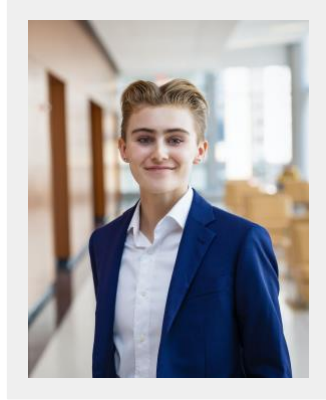




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Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:



Name: Taylor Hein

Law School: New York Law School

Organization: Mobilization for Justice

Update 1:

After finishing my 1L year at New York Law School, I am excited to share some updates about my experience. This summer, I am working as a summer legal intern with Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) in their Housing Rights Program. I am assisting attorneys, community organizers, paralegals, social workers, and support staff in preventing evictions and fighting to preserve safe and affordable housing for low-income tenants in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan.

While interning at MFJ, I am also working as a Research Assistant for Professor Britney Wilson through this summer and the upcoming school year to support her scholarly work related to civil rights law, disability law and policy, and more.

After competing in an intramural dispute resolution competition this past spring, I am excited to share that I was selected for New York Law School's Dispute Resolution Team, along with my amazing teammate. I also look forward to working as a Teaching Assistant for Professor Ross Sandler in his 1L Torts course in the fall, and I am happy to have been selected for the Spring 2024 Legislative Advocacy Clinic with the New York Civil Liberties Union.

I am also fortunate to be a Junior Staff Editor on NYLS' Law Review. 1L was such a rewarding journey and I was so lucky to be surrounded by people that also made this first year so much fun. Looking forward, I am excited to gain new experiences in preparation for this coming year.

I am especially thankful that I was selected as a Summer 2023 Fellow with @Equal Justice America to help support my work at MFJ this year, and I will be sharing fellow updates throughout the internship. Here is my first:



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As I finish my first month at MFJ, I have learned so much about the housing rights law landscape in NYC. It is a maze with constantly changing paths, creating new patterns we have never seen before and integrating them with unique paths we have not yet walked. As a rising 2L stumbling my way through this system, I see seasoned attorneys just as confused as I am by ever-evolving regulatory schemes. I see how they work every day to apply those schemes to the lives of tenants, all of whom have different stories and problems, in a way that humanizes their experience and advocates for their right to housing.

I could only imagine how the tenants feel navigating this system without legal knowledge—that is until Monday, when we did in-court intake. To interact with so many tenants facing eviction and learn about their situations was a stark reminder that the things we learn in law school are things that can house people, or unhouse them. Every law, every piece of legislation, every court opinion, has a practical and lasting effect on the lives of real people, and that effect reverberates outward often infinitely. It is the job of lawyers like those at MFJ to protect these people, to champion the well-being of low-income New Yorkers, and keep them in their homes. It is a reminder that a legal education is a privilege that all law students should be thankful for. No matter how hard it is. We should be thankful that we are being equipped with tools to protect ourselves, and we should employ those tools in the service of others. It also means that we should support tenant advocacy organizations to help people understand their rights and protect themselves.

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#EJAFellowUpdate

Update 2:

I knew that becoming a lawyer would entail research, and a lot of it. At New York Law School (NYLS), 1Ls are required to take a year long “Legal Practice” course, which teaches us how to write memorandums and appellate briefs, as well as interview clients and engage in negotiations. To complete each of these assignments and activities, we were taught how to utilize secondary sources as touch stones for orienting yourself in a new area of law or legal issue, to dig deep into case law, and conduct preparatory work on understanding both your client and your adversary’s background, goals, and weaknesses. So, entering my summer internship at Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) and as a research assistant with NYLS Professor Britney Wilson, I knew that my ability to research various legal (and non-legal) issues would be paramount to productive, meaningful work. What I did not expect, however, was the power of wielding curiosity and creativity in your research.



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After doing in-court intake with a client at MFJ, the first step is to understand their housing situation. We start by asking, “Is their unit rent regulated?” This question is integral to our ability to help these potential clients, since being in a rent stabilized or rent controlled apartment affords those tenants additional protections that other tenants in market rate apartments do not have. Sometimes we know immediately whether a client’s unit is rent regulated in some way. In other situations, we may have the opportunity to argue that the unit should be regulated. In that latter situation, we become investigators. Was the apartment built before 1974 and does it have 6 or more units? If it was built before 1974 but only has 5 units, are there additional illegal living spaces that could make it de facto rent stabilized? If it was built after 1974, did the building take a tax credit that rent stabilized the units? If the unit used to be regulated but the landlord claims it is not anymore, was it deregulated illegally? These are just some of the questions that we ask ourselves during initial research, and each one of them carries with it a thinking process driven by curiosity to come up with creative ways to protect our client.

All this to say, when people think of the legal profession, they think about lawyer’s researching and then arguing. However, what wins cases is digging deep. To do so, we cannot underestimate the power of being a curious learner, as well as a creative researcher and strategist because that very curiosity and creativity can prevent someone from being evicted.

