



## Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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**Organization:** Texas RioGrande Legal Aid

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### Update 1:

Over 3,000 in Austin are currently houseless, 70% of which are disabled.

In Boston, the median net worth for a white family is \$247,500 while for black families it is \$8.

Tenants in the United States owe an estimated \$70 billion in back rent due to the pandemic.

The common thread is a devastating lack of affordable housing in this country. I am honored to serve the Texas RioGrande Legal Aid Housing team which seeks to address the rampant exploitation that already vulnerable tenants face on a daily basis and works to connect others with affordable, accessible housing. Becoming an Equal Justice America fellow offers scholarships to those working in the vast field of public interest and has allowed me to answer the harrowing call of the housing crisis in this country.

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### Update 2:

Our housing team is preparing for the end of the CDC Moratorium on Evictions. Though the declaration was designed to prohibit landlords from evicting their tenants during COVID-19, some courts (especially those in Texas) have chosen to disregard the order. It is nearly abhorrent to think of myself as an arm of law enforcement... but the idea is made more palatable when I consider the tangible benefits that interpreting law in favor of poor, black, and brown folks can yield. I'm grateful for this clerkship for a number of reasons; the most salient being the opportunity to see how law and order supposedly operates in our beloved lone star state!

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### Update 3:

My time with Texas RioGrande Legal Aid is coming to a close. I'm reminded of Bryan Stevenson who stood before the judge after exonerating his client and said it was far too easy to convict an innocent man than the process of acquittal. Though he was referring to the "workings" of the criminal justice system, there is ample



overlap in the realm of housing. We have expedited court proceedings for people to be dispossessed of their houses. We have Justice of the Peace courts that operate nearly autonomously (will they follow the CDC moratorium or won't they!). We have a long and arduous process for tenants who wish to retain their housing/housing benefits that is difficult to do without a lawyer.

The picture isn't all bleak though. I've worked all summer long with people who provide free legal services, hear and care about their clientele, and assist in navigating a housing system designed against them.

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**Entry 4:**

My work at Texas RioGrande Legal Aid has left me with a greater sense of purpose and belonging in the field of public interest. Though housing inequities along racial and socioeconomic lines have been the subject of ample academic inquiry and people's lived experiences with these issues is well known, this internship lifted whatever veil of ignorance was left over my eyes. Our housing system is one that is largely unregulated and operates essentially autonomously. I've learned that the only laws that exist are the ones that are enforced. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn to wield the law as a tool for good, one with the potential to recognize and correct past harms done to marginalized folks using the law.