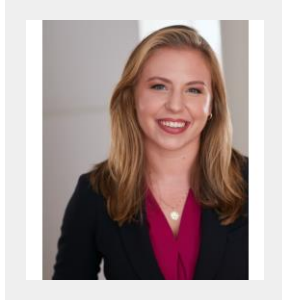




Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



Name: Rachel Bossuk

Law School: Brooklyn Law School

Organization: Mobilization for Justice

Update 1:

This summer I am interning in the Housing Rights project at Mobilization for Justice. The COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult time for everyone, but in particular for those who lost their jobs and could no longer afford to pay rent. Even with the eviction moratorium in place, tenants were still being evicted. Mobilization for Justice worked and has continued working to help those facing eviction due to nonpayment of rent, as well as ensuring those who are housed are housed safely.

My work this summer has so far been related to cases where the tenant is suing the landlord for harassment or to make repairs, and cases against the tenant for nonpayment of rent. This work is so valuable as housing law in New York is very hard to navigate without legal representation. I consider myself lucky to be receiving summer funding through Brooklyn Law School and Equal Justice America, so that I am able to assist in providing free legal assistance to New York City tenants.

Update 2:

My summer in the Housing unit at Mobilization for Justice has been far from ordinary. Due to the eviction moratorium in New York State, the usual work of representing New Yorkers facing eviction has been stalled and the attorneys have turned to different work—primarily holdover and nonpayment of rent cases. I am in the process of writing a motion to vacate on behalf of one client, which has been very interesting though not the usual work MFJ summer interns tend to do. However, what I have been reflecting on recently is how attorneys in this area of law approach their work and treat tenants.

Working in a client-facing area of the law, like housing rights, it is important to maintain a level of professionalism when talking with or about one's clients. Unfortunately, I have learned of and personally witnessed instances where landlords' attorneys have made jokes at the tenant's expense when they are not around and talked down to tenants when they were present in court. These instances are sadly not uncommon.



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when working at a legal services organization. The legal world is still a white male-dominated industry and those seeking free legal assistance are often people of color. At weekly housing team meetings, MFJ attorneys speak honestly about their court experiences and pass along the names of unprofessional attorneys and judges they have interacted with. In this small way the MFJ attorneys attempt to protect their clients by way of anticipating and preparing for this type of behavior in future interactions.

While the legal work and experience I am gaining this summer is invaluable, it is interesting to see how clients are viewed and treated not only by their own lawyers but also by opposing counsel and judges. A lot can be learned about a lawyer based on how they refer to their clients, especially when the client is not present. Going forward in my own legal career I will strive not to forget this and endeavor to treat everyone with the same level of respect.

Update 3:

As I complete my 6th week externing at Mobilization for Justice (“MFJ”) I am learning more about the internal structure of the organization as well as its culture, its challenges, and the variety of clients they serve. Something that recently struck me was the fact that while one might assume that “social justice” organizations like MFJ would be ahead of the game in terms of their DEI and anti-racism protocols due to the nature of their business, I have come to realize that this is not always the case.

My prescribed notion was that a firm so rooted in its mission to ensure equity would be a model for providing support, not only for their clients but also for their BIPOC staff. So, it was somewhat surprising to learn that MFJ was, like many organizations, really struggling with their DEI and anti-racism efforts. It seems that no organization, regardless of the good work they undertake, is immune from the need to dig deeper and improve in this area.

However, MFJ employees have recognized this and, in addition to the countless hours they spend on researching and advocating for their clients, they have also made it a priority to fit this work into their week. For example, during the Housing Team’s weekly meeting an attorney leads a “Race, Equity and Inclusion” discussion for the entire team. I have found these to be very inspiring and informative, and it has given me the opportunity to learn about the positive and negative experiences people of color encounter in the field. During these meetings attorneys and staff are allowed time to reflect on their experiences with clients and how they reacted, or wish they reacted in the moment, and receive advice.

Furthermore, a diverse group of attorneys formed a union in order to demand better working conditions and to persuade management to enact the change that they verbally supported. In fact, this group went on strike to ensure their contracts reflected these values. While it is always disheartening to learn that a company is not treating their own staff as well as they should, it is truly inspiring to see people who love their jobs and believe in their organization, embrace this mission and push for lasting systemic change. No organization is perfect, but it is clear that being able to learn from the experiences of one’s coworkers fosters a more supportive and safe working environment for everyone.



Entry 4:

As I complete the final week of my externship at Mobilization for Justice (“MFJ”), I am happy to report that the experience definitely enhanced my educational and other goals. From bringing into clearer focus the work of lawyers in the area of housing law and also understanding how the legal system benefits those it is designed to protect and when it does not, I have grown and learned. Working alongside MFJ lawyers who work countless hours and often struggle themselves in order to provide legal services for the vulnerable was an experience that was not only worthwhile but will help inform my understanding and appreciation of “boots on the ground” legal work going forward.

As I near the end of my summer placement at MFJ, I have had the opportunity to reaffirm many aspects of who I want to be as an attorney and also discover new areas of the law that I enjoy. I am particularly grateful for the direct experience in litigation, which I plan to pursue during at least the first leg of my career. I have additionally found that I enjoy researching novel legal topics and using my writing skills to draft motions. I look forward to developing my oral advocacy skills as a member of Brooklyn Law School’s Moot Court Honor Society this fall. I am also certain that I want to include pro bono work in my practice, regardless of whether I end up working at a large law firm or elsewhere. I am hopeful that next summer will afford me the opportunity to work more directly with clients, as I was not able to accomplish as much of this as I had hoped this summer. Nevertheless, I am confident that over the next two years of law school I will gain enough practice to provide excellent representation to clients by the time I graduate, and I am truly thankful to be able to work toward a career through which I can make a difference.