



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	The Bronx Defenders

Update 1: I'm excited to have completed the first few weeks of my summer internship with the Bronx Defender's Civil Action Practice as an Equal Justice America Fellow! Throughout this summer, I will be posting five updates recapping my experiences as part of being a fellow.

Historically, public defenders' offices have been limited in helping people who have collateral consequences as a result of being involved in the criminal legal system. The Holistic Public Defense model—founded by the Bronx Defenders—is pioneering a new form of public defense and assisting clients in all the ways they might need. I am fortunate to be a part of this model for the summer.

In 2017, New York passed the Right to Counsel law that provided free attorneys in housing court for every person facing eviction. One of the main focuses of the Bronx Defender's Civil Action Practice is working with these clients facing evictions. I am lucky to be working with incredible attorneys on the Right to Counsel Team and I have already learned so much from them about representing clients facing evictions and how to mitigate the steps that lead to evictions. I look forward to more opportunities with the clients and the organization.

I am so grateful to Equal Justice America for their support. The aid provided by EJA helps make it possible to pursue legal internships and careers that help the vast number of people that do not have access to legal aid services.

Update 2: I have been working at the Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice as an Equal Justice America Fellow for the past month now. In my time here, I have had ample opportunity to learn and grow as a lawyer.

Since starting my internship, I have been able to go to housing court two to three times per week and observe how Right to Counsel attorneys litigate for their clients in court. Moreover, I have been able to witness how the holistic defense model operates in real time helping those



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with collateral housing consequences get legal services to prevent evictions. Those experiences have truly taught me the intangibles of being a skilled lawyer and showed me how to litigate in a courtroom.

One story I want to share has to do with one of my clients who was facing eviction. She was served an eviction notice and briefed my supervisor on the notice ten days before she was to be evicted. I was tasked with helping my supervisor draft an emergency motion to stay her eviction pending approval for financial assistance to pay off her outstanding rent. I spent hours researching case law to insert into a motion that would support her claim for staying the eviction, and I also met with the client to inform her about what we wanted to say in the motion. After working tirelessly, we filed the motion just in time and it was granted. Our client was not evicted.

I am very fortunate to work with the Bronx Defenders.

Update 3: I am now halfway through my summer internship with the Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice as an Equal Justice America Fellow. I have had so many great experiences here and I am very excited for the remainder of the internship.

I have had the opportunity to interact with many clients throughout this summer. I am especially grateful to have worked with one client in particular. He and his wife have lived in their apartment and owed a certain amount of money in back rent. They paid it off and the case was trying to be discontinued, however, the landlord's attorneys were not responding to our Stipulation for Discontinuance. Our client was being stringed along and all he needed was repairs done and a signature on the Stipulation of Discontinuance. I got the chance to intervene and work with the landlord's attorney's office and the client to help resolve this issue once and for all. I consulted with many different people and helped negotiate the terms for discontinuance. After weeks of back and forth communication, I was finally able to discontinue the case and get the necessary repairs for the client. This one client's case taught me a valuable lesson in going above and beyond as an attorney to fully resolve certain cases.

I look forward to working with more clients like the one above. Thanks again to Equal Justice America for allowing me to have these kinds of experiences throughout my summer.

Update 4: I have only two more weeks of my summer internship with the Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice as an Equal Justice America Fellow. Now that I am approaching the end, I have begun to look back on the many valuable experiences I have had and the many skills and insights I have gained. I have been fortunate to have interacted with so many clients and learned so much from them as well.

One notable skill I have developed from working with my supervisor is knowing how to discuss difficult legal issues with clients, especially with regard to bringing certain claims in housing court. My supervisor and I have been working with this one client who wants to bring a claim to stop her eviction by arguing that the impact of changing apartments from her mother's NYCHA housing to a different apartment would be catastrophic for her mental health issues. Our client



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has relatively minor mental health issues, but nothing that would cause catastrophe if forced to move to an apartment. Asserting that claim is relatively hard to prove and bringing it might reflect poorly on the lawyer and the client. I have had to learn how to balance pursuing legal claims for our clients while also being realistic with them about which are likely to be successful. I have had to learn how to be sympathetic to their concerns while also being straightforward about the likely outcomes of their cases. And I have had to learn how to break tough news to clients even when they don't want to hear it. I do not know what we will end up doing with our client, but I know that I am slowly learning how to discuss these difficult legal issues with her and other clients like her. I know that I will be a better attorney for having witnessed and participated in a number of these conversations.

I look forward to finishing my internship strong and leveraging the skills I have learned at the Bronx Defenders into my next legal experience. None of these experiences would have been possible without the financial support of Equal Justice America. Their efforts have allowed me to pursue my internship and focus on my legal work rather than financial concerns.

Update 5: Two weeks ago, I finished my internship with the Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice as an Equal Justice America Fellow. After ten weeks at the Bronx Defenders, I can say that my skills as a lawyer and a litigator have been improved substantially. The opportunities I received at the Bronx Defenders would not have been possible without Equal Justice America.

I have learned a lot in my ten weeks at the Bronx Defenders. I have had the opportunity to join my supervising attorney in Bronx Housing Court two to three times a week. This included watching how my supervisor made compelling arguments before the court, negotiated with opposing counsel, and interacted with the judge over motions filed. I have practiced writing motions to help pause eviction hearings for clients and wrote numerous letters of advocacy for clients to the Human Resources Administration to secure rental arrears assistance. I have also researched multiple complicated legal questions including joinder of parties, sealing records, sur-replies, and month-to-month tenancies. Finally, I have developed good trial advocacy skills by performing (and receiving criticism for) openings, closings, direct exams, cross exams, and bail applications in front of my colleagues.

As I move forward into my legal career after law school, I will never forget those skills and experiences I have had, especially with the clients I have had the pleasure of working with throughout the summer. Although my time as an EJA Fellow has concluded, I am very grateful for the financial support of Equal Justice America throughout this summer. Their fellowship program has allowed me to pursue these amazing opportunities at the Bronx Defenders. For anyone else interested in pursuing public interest internships, I highly recommend applying to be an EJA Fellow. If you are interested in supporting the EJA's efforts, feel free to donate.