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#EJAFellowUpdate

Update 3:

Here is my third #EJAFellowUpdate for the Equal Justice America 2023 Fellowship:

This past week, I had the opportunity to accompany supervising attorneys on home visits with clients. As an intern, I assumed that my presence alongside the attorneys might not be welcome. The attorneys I worked with had already done an excellent job developing a relationship of trust and openness with the clients, but I had not had that opportunity. Interns have little experience, much less training, and no J.D. yet, so I wouldn’t blame clients for feeling uneasy about an intern working on their case, much less being inside their home. Whether an eviction proceeding is started because of alleged nonpayment, clutter, nuisance, etc., tenants are fighting to stay in their homes, and it is a life or death situation. Having housing security affects your physical, mental, and emotional well being, and everyone should have the right to feel safe in their homes.



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However, instead of being met with skepticism and uneasiness when I entered the client's homes, I was largely welcomed with enthusiasm and thankfulness. The clients that I have encountered so far are just glad to see that they have another person on their side, even if we have less of an ability to help them than our supervising attorney does. They welcomed me into their home and showed me a very personal part of their lives. I had the opportunity to engage meaningfully in the discussion between my supervisor and the clients and ask follow up questions based on my research and knowledge of the law, and demonstrate to them that I was informed and on their side.

As someone who worked in customer service for six years, the opinion that I shout from the rooftops to my peers is that lawyering at its core is customer service—it is your ability to understand people and connect with others that will set you apart as a future lawyer, not just your skills in legal research and writing. You cannot underestimate the power of empathy in any profession, especially this to be their advocate, even if you are just an intern.

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#EJAFellowUpdate

Update 4:

Here is my fourth #EJAFellowUpdate for the Equal Justice America 2023 Fellowship:

It is no secret that New York city has been and continues to be in a severe housing crisis. However, this crisis goes far beyond just a shortage of apartments available to rent. The stock of affordable housing is constantly dwindling and rent increases have outpaced incomes. Pandemic-era assistance with rental arrears, such as through programs like ERAP, has ended and so has the eviction moratorium. Meanwhile, we treat people who are unhoused due to losing their job during the pandemic, who are not being paid a living wage, or who are unable to maintain their employment because they have a psychiatric disability or mental health struggle, like second class citizens.

Fantastic staff at Mobilization for Justice have done incredible work drawing attention to an especially prevalent issue happening right now in New York city: supportive housing providers for people with mental illness and those who are formerly homeless have started hundreds (and counting) eviction cases in an attempt to collect millions of dollars in rent that its tenants could not pay during the pandemic. Supportive housing provides both affordable housing supportive social services for people who are at risk of homelessness. These providers, however, are threatening tenants with eviction in an attempt to get the city to pay them the unpaid arrears faster. The New



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York Times covered this story in more depth, which you can read here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/31/nyregion/nyc-evictions-supportive-housing.html>

The effect of this inhumane strategy is two-fold: not only do these tactics target the most vulnerable populations in New York city, such as those with mental health and psychiatric disabilities, and threaten their very last sense of security in supportive housing, but these tactics also hinder the larger housing court system. Despite the fact that under New York City's Right to Counsel law, DSS/HRA's Office of Civil Justice provides tenants facing eviction in Housing Court or NYCHA administrative proceedings access to free legal representation and advice, there are simply not enough attorneys to represent and protect every tenant. The system is working at a deficit, and landlords along with supportive housing providers are exacerbating this issue. So long as we fail to treat housing as a human right, we are failing New York city tenants, which is why it is important to fund civil legal services organizations and to grow the number of housing attorneys who can make Right to Counsel a functioning reality.

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#EJAFellowUpdate

Update 5:

Here is my fifth and final #EJAFellowUpdate for the Equal Justice America 2023 Fellowship.

Having completed my internship with Mobilization for Justice in early August, I have spent time reflecting on what it means to be a lawyer working in direct civil legal services. I encountered the typical lawyerly work I expected, such as drafting litigation documents and learning about eviction defense strategies. However, as I have discussed in a prior fellow update, it is also often the job of lawyers to meet with clients in their homes. These are usually follow-up visits after conducting in-court intake. During both intake and home visits, it is the role of a lawyer to issue-spot the client's situation, to ask the right questions in order to understand what elements of their case are strong or could be problematic. For most of the time, however, a lawyer to a client is also perceived as a therapist, a social worker, and a friend. Client's want someone to not only represent their legal interests, but to listen to them, to console them, to help them to cope with the stress of legal proceedings and how to avoid being involved in future ones.

A lawyer's job is to balance their zealous advocacy with their ethical obligations to protect and pursue a client's legitimate interests, while also not crossing personal boundaries, both their own and the client's. It is extremely difficult to not be emotionally invested in your client's situation, especially



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when working in housing law. Eviction proceedings are stressful and threaten a tenant's sense of safety and security, as well as their physical and emotional well-being. As a tenant's rights lawyer, you are working with your client because they are most often in incredibly difficult situations. Every client has a story tell, and it is a lawyer's job to be able to listen to that story and ensure that the client feels heard and respected, while also not making themselves susceptible to burnout by taking that emotional weight home with them. As I move forward in my legal career from this internship aware of the amount of burnout that occurs in the public interest field, I am lucky to have worked with great role models at MFJ for how to be a passionate and empathetic advocate who pursues the client's interests while also preserving their own emotional well-being, even if I am not always successful as a young lawyer in doing so.

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