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Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Neighborhood Legal Services Program

Update 1: I feel like I hit the ground running during these first two weeks at Neighborhood Legal Services Programs. The first week was full of information sessions. I got to meet the other five summer interns and we learned more about NLSP as an organization. NLSP provides free legal information, advice, and representation to low-income DC residents on civil legal matters. NLSP is divided into three main units - brief services, family law, and housing law. This summer, I will be working in the housing unit with my supervising attorney Itta. The second week of my internship, I got to sit in on a client intake call with Itta. Afterwards I drafted an email summarizing the call and explaining next steps to the client. I also learned how to fill out a housing conditions complaint form. Whenever I had downtime, I also took the opportunity to observe court to familiarize myself with the landlord-tenant litigation process. Overall, I am really looking forward to my summer here at NLSP.

Update 2: I have learned so much during my first month at NLSP. I have written several demand letters to landlords who denied our clients' rental applications based on credit score or voucher status. In DC this is against the law. I also worked on a research assignment for an attorney who wanted to know whether she should file an amicus brief or a motion to intervene. In this case, the District had stepped into the shoes of the client to negotiate a settlement agreement with the Defendant. The attorney wanted to ensure her client's needs were adequately met by the agreement. The other housing unit intern and I recommended an amicus brief since it would be slightly less work than a motion to intervene, and the District expressed desire to meet the client's needs. I also did my first client visit this week. Communication was difficult because she was a Spanish speaker and I can not speak Spanish at all. I realized I should have used a translator or brought someone to help translate. I am keeping this in mind as I move forward. I love the variety of learning opportunities I get to have here at NLSP.

Update 3: In the past two weeks I have really been able to improve my legal drafting skills. Some of the documents I have helped draft include motions to dismiss, answers, counter-complaints, and jury demands. I have also helped write several temporary restraining orders. One was for a client who had black mold growing inside her apartment. This client also had a young asthmatic daughter. In the TRO, we asked the court to order



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the landlord to remediate the mold problem immediately. The other TRO was for a client whose landlord had shut off all running water to her apartment. This meant that the client and her toddler grandson did not have access to basic plumbing. The TRO requested the landlord to immediately restore water to the client's unit. In addition to drafting assignments, I did a couple of home visits. One was with the other housing unit intern for her supervising attorney. This client's apartment was infested with mice. There were droppings all throughout the unit including on the pillows of her children's beds and in the kitchen. We took pictures of the apartment to keep record of the damage. The other home visit was for one of Itta's clients. The client and her grandson are living in an illegal basement unit that the landlord built without a valid permit. The unit does not have any windows or adequate ceiling height, and the kitchen in the basement lacks proper ventilation making it dangerous. The DCHA inspector who did the visit deemed the unit uninhabitable due to multiple DC Housing Code violations. Through visiting these clients and drafting TROs I was both shocked and disappointed by the living situations of many of NLSP's clients. Especially because DC is known to have favorable tenant laws compared to many other states. Although this was discouraging, it made me all the more grateful for and proud of organizations such as NLSP that work to protect vulnerable tenants.

Update 4: It is hard to believe I only have less than two weeks left at my internship with NLSP. I am working on a longer term TOPA project. TOPA is the Tenants Opportunity to Purchase Act which was passed in 1980 to combat urban displacement and help tenants become homeowners. Under this law, when a developer seeks to purchase an apartment building, the tenants must be given the opportunity to purchase the building, or they may assign their purchasing rights to a third party. The attorneys at NLSP are trying to put together a case concerning the purchasing of several properties by a company that may have violated TOPA. The company may have solicited signatures from tenants to create invalid tenant associations in order to assign their rights to the company. This week I also learned how to draft discovery documents - writing interrogatories and document production requests. Something I particularly enjoyed these past few weeks has been observing Itta and some of the other attorneys in court. It was inspiring to see how all of the attorneys are able to think quickly on their feet and speak eloquently under pressure from the judge and sometimes contentious opposing counsel. I helped one of the attorneys, Mary, write a summary of her motion to present before the court. She was incredibly composed during her argument despite the opposing counsel's aggressive behavior. Afterwards, she told me that as a woman of color in the field of law, she has often dealt with similar experiences. Nevertheless, seeing the NLSP attorneys in action in the courtroom has reinforced my goal to pursue a career in litigation.

Update 5: My summer at NLSP has come to an end. I am sad to leave the work which has been challenging, exciting, and rewarding at the same time. But more than that, I will miss the other interns and attorneys. One thing I really enjoyed about my internship was the opportunity I had to do assignments for almost all the attorneys in the housing unit. It was a great experience learning to work with so many different people and gleaning as much as I could from each person. I have to underscore the immense role my supervising attorney, Itta, played in my growth as a legal researcher and writer. I appreciated how she was so willing to let me participate in all her projects, whether that be taking the lead on clients calls, accompanying her on home visits,



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drafting motions, or attending court. Itta was also great at providing me with constructive criticism which helped me improve my research and writing skills more efficiently. In these last two weeks I have continued to work on challenging and interesting projects. One of the assignments I enjoyed in particular was helping with an order to show cause for the DC Court of Appeals. In this case, the client had her housing voucher terminated without a fair hearing. When the client moved into the apartment, she was registered as a live-in-aide because she was caring for her mother. Later, the client's sister essentially elder-napped her mother to Florida, so the client was living in the apartment by herself. After her mother had moved out, the client got her housing voucher recertified. Now, DCHA has terminated her voucher and denied her a fair hearing because of a statute that says live-in-aides are not entitled to fair hearings. However, there is a dispute of fact whether the client is a live-in-aide, so NLSP is appealing the case. I worked on the part of the argument that demonstrates the petitioner is aggrieved because she has been denied her procedural due process rights. When I first started this internship, I was not sure I would be able to write any motions, let alone motions that would make their way to the DC Court of Appeals. I think one of the most rewarding experiences I've had NLSP was finding out that several of the motions to dismiss that I worked on actually resulted in the landlords dismissing their cases. I also really enjoyed interacting with clients and being able to help them, even in small ways, was the best feeling. It reminded me why I wanted to become a lawyer in the first place. Overall, I had an excellent experience at NLSP this summer. I grew not only as a legal thinker, writer, and researcher, but also as a person. I made friends and mentors I hope to keep throughout law school and beyond. All of this would not have been possible without EJA's grant. I appreciate the support this organization has given law students to explore public interest work. Best of luck to the next generation of EJA Fellows!