

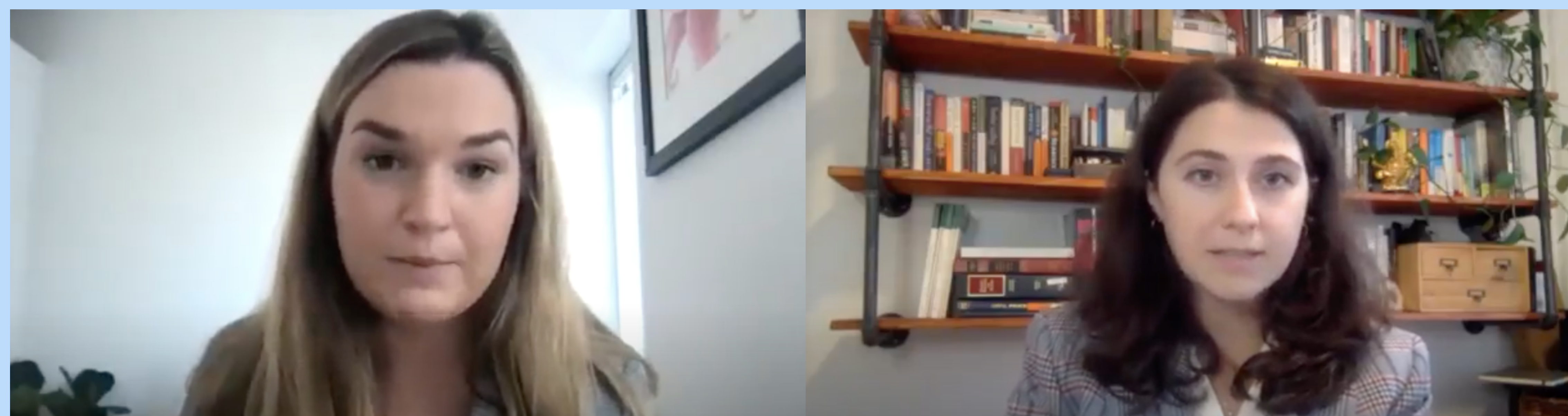
## A VERY HAPPY SDMA SIGNING AND AN IMPORTANT STORY OF HOW IT CAME ABOUT

Eric is a 21-year-old graduate of the Cooke School, with which SDMNY has a long and successful partnership (Good News [6/30/2023, 10/22/2021]). When he decided that he wanted to move out of his family's home and live independently, they did lots of research ("gathering information") and were fortunate to find Luv Michael, a program "created to provide a meaningful life for adults with autism beyond the lives of their parents" filled with "classes and community activities." In November 2021, Eric moved into his new home in Southampton where, his mom Heather reports, he is "happy and making much progress toward living a more independent life." He volunteers at a local church and is also able to engage in favorite activities, swimming and rowing. On July 15, he celebrated signing his SDMA surrounded by his housemates, family and friends.



Eric's decision to move happened during the SDMNY facilitation process, and we're sure that the ways in which his family provided support for that decision drew on their work in moving toward an SDMA. But there's also a great back story about how they all got there.

Although committed to fostering Eric's independence, his parents began a guardianship proceeding after he turned 18 because they were told it was needed. The Surrogate in Kings County appointed a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) to investigate and make a recommendation, and tapped into the Disability and Civil Rights Clinic at Brooklyn Law School where students had learned about the human right to make one's own decisions regardless of disability, and how SDM supports that right. When they met with Eric, the students were convinced that he did not need the draconian loss of rights involved in guardianship, and recommended SDM and SDMNY facilitation as an alternative. Although sympathetic, Eric's parents were concerned that, at some point, a third party—a healthcare worker or someone else—might refuse to accept Eric's decision and deny him needed services.



Students Jane and Lydia from the Brooklyn Law School Clinic assigned as the GAL in Eric's case

The students were able to share that SDMA legislation was likely and would solve the problem— if Eric had an SDMA that was created through a facilitation process, third parties would be *required* to accept his consent just as they would anyone else's, and could not consider his disability. Eric and his family had faith that the legislation would be proposed and passed and Eric signed up with SDMNY, suspending the guardianship proceedings. And, of course, that's exactly what happened! (Good News [7/29/2023])

Eric is living proof of the importance of New York's new SDMA legislation, not only in providing a remedy to discrimination against people with I/DD, but in incentivizing the use of SDM and dissuading families from unnecessarily pursuing guardianship. Eric says he plans to use his SDMA "in his life as a Decision-Maker", noting that, "when I need help in making a decision, I know who to ask." We know he will!

We are grateful to Eric and his family for believing that SDM would be a "better way" for him to live his best life, and for their faith that New York would provide a way to avoid the third-party discrimination against people with I/DD that so often results in unnecessary guardianship. And we are proud and honored that our work over the past 6 years has made such a difference.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO ERIC, HIS FAMILY AND SUPPORTERS, AND THANK YOU ALL!**