



RAPPAPORT CENTER
FOR LAW AND PUBLIC POLICY

BOSTON COLLEGE | LAW

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– Jaime Watson

Jaime Watson: The Women She Knows

For Jaime Watson, there is one very specific, common thread that has woven itself through her young educational and work career: the fight for gender equity.

What began in high school with what she considered unwarranted comments from male teachers, student ridicule for her longing for a female president, and generally being “sexualized and subjugated because of my gender,” turned into motivation for dual Arizona State University degrees in Political Science and Women and Gender Studies.

She stayed the course after graduation, working for two years as a legal advocate for the Sojourner Center, a domestic violence shelter in Phoenix, where she met the women she continues to see in her mind’s eye when she considers improved policy around gender equity issues.

“If you’re too far removed from what’s actually happening in communities, whatever policy you’re working on is probably not going to be very effective in changing people’s lives,” said Jaime, now a 30-year-old, third-year student at Northeastern University School of Law. “Having that time doing direct service gives me concrete evidence to inform what I would like to see changed.”

What she wanted to see changed, specifically, were substantial loopholes in Arizona’s orders of protection statute that led to logistical nightmares for victims and potentially deadly gaps in time between when an order was filed and delivery.

Thanks to legislation Jaime helped to craft while next working at the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission, the statute was rewritten to provide for an electronic system with a central repository and a deadline of just 72 hours for protective orders to be served. The law was passed in 2018, and the new system was launched in January.

It was while at the Commission that Jaime recognized the advantages of having a law degree – both from a practical and perception standpoint – and she found her match at Northeastern Law.

She spent the first year participating in the school’s Legal Assistance to Victims Project, and now in her final year, she is thrilled she was able to use the Rappaport Fellowship to spend her summer in the office of a former Rappaport alum, State Representative Natalie Higgins.

“This was an incredible time to be involved with the Rappaport Fellowship as the legislature worked to meet the call of the Black Lives Matter movement,” she said.

While working with Rep. Higgins on legislation to assist domestic and sexual violence survivors and on issues of police reform, Jaime was left to consider the role of race in protections from gender-based violence.

“If we’re relying primarily on law enforcement to deal with domestic violence, and those communities are facing harm at the hands of law enforcement so not feeling safe in accessing services, then they’re essentially locked out of those services,” she said.

The money otherwise earmarked for those police budgets might be better served, Jaime said, redirected “to help more holistically,” she said. “These victims still need housing. They still need childcare. They still need access to counseling services.”

With a future she expects will include one foot in direct services and one in policy work, she hopes to have the opportunity to figure that out someday on behalf of those for whom she’s been fighting.

“It always comes back to the women I’ve worked with,” she said.



– Dave Cummings
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