



## Summer 2020 EJA Fellow:



**Name:** Nardos Girma

**Law School:** NYU Law

**Organization:** Housing Conservation Coordinators

---

### Week of June 15th

I'm only a few weeks into my internship with Housing Conservation Coordinators but feel like I've already learned a lot about New York housing law, particularly the challenges facing low income tenants in rent regulated apartments. Much of the work that HCC does day-to-day deals with providing legal representation and assistance to these tenants. In addition to this standard legal work, I've also gotten a chance to observe housing justice advocates' city-wide effort to protect tenants amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. My update comes as Governor Andrew Cuomo's blanket eviction moratorium comes to an end and a wave of impending evictions approaches, with Black and brown communities likely to be hardest hit. It's hard to neatly wrap up this update with something optimistic in light of what lies ahead, but I can say that I am encouraged to see the work that HCC and other legal aid providers are doing and am glad I can be a part of that.

---

### Week of July 6th

The halfway mark for my internship came more quickly than I expected. So far, I've helped draft a motion, calculated damages in a rent overcharge case, and written a memo. One thing that has surprised me is how long it can take for a housing case to be settled and how powerful this temporal aspect of civil litigation can be. Having one's life hang in the balance for months or years as they defend themselves from legal action (housing-related or otherwise) would be distressing for anyone.

This temporal aspect of litigation was also something that was easy to overlook in the cases I read for my 1L classes, where the timelines felt compressed even over the span of multiple appellate cases.

This internship has given me a lot of valuable insight into the way many people interact with the legal system and some of the forces that can shape the outcome of their cases.



---

## Week of July 27<sup>th</sup>

Recently, one of my assignments was to assist clients who had questions about New York's COVID-19 Rent Relief Program and, if they were eligible, help them through the application. One of the things that struck me is how inaccessible the application process was for people who didn't have personal computers and printers, and how these technological obstacles are even more magnified during the pandemic. Throughout this summer, clients have faced various other technological challenges, including accessing Conferences that their attorneys have with Housing Court Judges and opposing counsel.

This experience has taught me to check my own assumptions about how widely used and accessible certain tools (i.e. laptops, smartphones) are and how the response to COVID (moving things online) across different industries has both enabled and hindered access.

---

## Week of August 10<sup>th</sup>

Summer internship experiences this year were unconventional. I, like many other interns, did my internship remotely, which brought some challenges and unfortunately barred the kind of direct client contact many of us were hoping to experience.

Nevertheless, my experience as a summer intern at Housing Conservation Coordinators was still incredibly instructive for me. I learned about some of the intricacies of housing law, a topic I had become increasingly interested in. I observed some of the challenges that vulnerable communities face and the way legal systems and government programs can be designed to their detriment. I got to do work I cared about and help the attorneys at HCC better serve their clients. This internship, my first experience doing direct service work, also made the idea of a civil legal service career more tangible to me.

I hope this won't be my last experience in housing law and I'm thankful for the EJA scholarship that helped with the finances of being a public interest intern.