

August 31, 2018

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

Dear Mr. Ruben:

Thank you so much for the opportunity to be an Equal Justice America Legal Services Fellow again this summer. Your generous fellowship supported my 2L summer work in the Civil Defense Practice at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS), a holistic public defense nonprofit organization. Holistic public defense is about providing comprehensive representation to low-income clients not only in criminal matters but also in the variety of civil matters that people are experiencing at the same time as—and often as a result of—their criminal cases. The generalist Civil Defense Practice at NDS provides legal help primarily with housing, but also with a range of other civil legal issues including employment, public benefits, asset forfeiture, and healthcare. NDS also has dedicated teams for Immigration Defense, Family Defense, and Youth Law.

At NDS, every Wednesday is community intake day: anyone from the community can come into the office with any legal issue and request representation. Every week this summer, I participated in community intake by conducting interviews with prospective clients. One man I interviewed told me that he had been illegally locked out of his apartment because he allegedly got into a physical fight with another resident of the building. The landlord had called the police to remove him without first bringing him to Housing Court as the law requires. As a result, this man had been street homeless for over a month when I met him. We took on his case and had him restored to his room a couple of weeks later. I was thrilled to accompany my client on the day that the landlord let him back in.

Another client whom I interviewed during community intake had been forced to quit his job as a bill poster because the police kept arresting him for posting bills. He had been arrested numerous times and had begun to suffer immigration-related consequences because he was not a U.S. citizen, so he had no safe option other than to resign. When he applied for unemployment benefits, his application was denied on the basis that he had quit without good cause. I met this client on a Wednesday and his unemployment appeal was scheduled for that Friday. I collaborated with an NDS attorney to prepare for this hearing in less than 48 hours, and at the hearing, I performed the direct examination of the client. We successfully persuaded the administrative law judge that being arrested for doing one's job is good cause to quit, and the judge reversed the denial of benefits.

Finally, one of the clients with whom I worked closely this summer was facing possible eviction from public housing because her grandson had been arrested. Although he did not live [in] her apartment and was not in the apartment at the time of his arrest, the public housing authority commenced proceedings to terminate the grandmother's tenancy because of his arrest. Once the

housing authority had threatened her with eviction, it then pressured her to sign an agreement to permanently exclude her grandson, meaning not only that he could never live with her but that he could never return to the premises—not even to visit, not even on holidays. She came close to signing the stipulation out of fear of eviction, but ultimately decided to go forward with a hearing. Faced with a tenant armed with representation and determined to vindicate her due process rights, the housing authority agreed to settle for probation.

My experience working in eviction defense during my 1L summer, also supported by an EJA Fellowship grant, was so powerful that I decided to become a lawyer for low-income tenants. This summer at NDS cemented my hope to use my law degree to represent people within that group who are having housing difficulties due to contact with the criminal justice system. I very much appreciate your support of my work during these two formative summers.

Sincerely,

Molly M. Rugg  
J.D. Candidate, Class of 2019  
New York University School of Law



## NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM

September 4, 2018

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

**RE: Molly Rugg, EJA Fellowship Recipient**

Dear Mr. Ruben,

It with great pleasure I write to you regarding Molly Rugg's summer fellowship in the Civil Defense Practice at Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS). NDS's Civil Defense Practice represents residents of Upper Manhattan facing collateral consequences of contact with the criminal justice systems and the family court systems. The Civil Defense Practice handles matters ranging from eviction defense to civil forfeiture proceedings and public benefits hearings to reducing barriers to re-entry.

Molly was an eager and valuable participant in the day-to-day work of the Civil Defense Practice. Throughout the summer, Molly worked on a variety of cases including an illegal lockout proceeding, an Unemployment Insurance Benefits hearing, an application to seal a record of conviction, and New York City Housing Authority ("NYCHA") termination of tenancy cases, including an Article 78 appeal of a NYCHA decision to terminate a longstanding tenancy due to a criminal conviction. Molly played an active role in each of these cases through conducting client interviews, identifying defenses, researching and writing, and preparing for hearings. Molly also handled community intake one day per week, meeting with members of the community on a walk-in basis, assessing cases for representation, and offering advice and counsel. Through each task, Molly exhibited the utmost professionalism and consistently produced excellent work product.

NDS is grateful that EJA makes it possible for exceptional law students like Molly to join in our organization's mission to provide the highest quality holistic legal representation to the residents of Upper Manhattan. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "EPW", written in a cursive style.

Emily Ponder Williams  
Supervising Attorney  
eponder@ndsny.org