



**“I am
beyond
thankful.”**

Smart and determined, Alena*, a young Latina woman, graduated high school with a newborn son and got her college degree as a single parent. Throughout this time, she suffered severe abuse from her child’s father and lax response from the police despite having a restraining order. After her child’s father tracked her down and brutally assaulted her, she came to the **Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law** and found safety and justice for herself and her son.

Unprotected by the Law

The violence began after Alena tried to break up with her son’s father. Over the next couple of years, he threatened to kill her, strangled and punched her, and showed up at her house with a gun. Fearing for her life and her son's, Alena went to court without legal help and received a short-term restraining order for eighteen months. The judge made custody orders which permitted the father to see his son. Using the pretext of court-ordered child visits, her former boyfriend continued his abuse, often in front of their son.



Once, he broke into her home, yanked her by the hair, bit her neck, and choked her. She called the police, but they did nothing except file a report. Believing that the police would not protect her from abuse, she gave up calling them, hoping to defuse the situations on her own.

Terror Returns

After months of calm, Alena’s abuser tracked her down once the time-limited domestic violence restraining order expired. She struggled to get away from him, but he slammed her onto the cement causing searing pain to her neck and spine. Her breast and neck bled openly where he had viciously bit her again to “mark” her as his. She scrambled as quickly as she could under a parked car to escape his crazed assault. Onlookers called the police. Once she was safe, Alena looked for legal help and found the Harriett Buhai Center for Family Law.

No Longer Alone

After Alena told her story to the Harriett Buhai Center’s lawyers, they immediately took her case. The Center helped her get an emergency temporary restraining order protecting herself and her son with no visits to his father. The

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Center's volunteer program found a pro bono lawyer to represent her, and together they obtained the maximum restraining order for five years, which upon application can be renewed permanently. Alena was awarded full custody of her son without allowing his father to visit until he completes a batterer's intervention program. At the Center's urging, Alena sought additional medical consultation and is now getting treated for the permanent damage to her spine caused by the last assault.

Epilogue

In addition to the family law case, the Center's lawyers contacted the detectives on Alena's behalf, and they are pursuing criminal cases against her abuser. The Center also referred her to the District Attorney's Bureau of Victim Services for assistance through the criminal process and pursuit of possible funds under the state's Crime Victim Compensation law. With Alena's permission, the Center notified authorities and asked them to investigate the failure of the police to properly enforce her restraining order.

Alena appreciates all of the support from the Harriett Buhai Center. She says, **"I was completely lost before I found the Center. With their help, I had my voice heard. I don't think I would have been able to do all of this alone."**

**Client's name and photo have been changed to protect her privacy.*

This letter was received from Alena. It has been condensed for clarity.

Dear Harriett Buhai Center,

I am speechless—you don't know how much it meant to me everything that was done. There's nothing I could say to express my gratitude. I am beyond thankful.

Thank you for helping me get a new restraining order. You provided guidance and support. I am grateful for you pushing the police detectives to take criminal action against my abuser.

You also gave me the reassurance that I was doing everything correctly. Now, I understand the court order, and I am able to tell the police and show them the language in the court order.

I greatly appreciate you coming to court and just being there for me. I was extremely nervous, but I'm glad it went well and that I had all of you there with me.

Thank you for having my voice heard. I don't think I would have been able to do all this alone.

Gratefully,

Alena

