



## Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Emily Smith

**Law School:** Boston College Law School

**Fellowship:** Greater Boston Legal Services, Family Law Unit

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### Entry 1:

As many of you may know, I am working for Greater Boston Legal Services this summer, in the Family Law Unit. The Family Law Unit focuses on representing survivors of domestic violence in Probate and Family Court proceedings. Because I am certified by Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Rule 3:03, I am a certified student attorney. This means I am able to represent clients in court on my own and directly advocate on their behalf. I am currently representing two clients in their divorce proceedings and immigration proceedings under VAWA. I came to law school with the intention of working with and advocating for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and with Equal Justice America, I have been able to do just that.

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### Entry 2:

The summer has been flying by at Greater Boston Legal Services Family Law Unit! Because I am a SJC Rule 3:03 Certified Student Attorney, I have had the opportunity to stand up in court on behalf of a client who is a survivor of domestic violence and plan for an in-court Pre-Trial Conference in which I will be arguing for legal and physical custody for my client and increased child support. I have also had the opportunity to maintain my own caseload of clients who are survivors of domestic violence and undergoing various court proceedings including obtaining restraining orders, divorces, child custody, and applying for status under the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA).

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### Entry 3:

Wow, I can't believe my summer at Greater Boston Legal Services is almost done! The past three weeks I have been working on a high risk domestic violence case. The survivor came to Greater Boston Legal Services Family Law Unit in need of help to enforce the restraining order against her abuser and to represent her in court as her abuser was attempting to use the court system to further abuse and traumatize the survivor. The survivor has to fight to keep sole custody of her daughter while also fighting for her right to be free from abuse. I accompanied



the survivor to the local police station to report a violation of her restraining order after the survivor tried to report it to the police and was turned away. All of the attorneys and staff of the Family Law Unit have been collaborating on this case. Before getting help from GBLS, the survivor had to advocate for herself in court by herself. If it weren't for civil legal aid, this survivor would be unaware of her rights and continue to be frustrated and re-victimized by navigating the court system alone.

I have also had the great pleasure of working with such an excellent team of interns. All five of the interns I have had the opportunity to work with are dedicated women who empower each other, bounce ideas off each other, and are passionate about the work they do. We come from four different law schools in Massachusetts, and I look forward to having my fellow interns in my network of peers post graduation from law schools.



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#### **Entry 4:**

Things have been moving fast at Greater Boston Legal Services! Today is my last post. These last few weeks have been my favorite of my internship so far. I was able to negotiate a divorce under the proper grounds for a client with opposing counsel, and stand up in court and question a client to establish a prima facie case of divorce and paternity for another client. I've felt very lucky that my court appearances have helped to bring some closure to clients, and perhaps relief that they are no longer legally bound to their abusers. I've also felt despair when hearings don't go the way we hope they do, leaving clients feeling revictimized and retraumatized.

After learning what I've learned about trauma, and how it outwardly manifests in behavior of survivors that we often see as 'counter-intuitive' or not what we would expect of the "perfect victim," I can only hope that this knowledge is becoming more widespread. Often, during court and during the process of working on a case, survivors may behave in ways we don't understand, or in ways that we may not think is in their best interest for the court case. One thing I've been told and remind myself is that survivors are doing the best they can, and sometimes the best they can do is better than the next day, or worse than the day before. All of the staff, paralegals and attorneys at Greater Boston Legal Services show a kindness and understanding towards traumatized clients that I hope I embody as an attorney. I am so grateful to GBLS and Equal Justice America for this opportunity.