



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

Summer 2023 EJA Fellow:

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Organization: The Bronx Defenders



Update 1:

This summer, I'm interning with The Bronx Defenders in their Civil Action Practice. The need for civil legal aid is urgent, as 80% of those living in poverty who require civil legal services don't have access to it. The need is even greater for people coming into contact with the criminal legal system because of the many insidious civil barriers resulting from that contact that keep people cycling through the system.

Throughout the summer, I'll be helping BxD Staff Attorneys as they advocate to keep justice-involved people employed and housed. I'm grateful for the support of The University of Texas School of Law and Equal Justice America.

Update 2:

Watching people go through the travails of housing court without an attorney is a haunting experience. While I've attended court with my supervisors, I've seen several people go through the court system alone without any guidance. It's a stark reminder of the gap in civil legal aid service for people living in poverty. I'm glad that I'm doing my small part to help people navigate our oppressive systems.

Update 3:

Every time I go to housing court, I'm reminded how awful it must be for the dozens of people I see being talked at by landlord attorneys threatening their families with eviction. The system is not kind to people who are doing their best in difficult situations. Even though New York City has passed a Right to Counsel law that is supposed to guarantee people faced with eviction an attorney as they navigate the archaic structures of housing court, there is not enough funding currently to uphold that promise. As a result, I see people trying their best to understand what is happening to them as they go through this awful process.



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Update 4:

Wow, already at my fourth update which means my summer with the The Bronx Defenders is quickly coming to a close. It's been an intense summer. I've spoken a lot about housing court, but a lot of the work I've done has also been employment related. NYC has strong protections for people facing employment discrimination based on criminal allegations. Some of the most meaningful things I've done have been conversations with employers advocating for our clients to get their job back. Some employers have thankfully been receptive, while others have been less so. The feeling of making a real difference and keeping someone employed is great; although I wish the situation didn't require our intervention in the first place.

Update 5:

My last update of the summer! It was a great experience with The Bronx Defenders in their Civil Action Practice. I got a lot of experience advocating for people impacted by unjust carceral systems. I learned a lot from great attorneys, and I hope to be able to continue the work I did after I graduate from UT next spring. I spent a lot of time in housing court and a lot of time on the phone with employers advocating for our clients. I learned even more about how systems work together to oppress poor people of color. Poverty impacts your housing which impacts your employment. Places like the Bronx Defenders help people combat those issues and maintain their liberty. I also got hands on training in trial skills with my fellow interns. I am extremely grateful that I had this opportunity and extremely grateful for the funding I received through Equal Justice America. It made living in NYC much more affordable for law students like me who won't be getting paychecks for their summer work. If you want to donate to support more law students in the future, please donate to EJA.