



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** John Calandra

**Law School:** Cornell Law School

**Organization:** Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline

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**Update 1:** I'm excited to share that this summer I was selected as an Equal Justice of America Fellow and am working for the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline. I am about one month into my summer internship where I have been primarily assisting Ithaca based tenants by helping research the applicable law in cases involving disputes with landlords where the tenant's rights are being infringed upon. Not only has this position been an amazing learning opportunity thus far (drafting memorandum, communicating with clients, helping compose letters to opposing counsel, etc.), but it has been unbelievably rewarding to see firsthand the impact that legal guidance can make on a person/family's life. The Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline primarily handles cases in which tenants are experiencing financial hardship, and therefore may have no alternative route to obtaining legal advice. The Hotline is really making a huge difference in helping improve the lives of tenants in the Ithaca area, and I am proud of the small part I have been able to play thus far.

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**Update 2:** This summer I was selected as an Equal Justice of America Fellow and have been interning at the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline. I have been at the position for over a month now helping to assist Ithaca tenants in disputes with their landlords. One of my recent cases was a situation in which we provided advice to a pregnant mother who discovered that her apartment has a lead-based paint problem. The presence of lead in her home is posing a threat to her young children as well as her unborn child. After researching the relevant law, my supervisors and I drafted a response letter to opposing counsel and expect for all of the tenant's demands to be addressed and the situation remedied.

The Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline has been able to provide free legal advice and guidance in many other cases just like this one. My internship has been both an amazing learning opportunity as well as incredibly rewarding experience to make a significant impact on the lives of multiple tenants in a community in which I, myself, am a tenant. The Hotline is really making a positive impact on the Ithaca community, and the support that the Equal Justice of America has been providing is vital to the continual success of the program.

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**Update 3:** This is my third update for the Equal Justice of America Fellowship grant that I have received this summer for my internship at the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline. I have been in this position for more than two months now. Each week, my fellow interns and I are given cases that involve disputes between Ithaca tenants and their landlords. After we research the applicable law, we prepare memoranda which are reviewed by



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supervising attorneys. After our memos are approved, we communicate our findings to the tenants and provide them with advice as well as options for handling their dispute.

The Tenants Legal Hotline has been an invaluable source of legal advice and guidance for many tenants in Ithaca who are not able to access traditional forms of paid legal assistance. Equal Justice of America's support allows for programs like the Hotline to continue to recruit interns to help make a positive impact.

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**Update 4:** This is my final update for the Equal Justice of America Fellowship grant that I have received this summer for my internship at the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline. This past week was my last week working at the ITLH, and I am truly grateful for the experience. Every week, I was able to take on new and complex issues that were impacting families across Tompkins County. During my internship, I worked on a case dealing with the improper disclosure of lead-based-paint, cases in which Tenants sought to terminate their lease agreements, wrongful taking of security deposits, breach of implied warranty of habitability, constructive eviction, retaliatory eviction, and so many more. Through researching the law for all of these cases, I learned a great deal about the legal landscape of tenant/landlord relationships, but I also learned that there are so many individuals who are being taken advantage of because they may not know their rights or be able to obtain legal representation. The Tenants Legal Hotline has been an invaluable source of legal advice and guidance for many tenants in Ithaca who are not able to access traditional forms of paid legal assistance. Equal Justice of America's support allows for programs like the Hotline to continue to recruit interns to help make a positive impact.

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**Update 5:** As I have posted before, I was fortunate to have received the Equal Justice of America Fellowship grant this past summer. This grant helped fund my internship position as a Legal Intern at the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline. I am truly grateful for the experience and the guidance that I received over the course of the internship. Every week, I was able to take on new and complex issues that were impacting families across Tompkins County. Some of the cases that I assisted on involved the improper disclosure of lead-based-paint, cases in which Tenants sought to terminate their lease agreements, wrongful taking of security deposits, breach of implied warranty of habitability, constructive eviction, retaliatory eviction, and so many more. Together, my fellow interns and I were able to collectively secure thousands of dollars worth of relief for the tenants that we assisted. Many of these Tenants did not know that they were entitled to significant relief; they simply recognized that something unfair was taking place with their landlords and reached out to us in desperation.

As I return to school this semester, I will be sure to use all the practical legal knowledge that I accumulated this summer, but I will also keep in mind the sad truth that there are so many individuals who are being taken advantage of because they may not know their rights or be able to obtain legal representation. I hope to be a part of organizations (like The Tenants Legal Hotline) going forward, as these programs are an invaluable source of legal advice and guidance for many who are not able to access traditional forms of paid legal assistance. Equal Justice America's support allows for these programs to continue to recruit interns to help make a positive impact.