

Featured Alumni

Eric Petry, Counsel, Elections and Government, Brennan Center for Justice

Tell me about the mission of the Brennan Center and your role there.

I serve as counsel in the Elections and Government Program at the Brennan Center, a non-partisan law and policy organization. Our work centers on upholding the values of democracy and equal justice and the rule of law, and we craft and advance reforms that make democracy work for everyone. My work specifically focuses on addressing money in politics, corruption, and government ethics. As research and policy counsel, I conduct empirical research to highlight how money influences the impact on representation and democratic institutions. I write reports to advocate for solutions like public financing and stronger campaign finance regulations. Additionally, I collaborate with lawmakers to draft legislation and, when necessary, contribute to litigation through Amicus Briefs and other findings in court to support our reform efforts.

You previously worked with the Brennan Center before you went to law school –what brought you back?

The Brennan Center has a unique structure, blending strengths as a think tank, advocacy group, and communications hub. It embraces a multidisciplinary approach to creating change, recognizing that legal and policy shifts begin with winning public support. This resonates with me, as my background in liberal arts research at the College of Wooster and the University of Chicago aligns with this multi-pronged strategy. It fosters creativity and curiosity in research, making our policy advocacy more effective. This approach is what initially attracted me to the Brennan Center after college, and it continues to inspire me today.

Is there anything that surprised you about the nature of your work at The Brennan Center in contrast to working in Big Law?

While there are clear differences between a law firm and a place like the Brennan Center, there are also notable similarities. Both can be fast-paced and offer diverse work. In my nine months here, I've found that think tanks, often seen as academic or slow-paced, also require quick responses—like drafting statements or analyses when issues arise in the news. I've enjoyed the blend of long-term research and fast-paced, varied work.

How did your time at Jenner shape your career?

At Jenner I worked on a wide range of issues, from appeals with Matt Hellman to sanctions with Rachel Alpert and Laurel Loomis Rimon. I also gained experience in investigations with Shreve Ariail and Marcus Childress, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to explore these areas. Many of my friends at other firms felt pigeonholed, but I never faced those constraints, which I really appreciate.

I found my stride, though, in the government controversies group on matters with Ann O'Leary, Brian Hauck, Caroline Cease, and Will Weaver. That policy-oriented work was dynamic and

fascinating, and something I hadn't even realized was a practice area when I was in law school. I worked closely with Ann O'Leary on tracking state legislation regulating tech companies, which I loved. Analyzing bill text, considering the strategy, and understanding the on-the-ground dynamics really solidified my interest in the policy space. I've carried those lessons into my current work at the Brennan Center. The experience I gained at Jenner has been directly transferable as I work with state and federal lawmakers and has helped me hit the ground running here.

You first worked at Jenner as a summer associate. What brought you back after your clerkship?

Returning to Jenner after my clerkship was an easy decision. I started as a summer associate in the Chicago office and then transferred to DC, as I was drawn to the firm's focus on policy and government-facing matters, which perfectly aligned with my career goals. What truly set Jenner apart for me was the people. From my summer associate days through my time as a junior and mid-level associate, I was able to explore a wide range of work including appeals, investigations, and trial court litigation. This diversity was key to my growth, and I always felt supported by the firm at every stage of my career.

Can you speak to the symbiotic relationship between Jenner & Block lawyers and the firm's pro bono partners?

While at Jenner, I worked on a project researching election security matters. Jenner's deep relationship with the Brennan Center, particularly through Jeremy Creelan, made it special to be part of that project. The firm's commitment to protecting democracy through pro bono work was incredibly meaningful to me. I remember when I informed Ann O'Leary about my decision to join the Brennan Center, her excitement for the organization was reassuring.

Pro bono work was also an important way for me to build skills and explore new areas. For example I got involved in sanctions and immigration matters despite no prior background, which eventually became small but consistent parts of my practice. Pro bono also helped expand my professional network, connecting me with people at the Brennan Center and other organizations, and empowered me to shape my career.

How do you stay connected with the firm and fellow alumni?

I'm excited to continue working with the firm through pro bono efforts and have made a point to stay connected with former colleagues. I built lasting friendships there. I've enjoyed attending Nationals games with former colleagues, joining dinner parties, grabbing coffee, and participating in other events. The people truly set the firm apart. I've often said that the only place I could see myself in private practice is at Jenner, and that's still true today. The strong relationships and commitment to pro bono are key reasons why.

What are your long-term goals, both professionally and personally?

I feel at home at the Brennan Center. My work is important and it feels meaningful. I get a lot of fulfillment out of what I'm doing. I'm surrounded by incredibly smart and dedicated and talented colleagues. I see myself continuing to stay in this space and working on these issues. While the threats to our institutions and system of government are real and severe, I'm glad to be here and

continuing the important work to ensure that democracy is more inclusive, effective, and robust for everyone.