



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Kevin Qu

**Law School:** Cornell Law School

**Organization:** Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline

---

**Update 1:** I'm so excited to share that I have just been awarded an Equal Justice America Summer 2023 Fellowship!

As an EJA fellow, I'm joining the fight to end inequity and working towards eliminating disparities within the civil legal justice system as an advocate for tenants' rights. Since taking the practicum course at [Cornell Law School](#), I've witnessed firsthand the imperative need for tenant advocates. Whether it be the retrieval of unjustly withheld security deposits, remedying violations of the warranty of habitability or defending against evictions, I am investing all my expertise to assist local tenants.

I'm grateful for the funding from Equal Justice America and eagerly anticipate a summer filled with personal growth and professional development. As part of my fellowship, I will provide bi-weekly progress reports on my work!

---

**Update 2:** Wow, I can't believe it's time for an update already!

Over the last two weeks, I have advised numerous clients regarding their rights as tenants. Some examples of cases I have worked on include matters concerning the warranty of habitability as per New York Real Property Law 235-b, breaches of a landlord's duty to mitigate damages after a lease violation, and the wrongful withholding of security deposits.

As an advocate, I am experiencing first-hand the imperative need for pro-bono legal services to enhance the accessibility of legal advice. I am looking forward to continuing my internship and doing my part to bridge that gap.

---

**Update 3:** In the time since my last update, aside from the typical cases involving security deposits and breaches of the warranty of habitability, I was able to help a client facing the prospect of eviction.



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Knowing I could inform and help my clients understand their legal rights and potential redresses under the NY tenancy law was extraordinarily gratifying. It was very fulfilling to see that I was able, through my familiarity with housing law, to empower my clients with the information necessary to navigate their situations and make informed decisions.

Although no one deserves to be evicted from a place they call home, it provides comfort to know that my clients understand the legal protections and their due process rights that exist to protect them.

---

**Update 4:** As the summer draws to a close, today marks the conclusion of my last case as an intern with the Ithaca Tenants Legal Hotline.

Reflecting on my summer, it has been filled with personal growth and professional development. As a lawyer in training, my work in the clinic has given me the unique opportunity to cultivate and enhance skills such as conducting client interviews, performing case law research, and deciphering intricate statutes. This internship has given me the forum to garner the knowledge derived from my studies in law into a real-world practical application.

The most fulfilling part of my internship has been witnessing the relief many of my clients expressed after I was able to present them with meaningful solutions to their dilemmas. See, the reality is that the clients I interact with who seek out legal counsel are facing conflict that they would rather not be facing. Being empowered to do everything I could to improve their situation, even in a small way, was extraordinarily gratifying.

During my work this summer, many of my clients' prevailing and frequently articulated concern revolves around the fear of retribution for asserting their rights or addressing grievances with their landlords. However, based on my experience, these concerns often find quick resolution through the facilitation of a mediation process, where issues/concerns can be openly discussed and addressed. As a tenant's advocate, what is critical is knowing your rights! You might be surprised, but there may exist laws that protect you in your very situation. If you encounter a housing-related challenge or any civil matter that may necessitate legal intervention, contact your regional legal aid organization or check out community clinics run by your local law school. These resources can offer invaluable guidance and advice about your legal rights and the available remedies.

Finally, I wanted to extend my sincerest thanks to Professor William Niebel for his legal insight. His passion and devotion to protecting and defending tenants' rights is inspiring. I would also like to thank Michaela for taking me on as an intern and for her ongoing support and guidance during my internship.

As my time at Cornell Law ends, I'm so proud to have been in a law school that cares so much about its community and the importance of teaching students not just the law books, but also the practice of law. Cornell's commitment to experiential learning has undoubtedly made me a better lawyer, as A.D White put it, "lawyers in the best sense".

Last but not least, thank you to Equal Justice America and all my donors who have supported my work and the work of other passionate EJA Fellows committed to making our world a better place.