



# EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

## Summer 2025

### EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	Legal Aid Chicago

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#### **Final Reflection:**

This summer, I had the privilege of interning with Legal Aid Chicago's Housing Practice Group. Over the course of the internship, I saw firsthand the critical role legal aid organizations play in closing the gap in legal representation that many low-income Americans face. Working alongside housing attorneys, I assisted residents of subsidized housing across Chicago who were facing eviction from their homes.

During my first week, I observed eviction court and witnessed the stark power imbalance tenants encounter at their initial hearings: nearly all plaintiff landlords appeared with legal counsel, while most defendant tenants arrived without representation and with little understanding of the proceedings. For tenants who were able to attend their initial appearance, Cook County's Early Resolution Program provided a critical lifeline—connecting them with a Legal Aid Chicago attorney who could offer legal advice or, in some cases, full representation.

Even when full representation was not possible, the guidance provided by Legal Aid Chicago empowered tenants to navigate the complex and intimidating eviction process, equipping them with the knowledge to defend their rights. For example, during my final week of the internship, I conducted several intake interviews with clients referred through the Early Resolution Program, including a single father at risk of losing both his home and custody of his children. After experiencing a serious medical issue, he fell behind on rent and was unable to catch up. Like many eviction cases, the consequences for him extended far beyond losing housing—if evicted, his children would likely have been placed in foster care. With Legal Aid Chicago's support, he was able to negotiate a payment plan with his landlord, resulting in the eviction being dropped and his family remaining together.



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This client experience, as well as many others like it this summer, has been incredibly important in solidifying my passion for becoming a public interest attorney. All the attorneys I worked with at the Housing Practice Group approached their work with such passion and care, treating each client's case as more than just a legal matter, but as a pivotal moment in each client's life. The legal issues that Legal Aid Chicago addresses do not exist in isolation; they profoundly affect every aspect of a client's livelihood. The attorneys in the Housing Practice Group understood this and consistently went beyond their legal duties, assisting clients with critical non-legal needs such as arranging stays at domestic violence shelters and coordinating moving services. Watching their dedication reaffirmed for me that effective advocacy is not only about understanding the law, but also about meeting people with empathy and respect.

Thus, my time at Legal Aid Chicago has truly deepened my commitment to using my legal education to serve underrepresented communities and to fight for those who might otherwise face the legal system alone, and I know this is only the beginning of my journey in building a career dedicated to advancing equity and dignity for all.