

Jenner & Block Secures Life-Changing Settlement for Native Foster Youth

News

December 18, 2025

Jenner & Block successfully represented a former foster youth and member of the Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria, a federally recognized tribe in Humboldt County, California, who faced homelessness and the loss of critical services. The firm advocated for pro bono clients Madison Fisher and her tribe in litigation against the State of California and Humboldt County, securing \$45,000 in compensation and a statewide policy change that will protect Native foster youth throughout California.

Federal law protects American Indian foster youth from being penalized for receiving tribal distributions, which often serve as compensation for historical injustices committed against their tribes. Despite this protection, officials from California's Department of Social Services and Humboldt County considered these distributions in determining Extended Foster Care eligibility, leading to vulnerable former foster youths like Madison being denied benefits through the Extended Foster Care program. These former foster youths lost critical housing, education, and medical services with dire consequences.

California Tribal Families Coalition first asked the firm to review the case in 2023. After two years of litigation, the Jenner team, working alongside the California Tribal Families Coalition, reached a settlement that achieved both individual justice and systemic change: Madison won compensation for the Extended Foster Care benefits she had been wrongfully denied, the County publicly acknowledged causing harm to tribal youth, and California clarified statewide policy changes ensuring Native youth will not be forced to choose between accepting money they're rightfully owed and accessing life-sustaining services.

The team was led by Partners Kate Spelman and Todd Toral with support from Partner Keith Harper, Special Counsel Krystalyn Kinsel and Allison Tjemsland, Associates Alex Ramsey, Sriya Chadavada, Ben Seelig, and Effiong Dampha, Paralegal Supervisor Christopher Ward, Junior Paralegal Christal May, Assistant Shoeba Hassan, and former Associates Julia Hirata and Benjamin Malings.

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