



EQUAL JUSTICE AMERICA

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EJA FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENT



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ORGANIZATION	Brooklyn Defender Services

Update 1:

I am grateful to have been selected as an Equal Justice America Fellow as I pursue my summer internship at the Brooklyn Defenders. Over the next two months I will work with a team of attorneys at the Defenders' Civil Justice Practice, supporting clients navigating the civil collateral consequences of their criminal proceedings. Over the past couple of weeks, I have had the opportunity to draft complaints, demand letters, and court filings to ensure that clients are not unlawfully excluded from their jobs or evicted from their homes. Thank you to Equal Justice America for the generous funding that ensures that law students can continue to spend their summers providing essential legal services and learning from dedicated attorneys.

Update 2:

New York City has some of the country's strongest regulations to protect workers from discrimination on the basis of criminal status in the form of the Fair Chance Act. While it is illegal for employers to take adverse actions against employees or prospective employees on the basis of criminal status without carrying out a thorough Fair Chance Analysis, too often employers fail in their responsibility to the detriment of justice impacted individuals. Employment attorneys at BDS provide essential legal services to ensure that workers have the protections to which they are entitled. Last week I drafted a rebuttal that we are filing against an employer who we are alleging failed in their duty under the Fair Chance Act and illegally discriminated against our client. EJA makes it possible for people like me to learn from and support attorneys who are advocating for the most vulnerable community members.

Update 3:



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For the past week I have been preparing a motion to vacate a default judgment for my client and reopen her termination of tenancy hearing. My client is a long time NYCHA tenant who is entirely reliant on public assistance to pay her rent and has an intellectual disability that hinders from successfully navigating bureaucratic challenges. When administrative breakdown occurred, she was left without meaningful support causing her to miss one hearing date which would result in the termination of her tenancy. In preparing for this filing, I conducted interview with the client and her sister, assessed psychological records, and carried out legal research to build the strongest case. Through the support of my supervisor at the Brooklyn Defenders, I was able to draft a filing from scratch and advocate for the procedural rights of my client.

Update 4:

One of the privileges of interning at a small practice at the Brooklyn Defenders is being able to support the staff attorneys in research projects that they do not have the resources to undertake during the year. Over the past few weeks, I have looked into matters that affect our clients cases but which do not have obvious legal answers. For example, I have researched whether or not airport workers are covered by New York City's Fair Chance Act which protects employees from illegal discrimination on the basis of criminal charge or conviction. Additionally, I am in the process of writing a memo on what procedural rights clients are entitled to if their application to succeed a family member in privately run public housing has been rejected. Through these research projects, staff attorneys can more effectively support current and future clients.

Final Reflection:

Advocating for socially and economically marginalized communities has grounded my professional work for the past five years. The primary reason I applied to law school was to develop the skills to be an even more effective advocate and to be able to support individuals and communities in new ways. My experience at the Brooklyn Defender Services Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS) Civil Justice Practice bolstered my understanding of what I can do as a lawyer.

In my final week as an intern, I had the opportunity to represent a client who had his taxi license suspending due to his active criminal charge at an administrative hearing. Over the course of four days, I researched recent decisions that supported our case, interviewed the client, wrote opening and closing arguments, and prepared the client for direct and cross examination. I also spoke with both his immigration and criminal attorney to learn more about his case and strategize how to most effectively frame his case without jeopardizing his other active proceedings. During the hearing, it was BDS's holistic approach to advocacy which allowed me to best represent the client and ultimately resolve the case with his suspension being lifted. When I began the internship, I had essentially no formal professional legal experience. Beyond the 1L classes I had taken and the pro bono work I had done I had no real sense of what lawyers



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do on a day-to-day basis. It turns out, at legal services practices they do a whole lot. Over the course of the internship, I developed an understanding that I can do my most effective work when it is grounded by a client's story. When I was assigned research memos to write, I struggled to immediately dig my teeth into a project that was purely hypothetical. However, when an attorney wanted to know if a client had to send school reports to NYCHA to verify their child's student status, I could easily throw myself into the research. Of course, in the future, my legal practice will involve require me to operate at multiple levels but this experience has sharpened my desire to have advocacy be the center of any work that I do.

If you want to support future law students in their professional journey in legal services and help them develop their understanding of how they can contribute to a fairer legal system then please consider donating.