

Lewis, Ahmadi in Harvard Law Today: Bringing Families Back Together

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PRACTICES Immigration

Harvard Law Today quoted Haynes Boone Associates and Harvard Law School alumni, Wesley Lewis and Paloma Ahmadi, in an article about how law firms have mobilized efforts to assist families separated at the border.

Here is an excerpt:

“It’s been all hands on deck here,” says Wesley Lewis ’13, an associate at Haynes Boone in Austin, Texas, who specializes in intellectual property law. “We’ve had an incredible response from across the firm.” Along with his colleagues who have visited several Texas detention centers, Lewis has worked with recently arrived clients to help them navigate the process of seeking asylum and ensure that they receive a fair hearing.

“I worked most closely with a client who fled life-threatening violence in Honduras with her 12-year-old daughter,” Lewis says. “She was separated from her daughter for about a month, and then taken through expedited removal proceedings.” The client had not knowingly waived her right to request an immigration judge to review her situation, so the firm brought an action for due process violation and a temporary restraining order. Lewis also helped explain the process to the client, clarifying the ins and outs of legal documents and answering questions.

“We’ve been helping our clients make sure they are receiving the process to which they are entitled,” Lewis says. “We want to make sure they are given a fair shot at asylum or whatever they are seeking, and we’re making sure they get an opportunity to tell their story.” He has continued to work with other clients as the situation evolves, adding, “I’ve been grateful to have a concrete way to address this issue, which is really troubling.”

Associate Paloma Ahmadi ’10 also commented on how she has been able to utilize her legal and Spanish-speaking skills to advocate for her clients.

“I’ve been involved on behalf of two different clients who arrived in the country with children,” says Ahmadi, an associate in the firm’s San Antonio office. “I’ve been learning their story and making sure we present it as fully and transparently as we can. Being a lawyer is a privilege, and I’m always excited when I get to use my advocacy skills in a way that makes our system a little bit fairer and more transparent.”

Ahmadi, who is fluent in Spanish, has also been able to speak to her Central American clients in their native language. “That’s been a huge help,” she says. “I think I’ve been able to learn and share their stories more directly.” ...

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