



Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



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Organization: Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center

#1: Week of June 15th

My internship at the Urban Justice Center's Safety Net Project is off to a great start, though I must say a virtual internship takes some getting used to! I have learned so much already - from the excellent trainings on various legal topics, to increasing my knowledge about the unique structure of the organization, to beginning my deep dive into nuisance cases for my individual research project - it's been an amazing few weeks. I also had the opportunity to work on some pandemic-specific unemployment insurance issues, which was a new area of law for me. It's been a good learning experience and feels good to be able to provide some assistance directly related to the COVID-related hardships our clients are experiencing. However, the breakdown of the usual processes and overloading of the NY & NJ Departments of Labor (in addition to their reduced capacity due to being underfunded for years) has significantly reduced our ability to assist. Often there's very little we can do when it's impossible to speak to anyone on the phone. Here's hoping that the situation will improve soon!

#2: Week of July 6th

The past two weeks have been a whirlwind. As the New York Housing Courts issue a flurry of Administrative Guidance and Governor Cuomo signs his own Executive Orders, at the Safety Net Project of the Urban Justice Center we are working furiously to ensure that we fully understand the fluid state of the law and can best advise our clients on their rights. It has been truly enraging to see courts push to resume business as usual, as evicting anyone during a pandemic only worsens the current public health crisis that grows more dire each day. Virtual court appearances are not a solution either, as I have witnessed first-hand the difficulties experienced by both attorneys and clients in Skype Court, including difficulty hearing the proceedings, the inability to discuss matters with one's client, and a complete lack of language translation services. As for returning to in-court appearances, the situation is so fraught that the Union of court officers has filed suit to prevent being called back to work until their claims of inadequate safety measures have been resolved. At the same time, tenant advocacy groups like the Right to Counsel



Coalition NYC and Housing Justice for All have been doing the real on-the-ground work, creating FAQ and Know Your Rights sheets to explain the multitude of changes that occur on a near-daily basis. Interning at UJC during this time has truly taught me the value of a responsive, coordinated tenant movement that works in conjunction with tenant-side attorneys.

#3: Week of July 27th

Today I am proud to say that I have completed and submitted a series of suggested updates to a Landlord-Tenant Treatise that is widely used throughout New York. The focus of these updates was on "clutter cases." These are cases in which a person is facing eviction due to allegations of an unsafe or unsanitary cluttered condition within the apartment. The suggested updates are the culmination of one part of my independent research project focused on clutter cases that is currently being hosted by the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. It was great to be able to work on these suggested updates, because not only did it deepen my understanding of this area of the law (I have now read and analyzed all 75+ clutter cases from NY in the past 20 years!), but I believe that my updates will assist attorneys in securing just and equitable results for these clients, many of whom are low-income older adults with mental and/or physical health conditions. Two highlights from my suggested updates were: 1) the inclusion of a lot of new case law around Reasonable Accommodations for tenants with disabilities; and 2) important new terminology - moving away from calling clients in clutter cases "hoarders" (an oft-misapplied medical diagnosis with negative stigma) or "Collyers" cases (in reference to a pair of brothers whose tragic death in the 1930s has been overly sensationalized and carries no meaning outside of NYC case law). Though by no means perfect, "clutter cases" is a more humane term that focuses on the curable condition, separates the condition from the person experiencing the issue, and doesn't include any loaded medical terminology. Here's to hoping that my updates will be published and that the use of the term "clutter case" can gain traction!

#4: Week of August 10th

It's hard to believe that my internship is wrapping up. Handling unemployment insurance cases, writing the treatise update (found out that nearly all of my suggestions will be published, yay!), speaking with practitioners about clutter cases, keeping up with the rollercoaster of eviction moratoriums – it has been a summer full of remarkable events. My internship at UJC has shown me how to adapt and stay flexible when the legal landscape is constantly changing. I also improved my ability to balance very different projects: I had to keep up with clients' unemployment matters while simultaneously moving forward with my complex clutter case research project. Ultimately I found that I enjoyed it – when I got stuck on a particular research question or treatise draft I could switch to working on something completely different, allowing me to take a break from what was stumping me while still staying productive. And it reaffirmed what I have been learning during all of my class and internship experiences: a career with a healthy mix of writing, researching and direct client interaction is one that will keep me motivated and engaged. Working at UJC has only deepened my commitment to supporting tenant rights, and I look forward to taking the bar and joining the fight as a tenant-side housing lawyer!