



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



Name: August Leinbach

Law School: Columbia Law School

Organization: Mobilization for Justice

Week of June 15th

As part of my summer fellowship through [Equal Justice America](#) I will be writing a few brief [EJA Fellow Update](#) posts about my internship experience.

I began in the housing program at [Mobilization for Justice, Inc.](#) almost three weeks ago, in the midst of a pandemic and nationwide uprising that have underscored the depth of racial and economic disparities in our society. These disparities are readily apparent when looking at who is most prone to housing insecurity, displacement, and homelessness, issues born out of an exploitative real estate industry whose practices have particularly targeted Black and brown tenants. With this context in mind, I have been thinking through the role of the law in developing and reinforcing such a system, and how legal services attorneys can use their tools to challenge it.

These first few weeks have also been a time to begin learning the specifics of New York housing law and its practice. With the state's eviction moratorium still in place, my projects have focused on harassment and repair cases, as well as non-litigation advocacy strategies.

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Week of July 6th

I am now midway through my time at [Mobilization for Justice, Inc.](#), and have had the opportunity to participate in a wide range of the organization's housing work over the last few weeks. This has ranged from



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handling the logistics of a tenants association's group repair case to researching policy proposals designed to slow displacement in building conversions. I have also been observing the complex process of court reopening, about which there seem to be more questions than answers at this point.

Week of July 27th

My last few weeks at [Mobilization for Justice, Inc.](#) have been shaped in part by the pandemic, from doing outreach about a new COVID rent relief program to researching a state law providing some eviction protections for tenants with lost income since March. I've also been looking into case law on non-traditional family succession claims, which offer rights to rent regulated apartments to "non-traditional family members" of tenants who have moved out or passed away. These were some of the most interesting and often moving opinions I've read, detailing the extent of the love and caring demonstrated by two people who see each other as spouses or close family members even if they might not fit the traditional definitions of these relationship.

Week of August 10th

I wrapped up at [Mobilization for Justice, Inc.](#) a week ago and have been left with much that I can take with me into the new school year and beyond. I had the opportunity to work on cases involving tenants' associations and rent strikes, areas where the law can be both particularly helpful and have the limits of its effectiveness tested. I saw how, on the one hand, lawyers could provide essential support for collective actions to assert tenant power. At the same time, rules in place to protect the property interests of landlords meant that we could only go so far through the courts without organizing and policy change.

If you're interested in supporting future legal services attorneys, consider giving.