



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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During my 2L summer, I had the amazing opportunity to work in the Housing Practice Group at Legal Aid Chicago. Housing justice work, especially in Chicago, is very important to me. Everyone deserves safe and affordable housing. Unfortunately, thousands of Cook County households are severely cost-burdened and are vulnerable to losing their homes. I was able to work with Legal Aid Chicago to provide free legal services to some of the County's most vulnerable residents.

I enjoyed working to keep clients housed. I spent time advocating for clients asking for dignified living conditions. I fought against landlords who left tenants without working utilities, with intense rodent infestations, and mold. Low-income tenants were forced to use their last dollars to remedy situations their landlords were responsible for. Families had to take money used to feed their kids to fight against roaches and rats, and landlords just continued raising the rents while leaving the units in unsanitary conditions. In those situations, landlords and large property management companies preyed on clients not understanding their rights. Being able to stand up on behalf of these clients to ensure their voice is heard was so important. I was certified to appear in court as an intern, and sometimes the hearings were extremely short. But the impact of the advocacy was great. I spent hours and hours drafting a motion, but the hearing on the motion was over within minutes. However, my client's reaction to prevailing will stay with me forever. They were so incredibly grateful for the support we were able to provide, and it helped them move on from this overwhelming experience.

While most of my summer was spent working on housing justice, I took advantage of several opportunities to volunteer in Legal Aid Chicago's walk-in community legal clinics. These clinics were hosted monthly throughout the city in collaboration with community organizations and legal sponsors. It provided a consistent space for members of the community to come seek legal



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guidance on any issue they had. I was so grateful to be able to meet with clients face to face to support them through whatever issue that was impacting them. Sometimes a client would come feeling like they were in a crisis. They had a million other things going on in their life, and since this one issue was so foreign, they felt like they couldn't overcome it. Sometimes helping involved explaining the issue to them and helping them through some self-advocacy. In those times, it was nice to help a client through what they felt was a crisis they couldn't manage. Helping them see the reality and the power they had to overcome it was great to do. When the issues were more complex, it still felt good to help clients understand the reality of the situation and what options they have.

These moments with the clients reaffirmed my decision to go into civil legal work. My community deserves advocacy in this complicated legal system that can be easily exploited by people with the money to do so. I am committed to serving the public, and I am so grateful Legal Aid Chicago gave me the opportunity to start this advocacy now.