

# PILF FELLOWSHIP

*by Emily Atwood '03*

This past summer, I worked in the Family Income Division of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), which oversees welfare and housing legislation and policy affecting children. Over the course of my internship, I worked on legislation concerning housing vouchers and unemployment insurance, but most of my work focused on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

TANF, which constitutes the segment of the welfare designated to families, was originally passed by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton in 1996. The legislation is due for reauthorization in September, so, for most of the summer, TANF (which passed the House in the spring) was working its way through the Senate.

The Senate Finance Committee was in charge of drafting the legislative language for the Senate's version of the bill. During the weeks leading to the Senate Finance Committee's hearing, I represented my division at several heated meetings of advocacy coalitions. My role was to collect information from these debriefings and report to my division with updates on the status of the legislation. On occasion, I also had the opportunity to offer input consistent with the opinions of the Family Income Division. Many of the organizations, such as my division, were unhappy with the House's version of the legislation because it requires TANF recipients to work a greater number of hours but does not support an adequate increase in childcare funding. (So, for example, a single mother could be required to work more hours but will not receive sufficient financial support to cover the costs for additional hours of childcare.) In an attempt to get the bill we wanted, calls were con-

stantly being made to senators' staffers and other so-called "heavy hitters" in DC. The dynamics of this process were unlike anything I'd seen before.

As a part of our lobbying efforts, in early July the Child Care division of CDF sponsored a rally for an increase in childcare funding. More than 200 mothers and children attended the rally—where Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Representative George Miller of California spoke—and then lobbied a number of Senators. Members of Congress and their staffs are constantly receiving calls, letters, and reports from professional lobbyists and organizations. However, it is a rare thing when normal folks knock on their door to talk about an issue they care about. This was probably one of the more memorable moments—helping normal folks lobby their congressmen and seeing the results.

In July, the Senate Finance Committee met (both the committee room and an over-flow room were packed) and passed TANF legislation that reflected many of CDF's interests. We won some of the battles but also lost a few, including the fight for more childcare funding. But that's one of the huge lessons of politics; you have to compromise and return to fight another day.

After spending almost three months working in the offices of a national advocacy organization, I can most definitely say I would like to eventually work for an organization that does similar work. I loved mixing my work on legislation with the realm of public policy. But before working for an advocacy organization, I would like to work on Capitol Hill formulating and drafting legislation. I learned a tremendous amount this summer, but probably the most valuable lesson I learned is the wide range of non-traditional careers for law graduates.