian is named Amy, and she was actually the best friend of Emily's late mother. She has two kids near Emily's age, too.

When Emily's father left the hospital, her contact with him initially began with in-person visits but steadily reduced to just phone calls and texts. She would end most calls crying because of his yelling and hurtful remarks, and she always felt anxious about the next time she would have to see him. He would also use manipulative behavior to force her contact by shutting off her cell phone service and even filing an ex parte request to the court to require visitation with him, which was denied. She felt like she was never going to have space and time to heal from his abuse, so she filed for a domestic violence restraining order against him.

Her initial temporary restraining order was denied, and after that happened, she and Amy found us at LevittQuinn. We brought them on, and I assisted with the case by consolidating witness statements, a police report, and her interview into one supplemental declaration. I also wrote up



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examination questions to prepare us for the hearing. The hearing for a permanent restraining order occurred a week later, and it was successful. The judge granted Emily a 5-year restraining order against her father.

This experience was so satisfying for me because I feel like Emily will finally be able to live a normal teenager's life now. Her guardian family is amazing and I'm happy that she'll finally have the space that she needs to heal, to have fun with her friends, and to be a normal 13 year old. It feels like we've put agency over her life back into her hands. I hope she takes this new feeling and runs with it.

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LevittQuinn can work with any individual involved with a matter that has jurisdiction in the Los Angeles Superior Court. Given their unique structure, LevittQuinn is able to work with clients from different states, and even different countries.

Another case I was heavily involved with this summer pertains to an upcoming trial for a contested name change of a minor. Our client, who I'll call Carmen Hernandez, lived in the United States but has since been deported to Mexico. Before leaving, she had her mother appointed to be the legal guardian of her son, who I will call Jorge Hernandez. She wanted Jorge to still have all the opportunities as a U.S. citizen, and to continue living in Los Angeles. Jorge's father, Jason Garcia, was not present for his birth, nor did he petition to establish parentage until Jorge was 18 months old. He has since established parentage, terminated the existing legal guardianship, and was awarded sole custody of Jorge. Carmen's mother retains a visitation order with Jorge, so Carmen can call and connect with her son when he is at his grandmother's house. However, in most other cases, her contact with Jorge is thwarted by Jason. Jorge is now 10 years old, and Jason is requesting the L.A. court to legally change his son's name to "Jason Jorge Garcia". Jorge sometimes visits Carmen in Tijuana, but Jason has since threatened there will be no more visits for Carmen unless she agrees to the name change. Our client does not believe changing Jorge's name is in his best interest, but rather is for Jason's self-serving motives instead. She made her own request for order in their parentage case to guarantee more predictable time and visitation with her son. There will be a trial in a couple months to address both custody and the name change.

The legal standard for changing a minor's name is whether the change is in the child's best interest. My supervisor initially asked me to write an objective memorandum on whether changing Jorge's first and last name was in his best interest. I included case law and statutes from my research and applied the rules to the facts of the present case. Next, I shifted my



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writing from an objective to a persuasive perspective, drafting the memorandum of points and authorities for the trial.

I worked in finance before law school and never got to write in any significant capacity. I left my job because I wanted a career that made a more direct and meaningful impact on people's lives. I didn't realize how much I liked writing until I came to law school, but now I'm using my words to advocate for others. It feels powerful to take the law and wield it with my writing to help Carmen in this custody dispute.