



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2022 EJA Fellow:



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**Law School:** University of Wisconsin Law School

**Organization:** Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

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**Update 1:** This week, I'm entering my second week as a legal intern in the Housing Defense Practice at Neighborhood Defender Service in their Harlem office. NDS is a community oriented, holistic public defense office providing a wide range of legal services to its clients in order to address the underlying issues that bring them into contact with the criminal legal system. So far, I have enjoyed being trained in all of NDS' practice areas, including criminal defense, immigration, housing defense, family defense, and other civil legal consequences that often accompany criminal charges and convictions.

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**Update 2:** Since my last EJA Fellow Update, I've been helping my supervising attorneys with a variety of tasks at Neighborhood Defender Service. Anything I can do to assist the Housing Defense Practice translates to their increased capacity to serve more clients - especially time-consuming tasks like printing out materials to prepare for a rare trial in Housing Court or painstakingly combing through old files at the courthouse. I've also conducted a home visit to assess the maintenance and repairs needed in a client's home and written legal memos about a public assistance program's effect on a person's application for citizenship as well as the nuts and bolts of succession rights in rent-controlled apartments.

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**Update 3:** Time for another EJA Fellow Update! Last week, I was fielding calls at the Neighborhood Defender Service hotline for the Harlem community where people call in seeking legal advice or representation on a civil legal matter - often, the issue is housing related. Even though NYC has a Right to Counsel, housing defense practitioners in the city are operating at capacity: there are more people seeking representation than attorneys available to competently represent them in eviction hearings. This means it's important that I make callers feel comfortable right away, ask the right questions, and - most importantly - listen to get all of the necessary information to take back to the Housing Defense Team so that we can give them the best legal advice even if we can't represent them. I'm hopeful that my work this summer helps to make the right to counsel a reality for New Yorkers.

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**Update 4:** As my internship at Neighborhood Defender Service draws to a close, I've been working on a variety of different matters: research to support a motion for summary judgment for the first client I met with this summer, writing my first answer, and helping to organize materials for a client's application for assistance paying off past due rent. Because NDS is a holistic public defense office, not everything I work on is strictly related to a housing court case: some tasks, like the One Shot Deal application I have been gathering materials for this week, are meant to support clients who have fallen behind on rent payments as they navigate the bureaucracy of available assistance. Ensuring clients have access to the resources available is one of the most important things we do, and a holistic practice honors the interconnectedness of a clients' legal wins and their material wellbeing.

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**Update 5:** It's hard to believe that my summer internship with Neighborhood Defender Service is already over! I'm grateful to NDS Harlem and Equal Justice America for providing me with this opportunity to learn and grow as an advocate in a new setting. From conducting home visits with clients and operating our civil legal advice hotline to honing my legal research and writing skills and observing summary proceedings in a very crowded New York City Housing Court, there are innumerable lessons from my time working with the Housing Defense Team that I will take with me into 3L and beyond as I begin my legal career.

Thanks to Equal Justice America for providing me with an Equal Justice America Fellowship, which made this experience possible.