

August 31, 2017

Dan Ruben, Executive Director  
Equal Justice America  
13540 East Boundary Road  
Building II, Suite 204 Midlothian, VA 23112

Dear Mr. Ruben,

This past summer, I worked as an intern at Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A in Brooklyn, New York. I worked in the Group Housing Unit, where we largely brought affirmative cases on behalf of groups of tenants who were experiencing difficulties with their landlords.

Many of our clients experienced hardship because their units were rent stabilized. In New York City, landlords can only increase the rent of rent stabilized units by guidelines established by the city. Typically, this means landlords can increase the rent of these units by 1% or 2% per year. However, if a unit rent stabilized has a vacancy, the landlord can increase the rent by 20% between the two tenancies. In addition, if a landlord makes capital improvements to a unit, the landlord can increase the rent by 1/40<sup>th</sup> of the total cost of the capital improvements (examples would be a kitchen renovation, bathroom renovation, gut renovation, etc.). Currently, once a unit's registered rent goes about \$2700, the unit is considered de-regulated and the landlord can charge whatever rent he or she chooses. These are considered market rate apartments. This means that landlords will do whatever is necessary to get the rent above \$2700, and because my organization works largely in quickly gentrifying areas of Brooklyn (Williamsburg, Bushwick, Bed-Stuy, Greenpoint), there is a high demand for apartments.

Our clients faced many different issues with their landlords. For the most part, their landlords try to force them out by failing to make repairs, shutting off heat or hot water, or worse. Rent stabilized tenants have a legal right to a lease renewal every year, meaning there are very few reasons that a landlord can legally evict a rent stabilized tenant. Thus, they turn to the less savory methods mentioned earlier. Our cases often involve organizing groups of tenants who have the same issues with one landlord, and filing a suit for the landlord to make repairs. After a court order is issued, the landlord must follow the judge's instructions, or the landlord risks being held in contempt.

Many of our clients simply want to stay in their homes with basic necessities, such as a functioning stove, hot water, and heat. Our clients are kind and thankful, and I have built meaningful relationships. I would not have been able to do this work without my Equal Justice America Fellowship, and I am beyond thankful for this opportunity.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ Lindsey Eckert

Lindsey Eckert  
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