



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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Update 1: I'm excited to receive funding through Equal Justice America to support my legal work with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights with their Equitable Community Development and Housing team over the next 10 weeks. As Chicago rapidly gentrifies and fails to adequately rebuild public housing, advocates must continually support policies and development that protect low-income tenants and increase affordable housing. I am excited to support community-lead and grassroots civil rights initiatives that center marginalized communities in directing the development of their own neighborhoods. CLCCR lawsuits, like the one linked below accusing HUD and the Chicago Housing Authority of civil rights violations, work to amplify the voices of community organizations seeking for more fair and equitable housing policies in Chicago and beyond. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-chicago-fire-cha-hud-lawsuit-land-lease-20230602-bsfeocz4zetdori2srvcgrpq-story.html>

Update 2: Just this morning, WBEZ published a report showing that Cook County's eviction rates have reached pre-pandemic levels. A combination of steep rent increases throughout the region and the end of pandemic-era eviction moratoriums have exacerbated this crisis. A disproportionate amount of evictions are taking place in majority-Black neighborhoods, sustaining the pre-pandemic patterns of racist housing law enforcement and failed safe-guards for folks at risk of eviction. <https://www.wbez.org/stories/cook-county-evictions-back-to-pre-pandemic-levels/3e34bc0c-10b9-4e77-93be-4811ff6e541d>

While in the short term, individuals facing eviction can contact cookcountylegalaid.org for free legal help and to get connected with rental assistance, the skyrocketing eviction rate and increasing cost of housing must be addressed. Alleviating housing insecurity and the racial housing disparity in the long run means recommitting to public and affordable housing, fore fronting communities in neighborhood development, working towards legalizing rent control and stabilization in Illinois, and empowering tenants and communities to challenge the evictions of their neighbors. I am proud to be working with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights' Equitable Community Development and Housing team this summer towards an affordable city and equitable neighborhoods.

Update 3: The affordable housing and eviction crises in this country are unabating. The structure of eviction courts are not designed for tenants facing eviction, who are often economically burdened and institutionally



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disadvantaged as compared to the landlords seeking their removal. Housing advocates must insist on retaining certain pandemic-era protections for tenants seeking evictions and envision new, creative ways to avoid punishing impoverished communities and unstably housed people in a context of rising rents and a refusal to build adequate public housing.

The New York Times profile on Philadelphia's mandated landlord-tenant mediation program, which survived past pandemic driven stay-at-home policies, is an example of what beginning steps cities can take to slow the oncoming deluge of evictions. City governments can follow-up on these efforts by enforcing anti-discrimination laws for voucher holders and robustly rebuilding safe, affordable, and beautiful public housing.

As mayor Brandon Johnson recognized in his transition report, efforts to increase the building of affordable housing can begin to reverse the deep disinvestment and inequities that plague Chicago's housing system. I am grateful to be working with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and our community partners towards a city that effectively addresses, slows, and stops evictions and rising housing costs.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/13/headway/philadelphia-tenants-eviction.html>

Update 4: I'm so grateful for all the opportunities I've had to develop legal advocacy skills at the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights so far this summer. Over the course of my internship, I've been able to dig deeper into the law and practice of fair housing advocacy and further educate myself on the criminalization of housing and evictions in Chicagoland.

I have so enjoyed learning from the dedicated attorneys on my own team who are committed to legislative advocacy and litigation that amplifies the voices of affected community organizations and tenants. I have also been inspired by other attorneys at Chicago Lawyers' Committee who have focused on education equity, supporting black-owned small businesses, and increasing voting rights for incarcerated people in the midwest. A huge thank you to all Chicago Lawyer' Committee staff members for your tireless dedication towards building a world built on racial and economic justice.

Update 5: I learned so much during my 10 short weeks with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. My experience there was a powerful reminder of the importance of access to affordable civil legal services and systems-wide policy protections in support of affordable housing.

Many of the cases I had the opportunity to work on focused on holding Illinois cities and towns accountable for policies that decreased the availability of public housing and furthered residential segregation. The ripple effect of ordinances that stunt the potential for future public housing projects or discriminate against individuals with criminal records include profound inequality between neighborhoods and a deepening of racial and economic inequity. To combat ongoing disinvestment and segregative housing policies, lawyers and advocates must challenge these laws directly and propose alternative visions that expand housing for marginalized people.

I am so grateful for the opportunity to support community housing advocates this summer. As I begin my final year of law school, I look forward to learning strategies to advocate for affordable and inclusive communities. Thank you, Equal Justice America and Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, for helping to ensure the housing civil rights of Chicagoland residents.