



Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Molly Jane Thoms

Law School: Boston College Law School

Organization: MetroWest Legal Services

Update 1: June 18, 2021

This summer, I am grateful to be supported in my internship at MetroWest Legal Services in Framingham, Massachusetts by Equal Justice America. I am assigned to the Family Law Unit, where we work with clients who have experienced domestic violence. Recently, I have been helping my supervising attorney renegotiate a parenting agreement, draft and file documents for upcoming hearings, and prepare for a 209A restraining order renewal. In that hearing, I will represent the client through my SJC Rule 3:03 student attorney certification. The staff, clients, and fellow interns at MetroWest have been extraordinarily welcoming; it is such a privilege to work alongside them. Only having prior experience with state and federal law related to youth and education through the JRAP clinic at Boston College Law School, this area of the law is brand new to me. I have also only appeared in (Zoom) Juvenile Court... so in-person Probate & Family Court will also be a new experience. Nevertheless, family law is intertwined with juvenile law in the lives of many clients and their families, and I am thrilled to have this opportunity to develop my legal skills.

Update 2: July 2, 2021

Cruising into the end of the fifth week of my internship at MetroWest Legal Services in the Family Law Unit. Breaking news is that we appeared in-person at Concord District Court. This was my first ever non-Zoom hearing and first time taking direct testimony and cross examining an opposing party. Although we were scheduled to be heard at 9:00AM, our case was not called until 3:45, so we spent the majority of the day sitting on a bench in the lobby. It was exciting to watch the goings-on of the courthouse, even in the absence of air conditioning on a 95° degree day. My client was wonderfully patient and brave, and we successfully renewed a restraining order for her and her two kids. Shout out to my extraordinary supervising attorney who said I would want a picture to commemorate the day, along with my trusty case file.



Update 3: July 18, 2021

I am continuing to love working in the family law unit at MetroWest Legal Services. As an SJC Rule 3:03 certified student attorney, I can represent clients in court under attorney supervision. Last week, we decided to put the certification to good use and accept a restraining order / custody case that the unit would not have had the capacity to do otherwise. Under expert guidance, I did the intake call with the client on a Friday, sent notes to the supervisor over the weekend, learned we were officially accepting the case at 10AM on a Tuesday (following the Monday holiday), prepped at lightning speed for the remainder of that day and night, and showed up in court for the hearing on Wednesday morning. We were heard at three different points in the day, and the judge ultimately decided mostly in our client's favor. In the late afternoon, we got to see her reunited with her child after nearly a year of separation.

This fall at Boston College Law School, I took a class called "Civil Gideon and Access to Justice" where we learned about ways to make the legal system accessible to all. As our client and her family speak only Portuguese, I saw the language dimension of #accesstojustice come alive. In preparing for the hearing, we relied on a translator to discuss my client's experiences and develop a strategy. Inside the courtroom, everything from witness testimony and attorneys' statements down to little comments made by a judge about why we're taking a break at a certain point is supposed to be translated into the parties' native languages. In terms of promoting equity, agency, and dignity for clients within the legal system, it is imperative that people can understand the proceedings that impact their lives and relationships in such significant ways. I am deeply humbled by this work, and to Equal Justice America for supporting it.

Update 4: August 10, 2021

My time in the Family Law Unit at MetroWest Legal Services concluded in the most extraordinary way: participating in a three day federal court trial under the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. This once-in-a-law-school opportunity included filing my notice of appearance in federal court, sitting at the counsel table with my supervising attorney Abbigail Shirk, cuing up evidence to impeach witnesses and be admitted into the record through authentication, and taking direct testimony from two witnesses. Outside the courtroom, Abbigail and I had weekend and late-night work sessions to craft strategy. Litigating this three-country case on behalf of our client was challenging and eye-opening. Working at MetroWest, and particularly on this case, has deepened my understanding of being an attorney and the legal system. Never-ending thanks to Abbigail for being an incredible mentor, to the staff at MetroWest who made me feel at home in legal services, and Equal Justice America – as well as the Massachusetts Bar Foundation – for supporting my work this summer. I am entering my 3L year at Boston College Law School motivated and thankful. So that others can have experiences like this in the future, please visit <https://lnkd.in/esX3x7i>.