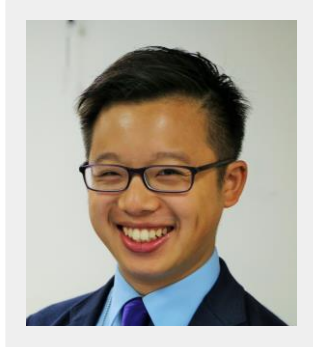




Summer 2021 EJA Fellow:



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Law School: Rutgers Law School - Newark

Organization: TakeRoot Justice

Update 1: Two weeks ago, I finished my second year at Rutgers Law School (time flies!) and began my summer legal internship with TakeRoot Justice Equitable Neighborhoods (EN) practice area. The EN team partners with residents in historically under-resourced areas to fight for stable and affordable housing, community spaces, jobs to make a good living and other opportunities that allow people to thrive.

One of my responsibilities is conducting legal research for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents and organizers in addressing proposals for the future of NYCHA. I've learned how to file and organize various federal and state open records requests (e.g. FOIA and FOIL). From those efforts, I ensure this information is publicly accessible on a website (NYCommons) so that NYCHA residents have primary sources to inform their organizing. It is truly fascinating how open records requests are such a key tool that facilitate transparency, accountability, and democratic dialogue!

Update 2: Hi everyone! One thing I had a chance to do in my legal internship at TakeRoot Justice's Equitable Neighborhood Team is advise a tenant group on whether they could fundraise based on their nonprofit status. I never realized how much tax law is involved in finding out an answer to a question like that! And even after learning about the related law, there is still so much to consider logistically. How will a group learn to file the required administrative paperwork to be a non-profit? Are there other nonprofit categories that might be match the client's goals? I've really appreciated this client-centered approach in the work at TakeRoot and want to continue honoring that in my career!

Update 3: Where does the law allow for (or impede) public housing residents' engagement in where they live? I recently took a deep dive into the regulations, statutes, and administrative agency notices that are relevant when New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) converts certain developments to private management under Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT), a blend of different federal funding.



NYCHA is home to about 380,000 residents, about the size of New Orleans or Cleveland. When key information is buried amidst this maze of documents, it can be difficult to see: what exactly are the resident's rights if they oppose the PACT conversion? If there is a mix of federal programs (and its underlying law/regulation), which obligations do the public housing authority have to the residents so that the residents have an opportunity to be heard? After finding out the information, I would highly recommend a second step of converting that information to plain language and a flow chart or other visual! And the journey to democratize information for community-led organizing continues. . .

Entry 4: Last week, I concluded my summer internship at [TakeRoot Justice](#). I am grateful to my supervisor and other staff for all that I've learned about community lawyering in practice and centering directly-affected tenants and neighborhood residents. Conducting legal research with community coalitions provided me a front-row seat to the process of how community ideas can become policy.

One my assignments was conducting research for the Abolish the NYC Tax Lien Sale Coalition. This coalition calls on the City of New York to abolish the tax lien sale, and develop an alternative system of tax collection and property disposition that promotes neighborhood stability and equity through supporting community land trusts (CLTs).

Generally when you don't pay your property taxes, water bills, and other charges against your property, these unpaid charges become tax liens that may be sold in a tax lien sale (with variations of this mechanism in other places). In New York City, the Department of Finance can sell that debt to third-party investors. Those investors can profit off a homeowner's interest, penalty and administrative fees and the homeowner's debt continues to grow. The tax lien sales do not solve the root issue of why homeowners, disproportionately people of color, cannot pay off their debt in the first place, be it a medical or health emergency or sudden unemployment.

After the my research process deciphering state/city tax codes and regulations to support the Coalition, I appreciate that so much of this work is collective – listening to the wisdom of best practices from other cities, while at the same time considering the perspectives of directly-affected homeowners, coalition members, and City officials. Coalition work can be a long road, and I am happy to have been part of that journey.

If you are able, kindly consider donating to [Equal Justice America](#) to continue supporting legal interns providing critical legal services to low-income communities.

For more on the Abolish the NYC Tax Lien Sale Coalition, see here:
<https://nyccli.org/abolish-the-nyc-tax-lien-sale/>