



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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LAW SCHOOL	Temple Law
ORGANIZATION	Build Up Justice NYC

My name is Savannah Henry, and I am writing a reflection detailing my summer internship to contribute to my role as an Equal Justice America Fellow. This summer I got the opportunity to work for Build Up Justice NYC (formerly Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A) in their Preserving Affordable Housing unit. I found this experience in the public interest world to be extremely enriching and fruitful, which I know is a goal and hope for the Equal Justice America Fellowship. I am truly excited to share what my client workload looked like, the impact of the job I was doing, and how this internship and fellowship has helped me gain a stronger understanding of the work I plan to pursue post-graduation.

Working directly with clients was without a doubt the most meaningful part of my summers. At my internship the attorneys did not do their own intake instead there was a client services team who ran the initial intake. During this intake I was able to sit down and have one-on-one conversations with clients as they shared intimately their housing struggles. This ranged from poor living conditions, rodents, insects, no heat, landlord harassment, and unfair rent prices and hikes. I understand that these are not easy conversations, and I appreciate that they were able to share with me. One client told me that he came to intake expecting negativity but after talking to me he actually felt hope. This stays with me to this very day. I also got the opportunity to work alongside the Organizing Attorney at Build Up Justice NYC who helped organize tenants and tenant associations. This attorney shared with me that the biggest challenge is helping people adjust their mindsets. Many people accept their poor housing conditions simply because they are grateful to have a roof above their head. We began to work with tenants, emphasizing that they have power and have the right to safe and healthy living conditions. We encouraged them to ask for more, a principle I stand by.

It is no secret that public interest lawyers are busy. At Build Up Justice NYC the caseloads were high and there were plenty of clients who needed assistance. I felt gratitude for being



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included on the team and I know that gratitude for my work and involvement was reciprocated because we were able to help more people. This impact was as simple as taking the initiative to check in with the court officers on busy days at the courthouse to being directly involved by writing and drafting stipulations and negotiating with opposing counsel. Research was also a large part of my summer; I was able to research on pressing issues in the housing world and gave the attorneys at my internship access to information that could help them get our clients better deals. I did not feel like a fly on the wall, I felt as though I directly made a mark during my time with Build Up Justice NYC.

One personal fear I have always harbored is the idea of sitting at a desk every day from 9-5pm doing the same work. Safe to say, through my summer internship, I learned firsthand that this would not be the case as a housing attorney in New York City. Additionally, after reading testimonies from the other Equal Justice America Fellows, I saw for many of them the work was diverse and varied. This made me feel affirmed in my decision to become a lawyer and excited to embark on the journey of developing my “traditional” and “people” skills to become the best attorney I could be. By the end of my time with Build Up Justice NYC, I decided I would love to continue to pursue housing work and dedicate myself to working for and with tenants, to preserve and advocate for their rights. I am grateful to Equal Justice America for helping me as I navigated this journey and moved toward this conclusion.