



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Thao Ho

**Law School:** NYU School of Law

**Organization:** The Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice

---

### Update 1:

This summer, I am excited to be working as a Legal Intern in the Civil Action Practice at The Bronx Defenders, funded in part by Equal Justice America. The Bronx Defenders is a public defender nonprofit that is radically transforming how low-income people in the Bronx are represented in the criminal legal system and, in doing so, is transforming the system itself. The Civil Action Practice specifically works with clients in civil court and creates access to basic civil needs, including housing, forfeiture, employment & income, access to public benefits, community reentry, and government misconduct.

---

### Update 2:

This summer, I will be providing updates on my internship at the Civil Action Practice within The Bronx Defenders. I'm already halfway into my internship and I have gotten a taste of what community-centered and client-oriented holistic defense can look like. I have had the opportunity to conduct legal research on tenant harassment, assess the viability of tenants' warranty of habitability claims, observe proceedings in criminal and civil courts, and engage residents of the Bronx in participatory budgeting. I know that this summer will continue to afford me more opportunities to witness how legal services, political advocacy, and community organizing can merge to transform local communities.

---

### Update 3:

As my summer begins to wrap up, I wanted to share some amazing events I was able to participate in at The Bronx Defenders. Last week, I tabled at The Bronx Defenders' annual block party to share information on how to file a Notice of Claim, a required form to notify the city of an individual's intention to bring a lawsuit against a city agency in New York. This week, I volunteered at their monthly Reentry Clinic with one of my supervisors, Babatunde Aremu. In between, I have served as a mock juror for the Defenders' Academy, begun drafting a complaint to the New York City Human Rights Commission under the Fair Chance Act, and



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

conducted an interview with a tenant regarding potential harassment claims against their landlord. Every day looks different in holistic practice, but being able to play all these different roles has taught me how to be an advocate that can adapt to the needs of our community members.

---

## **Update 4:**

How quickly time flies - this week is my second to last week with The Bronx Defenders. One of the experiences that I will carry with me the most from this summer is the cruel, daunting nature of housing court. Watching our clients struggle with navigating their case as they go through immense pressure and trauma is a forceful reminder of how legal systems like housing court disproportionately harm low-income communities of Color. All the more apparent is how courts often operate within a silo without recognizing the impact of gentrification, income instability, and environmental racism on these same communities. Although New York City provides tenants with the right to have a lawyer when facing eviction, there is always a constant demand for civil legal service providers to fight against the city's housing crisis.

---

## **Update 5:**

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to work at The Bronx Defenders this summer. I learned so much from my amazing supervisors, Georgia Decker and Babatunde Aremu, Esq., and was able to practice holistic defense under their guidance. I met attorneys, staff, and fellow interns who are so passionate about the work they do. I worked on numerous assignments and projects to fight for tenants' and workers' rights. And I got to interact with community members through The Bronx Defenders' outreach and organizing opportunities throughout the year. All of this was possible because of where I worked, and Equal Justice America made my work more financially accessible. If you would like to support additional funding for students interested in civil legal services, please consider donating to Equal Justice America.