



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



NAME	Wanny Mei
LAW SCHOOL	Fordham University School of Law
ORGANIZATION	Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

Update 1:

I am a few weeks into my summer legal internship with the Housing Unit at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and I am very grateful to help the Right to Counsel team defend tenants in eviction proceedings. So far, I've had the opportunity to learn about the ins and outs of Manhattan Housing Court, support with intake interviews, and research potential new legal avenues to help keep vulnerable tenants in their homes.

Thank you to Equal Justice America for allowing me to help provide direct civil legal services this summer as one of their EJA Fellows! EJA's work is critical—80% of people living in poverty do not have access to civil legal aid, and EJA is helping to bridge the access-to-justice gap.

Update 2:

For the past couple of weeks, I have been working on a case to try to help an elderly, disabled client get succession to her rent-regulated apartment. My client has lived in this apartment for over a decade and has lived in the same neighborhood for her whole life. In the interest of staying in her home and community, she is applying to succeed to her late husband's lease, as he was the only named tenant of record.

However, due to difficulties finding documentation proving that she lived in the apartment for the required period of time, she is facing an eviction proceeding. Because of this, she is at risk of losing her home even though she actually meets all the requirements for succession.



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This work is really showing me the importance of civil legal aid for vulnerable individuals. I am grateful to use my legal education and the skills I've gained in law school to advocate for this client and help her try to maintain housing stability.

Update 3:

Last week, I worked on a legal research assignment that sat at the intersection of housing law and family law, as there were questions about how the results of a divorce proceeding would impact a separate eviction proceeding. My role was to figure out how a divorce court's award of sole possession to one spouse would impact succession rights to a rent-stabilized apartment.

This experience taught me the importance of a more holistic approach to civil legal representation, particularly in the housing context. I learned firsthand that it is important to recognize that each client brings different layers of identities and issues to the table, even when their most immediate legal issue is housing related. While some clients may come in with a straightforward nonpayment eviction case, others come in with additional issues related to domestic violence, disability, and more, which require more research into the intersections of different areas of law with housing law. Through this experience, I learned that it is important to learn about more areas of law and work with other legal teams with expertise in other areas of law to better understand and serve clients. When civil legal aid organizations have the infrastructure and capacity to have expertise in multiple areas of law, these organizations can better serve some of the most vulnerable clients.

Update 4:

I recently worked on a research question at the intersection of immigration law and benefits law. I was looking into whether a person with a temporary work visa would have access to public benefits, such as SNAP, Cash Assistance, and more.

While most of my work has been in housing law, this experience has further taught me about the importance of a holistic approach to civil legal aid when serving our clients. Clients can sometimes have various intersecting legal issues that impact how we represent them. Determining whether someone's immigration status qualifies them for certain public benefits impacts the strategy we would take in trying to help resolve their housing legal issues.

Immigration law is a very complex area of law, and lawyers engaged in eviction defense already have high case loads and limited capacity to engage in deep, nuanced research of different areas of law from scratch. Therefore, it is very important that civil legal aid providers in various areas of law can share resources and findings with one another. It is incredibly important that



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civil legal aid providers are able to have the capacity to create such resources and share them with other legal services organizations for the benefit of our clients.

Final Reflection:

Over this summer, I interned with Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation's (NMIC) Housing Unit on the Right to Counsel team. One of the cases I worked on deeply impacted me: this was a case to try to help an elderly, disabled client succeed to her rent-regulated apartment after her husband passed away. From my conversations with her, it was clear that she actually fulfilled the requirements for succession to the apartment, but a few unfortunate events outside of her control prevented her from collecting the necessary documentation proving that she lived in the apartment for the requisite period of time. By the time she retained NMIC, she had already been denied succession, and she was facing eviction as a result of the denial.

After conducting a lot of legal research into the matter, I found that the law was truly not on our side. The requirements for succession were incredibly strict, and very few denials were ever overturned on appeal. While my client's story was very sympathetic and she had valid excuses for not having all the required documents, there was not enough legal support for her succession case. Throughout the summer, I struggled with the injustice of this situation, especially when looking at it from a broader, human perspective: a vulnerable tenant was facing eviction from her home of over a decade because she was missing a few documents.

Despite the unfavorable odds, I worked very hard and continued to advocate for her. This experience made me realize that I will continue to face difficult and potentially losing cases throughout my career, but it is important to keep fighting for the people at the center of these cases. Even if the legal precedent is not on my side, I will keep looking for different ways to advocate for vulnerable clients. I realized that even if the odds are not favorable, the odds are still slightly better when a tenant has legal representation, as opposed to when a tenant faces a legal proceeding pro se. I will inevitably face many challenges and losses throughout my legal career, but I will continue to learn from them, grow in my advocacy, and eventually win and achieve justice for my clients.