



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



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**Update 1:** I am deeply grateful to receive funding through Equal Justice America to support my legal work with Communities Resist, Inc. (CoRe) over the summer.

For Brooklyn and Queens residents who are most vulnerable, the justice system can be intimidating and inaccessible. It is a pleasure to work with an organization that assists communities of color in my own neighborhood to combat gentrification and structural racism by joining them in the struggle to organize and protect their homes.

The last couple weeks I have learned so much about community organizing and lawyering while centering the voices of those most affected - particularly premised on the idea that decisions governing housing, the allocation of public resources, neighborhood development, land use, rezonings, and urban planning should not be imposed on low-income communities, but rather formulated through a grassroots, bottom-up process that ultimately empowers the low-income residents we serve rather than displaces or disenfranchises them. I look forward to continuing to identify structural changes that can be made at a policy level to ensure tenants' can remain safe and secure in their homes once I graduate from Brooklyn Law School.

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**Update 2:** As an advocate for Housing Justice interning at Communities Resist, Inc. (CoRe) in Brooklyn, I am driven by the shared struggles of my generation. Like many others, I've often felt overwhelmed by the daunting prospect of being a renter for my entire life. While I consider myself fortunate to currently reside in an apartment I adore, situated in a neighborhood that holds a special place in my heart, there remains an unsettling truth: there are no guarantees that I can stay here or afford to do so for as long as I would like.

Now, let's address a question we frequently encounter: "Ok, so your rent went up by \$50. What's the big deal?" It's crucial to shed light on this common inquiry.

First and foremost, a significant number of New Yorkers are already struggling to make ends meet, barely



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affording their current rent. The unfortunate reality is that finding a more affordable apartment than the one you currently have is often an arduous, if not outright impossible, task. So, that seemingly insignificant \$50 increase holds much more weight than it might initially appear.

To put it into perspective, that additional \$50 (often even more!!) can be the difference between stability and turmoil, between having a roof over one's head and facing the daunting prospect of housing court. It may mean cutting back on essential expenses like groceries, healthcare, or education, pushing individuals and families to make painful sacrifices just to maintain a place to call home.

By advocating for tenants' rights and working towards fair housing policies, we aim to combat these injustices head-on. Together, we can create a society where housing is a basic human right, not a privilege reserved for a fortunate few.

Join me in standing up for our communities, raising awareness about the challenges faced by renters, and fighting for affordable housing solutions that promote stability, equality, and social justice. Together, we can build a future where everyone has a safe and affordable place to call home. 🤝🗳️

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**Update 3:** I have about a month left in my summer internship with Communities Resist, Inc. (CoRe), and I am happy to share another update! Throughout this journey, I've witnessed the power of legal support in empowering communities and fighting for tenant rights. Communities Resist works with Tenant Organizations ("TAs"), which play a crucial role in ensuring fair and affordable housing for all. TAs bring together residents, unite their voices, and tackle common challenges collectively - while being well-versed in the actual needs of the community and its residents.

This model of representation draws upon the power of the collective and recognizes the strength in organized numbers. In these weeks alone, I have learned from attorneys stopping unjust evictions, securing necessary repairs, and advocating for stronger tenant protections. For example, I was able to use my Bangla language skills and interpret for a client, which was extremely rewarding! I look forward to taking these lessons into my legal career.

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**Update 4:** New York is in a housing crisis by nearly every metric: rent is unaffordable, evictions are rising to pre-pandemic levels. The precarity of housing brings with it a myriad of other housing discrimination, including discriminatory eviction.

This summer I have learned the importance of tenant-power organizations to creating and sustaining housing stability. Tenants represent a potent political class – making up the majority of the population in many US cities – and often experience unsafe housing conditions (rent hikes, no heat in a multi-family building, et cetera) collectively.



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By building organizations, tenants can work collectively to win safer living conditions in their homes; neighbors can develop stronger social ties that lead to deeper civic participation and healthier overall neighborhoods. And finally, tenants can create a political constituency and leverage their organization to pick (and win) political fights.

Now my question turns to - how can we support tenants to create a political constituency and leverage their organization to pick and win political fights?

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**Update 5:** My transformative summer at Communities Resist, Inc. (CoRe) has drawn to a close, marking the culmination of an enriching internship experience. Over these few months, I have been immersed in the intricate workings of Brooklyn Housing Court, gaining intimate insights into the lives of tenants and delving into the historical backdrop of Brooklyn's housing landscape. A profound understanding of recent housing policies has been woven into my repertoire, equipping me with a comprehensive perspective on the challenges that the community faces.

One of the most impactful aspects of my internship has been my role as an interpreter for a Bangladeshi client confronting the daunting threat of eviction. Witnessing the vulnerability and resilience of these tenants has sensitized me to the broader issues of housing inequality and the urgent need for accessible advocacy. Through this interaction, I've not only honed my Bangla language skills but also unearthed a deep-seated empathy that will continue to guide my future endeavors.

Engaging firsthand in anti-warehousing rallies, housing clinics, and tenant association meetings has unveiled the power of collective action. The spirit of unity and determination displayed by the community has underscored the potential for grassroots movements to incite tangible change. This lesson in mobilization has fortified my belief in the potency of solidarity and grassroots efforts in shaping more equitable housing policies.

A pivotal highlight of my time at Communities Resist has been my direct engagement with elected officials, amplifying the voices of the marginalized and advocating for housing justice.

As I reflect on these profound learnings, I'm acutely aware that this internship has been a transformative stepping stone. Armed with a deeper understanding of the complexities of housing justice, a heightened sense of empathy, and a burgeoning advocacy prowess, I am poised to carry these invaluable lessons into my future endeavors. Whether in further academic pursuits, professional roles, or continued activism, I am resolute in my commitment to championing equitable housing solutions and amplifying the voices of the marginalized. My summer at Communities Resist has not only equipped me with skills but has also ignited an unwavering determination to contribute meaningfully to the pursuit of a more just and inclusive society.