

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

Dear Mr. Ruben,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Equal Justice America Summer 2017 Fellowship. I completed a ten week internship with the Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice. The Civil Action Practice integrates civil representation within the Bronx Defenders' team-based structure, working with criminal/immigration/family defense attorneys to minimize the severe and unforeseen civil penalties enmeshed with criminal and family court involvement.

Over the summer, I advocated for clients in Bronx Housing Court. I am grateful to my supervisors for giving me the opportunity to interview clients, write affidavits, serve subpoenas, and generally adding context and life to the formal legal education I have received thus far. One particularly memorable client was a woman who had been in the New York City shelter system for four years until she was finally given a housing voucher for her own apartment. Her landlord was alleging that she had not paid rent, even though the city agencies which ran the voucher program were wholly responsible for ensuring that the landlord received the rent payments. She had done more than her share of due diligence in trying to understand why the payments weren't being cashed by her landlord and yet she had been threatened with eviction multiple times, putting her and her young son at risk of homelessness. Despite all of the stress and trauma she had faced, she remained joyous and hopeful throughout. When she was threatened with eviction once more, I wrote an Order to Show Cause to demand that the landlord and the city agency appear in court to justify their inability to solve the rent discrepancies that had put our client at risk of homelessness despite her full compliance with the voucher requirements. The order was granted and she was able to stay in her apartment. This case demonstrated to me the need for a right to counsel in housing court, where the vast majority of tenants appear unrepresented. Had the Bronx Defenders not been there for our client, she would have been rendered homeless through no fault of her own. The amount of effort that went into retaining an apartment for a single client underscored how frustrating and complicated it can be for a low-income person in New York City to maintain stable housing.

In addition, I participated in the community intake process, where I screened people for eligibility for representation. The most difficult part of community intake was telling people that we would not be able to help them. The Bronx Defenders is already a very comprehensive organization and yet it can only address a few of the numerous legal barriers faced by low-income people. The process for individuals to finally obtain the help they need can feel like broken telephone, an endless cycle of referrals to other people who may or may not be able to

help. Having to turn away community members was a powerful experience, as it illustrated the depth of the need for increased indigent legal services funding.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for supporting this opportunity and for encouraging law students to delve into civil legal services work. My summer was incredibly meaningful and working for the Bronx Defenders reinforced my passion for social justice.

Sincerely,

Courtney Kan  
New York University School of Law  
Class of 2019