



Summer 2019 EJA Fellow:



Name: Avi Rothfeld

Law School: Fordham Law

Fellowship: Bronx Legal Services

Entry 1:

This summer, I am interning at Bronx Legal Services in their Housing unit and I am proud to have gotten an Equal Justice America fellowship for this work. This will be the first of a series of posts throughout the summer with updates on my internship.

At orientation, they told us, “All eyes are on New York City.” In 2017, New York became the first city in the nation to provide a right to counsel for low-income tenants facing eviction. After spending just one day in the chaotic and overcrowded Bronx Housing Court, it was unbelievable that many people had been left to represent themselves before the law passed. In the first year since the right to counsel was enacted, evictions in the Bronx were down 23%. Most recently, a sweeping reform of New York state housing laws is on its way to getting signed, which will make a huge difference for Bronx Legal Services’ clients.

I am learning the obstacles low-income tenants are up against in the housing court system and the devastating results for families who are unable to keep their homes. And I also see that the attorneys are optimistic about changes in the law going forward, which will give their clients a fighting chance. It is thus a fascinating time to be spending the summer working in housing law.

Entry 2:

This is my second update from my summer internship at Bronx Legal Services, with the support of Equal Justice America. Last week, I assisted the attorneys at UA (Universal Access) Referral Day at Bronx Housing Court. Under New York law, low-income tenants facing eviction in certain zip codes are entitled to an attorney. It is our job to find them and make them aware of this right. Once a week, Bronx Legal Services is assigned to seek out tenants in court and see if they qualify for this free legal service. Finding them is not easy. Another intern and I assisted the attorneys in yelling out names in the hallway outside the courtroom from a long list of potentially-eligible tenants in court that day. After going through all the names on the list a few times without



any response, it seemed like we would be endlessly calling out the same names. But eventually we were approached by people who heard their name called. We then asked them a few questions to see if they were eligible before giving their information over to those conducting intake in the small Bronx Legal Services office down the hall. By the end of the morning, we had gotten through nearly the entire list. It was exhausting. My voice was tired. I couldn't imagine a less efficient system. But it was satisfying knowing that the clients we would be able to represent would have a better chance of fighting their case – and that they wouldn't have to go at this alone.

Entry 3:

This is my third update from my summer internship in the housing unit at Bronx Legal Services, with the support of Equal Justice America

As the summer is nearing a close, I am appreciating the range of experiences I have been able to get at Bronx Legal Services, supporting the attorneys defending low-income tenants facing eviction. From assisting with intake at housing court, to drafting a motion for summary judgment arguing that the petitioner was delayed in asserting its claim, to writings parts of a post-trial brief for a client's warranty of habitability counterclaim, my summer internship has allowed me to work on really interesting cases at various stages. At the same time, I have become more engaged with tenant's rights issues and have a better understanding of New York landlord-tenant law. I am constantly inspired by the commitment and passion of the attorneys at Bronx Legal Services, who are always seeking creative and novel ways to improve the outcomes for our clients.

Entry 4:

This is my final update on my summer internship with Bronx Legal Services, with the support of Equal Justice America. I am so grateful to have had such a meaningful experience over this past summer. In addition to my substantive work assisting the attorneys in the housing unit, I got a very well-rounded experience, through which I came to appreciate the rich history of the Bronx and the communities we served. I took part in workshops and attended smaller group meetings that helped expand my knowledge of the issues facing Bronx residents and learned more about the effects of poverty in America more broadly.

In addition, there were many fun activities and outings planned for us that allowed us interns to connect with one another and with all the attorneys and staff. Not to brag, but my team won the first annual Bronx Legal Services Trivia Competition.