

THE HOUSING JUSTICE INITIATIVE AT FORDHAM LAW SCHOOL

The Housing Justice Initiative (HJI) at Fordham Law School was created to help students engage with New York City's groundbreaking new law which makes it a right for income eligible tenants to have attorneys when facing an eviction in NYC. The surrounding issues and social movements that led to the passage of the law are central to the social justice mission of HJI. HJI works with students to prepare, through learning and practice, to make a difference for low-income tenants and pursue careers in housing advocacy and poverty law. HJI also serves as Fordham Law's bridge to tenants, legal providers, the City, and other law schools engaged in this important work.

WHY HOUSING AND WHY NOW?

In 2014, New York City began expanding its investment in legal services for tenants facing eviction in New York City Housing Court., largely as a result of organizing efforts by coalitions of advocates, tenants, academics and legal services providers. In 2017, the City Council passed a bill, Intro 214-B, ensuring that at the end of five years, all income eligible tenants will have an attorney when fighting their eviction in housing court. The City has now committed to investing \$93 million in this Right to Counsel effort to be phased in by zip code. This investment will provide free legal representation to New Yorkers with household incomes below roughly \$50,000—approximately 200 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four—and legal counseling to those earning more. The City estimates that eventually 400,000 New Yorkers will be served each year, but this legislation has already increased the number of tenants represented in Housing Court from one percent to 27 percent, reducing evictions by 24%.

To make Right to Counsel a reality, the City estimates that there will be 250-300 new housing attorney jobs over the next few years (including supervisors). Organizations that will likely be hiring range from the Legal Aid Society (legal-aid.org) and Legal Services (legalservicesnyc.org), to a range of smaller, neighborhood-based providers across the City.

Why housing law and why now? Beyond the immediate impact that housing lawyers have, this is essential work for anyone interested in civil rights, poverty law, social and racial justice. Indeed, housing can be a gateway, providing opportunities for gaining valuable skills—litigation, research, writing, client counseling—applicable to many public interest practice areas.

Right to Counsel will serve as a national model for access to justice, and Fordham Law students can get involved now to shape the future of housing law.

¹ See <http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1687978&GUID=29A4594B-9E8A-4C5E-A797-96BDC4F64F80>.

² See NYC OFFICE OF CIVIL JUSTICE 2016 ANNUAL REPORT.

³ For more information, see <http://www.righttocounselnyc.org/>; http://civilrighttocounsel.org/major_developments/894.

OPPORTUNITIES AT FORDHAM LAW

Fordham Law School offers a range of opportunities to learn more about housing advocacy and to do the work! Beyond coursework, these opportunities include externships, programs, student groups, networking, mentoring, and career counseling.

Learn – and Do – Housing Law: Course Work and Experiential Learning

- **Curriculum:** Fordham regularly offers Residential Landlord-Tenant Law, currently taught by Professor Gerald Lebovits, as well as courses relevant to the housing law such as Affordable Housing, Law Practice & Policy, Land Use Law, State and Local Government Law, and the Law of the City of New York. For questions, contact Professor Nestor Davidson (ndavidson@law.fordham.edu).
- **Experiential Education:** In the newly launched *Housing Litigation Externship*, students perform fieldwork at either Bronx Legal Services or Housing Conservation Coordinators, Inc., representing low income tenants in eviction proceedings. The externship includes direct client contact and court appearances in NYC Housing Courts, providing tenant defense under the supervision of experienced housing litigators. The seminar portion of the Externship explores the history of rent regulation in NYC, the historic new legislation providing the right to counsel for low income tenants facing eviction in NYC Housing Court, and basic principles of landlord-tenant law.
- **Trainings:** In partnerships with providers, Fordham hosts trainings on numerous areas related to housing law practice. These trainings are bi-weekly and geared towards practicing attorneys. Students are invited (and encouraged) to attend these trainings. Email Leah Horowitz (lhowitz2@law.fordham.edu) for a schedule with dates and topics.

Engage with PIRC Student Groups, Centers and Institutes

- **HAP:** The Housing Advocacy Project (HAP) sponsors events, externships, volunteering, shadowing in housing court, and other opportunities to engage with housing advocacy. hap@fordham.edu; law.fordham.edu/pircstudentgroups
- **PIRC & ULC:** Both the Public Interest Resource Center (pirc@law.fordham.edu) and the Urban Law Center (urbanlaw@law.fordham.edu) are resources for housing work and careers, co-sponsoring the Pathways to Practice speaker series panel on housing law each year, among other resources.

Fellowship Opportunities

- **Summer:** *Kirpalani Summer Fellowship in Housing Law*. Receive a stipend of \$4500/\$5000 to do housing work at a non-profit or government agency for a summer internship.

Partnership with Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC)

www.hcc-nyc.org

- HCC is a legal not-for-profit organization that seeks to preserve safe, decent and affordable housing on the west side of Manhattan. Each year, HCC provides legal services, tenant and community organizing, and weatherization assistance to thousands of neighborhood residents keep their homes, improve their living conditions, and fight for the changes that will keep our neighborhood affordable and diverse for years to come.
- In partnership with HAP, HCC invites interested students to shadow attorneys at their weekly **Monday night intake clinic**, 7pm-9pm. Sign-up: hap@fordham.edu
- This partnership also gives students the opportunity to shadow attorneys in housing court; advocate for tenants in public housing; engage in administrative advocacy; assist with pre-litigation advocacy to prevent landlords from bringing eviction proceedings; intern with direct supervision including opportunities for motion practice, oral advocacy in court, and negotiation skill building; work with tenant organizers in the greater Hell's Kitchen neighborhood.

Alumni Mentorship and Networking

- For each interested student, **HJI provides an attorney mentor**. Mentors are attorneys practicing housing law and are alums and/or work at a partnering organization. To be paired with a mentor, email Leah Horowitz (lhowitz2@law.fordham.edu).
- HJI is closely connected with many of the organizations and attorneys doing housing advocacy. We encourage students to use these networks to learn more about this work. In addition to an individual mentor, email Leah Horowitz (lhowitz2@law.fordham.edu) for our list of alums and reach out to them for coffee or shadowing.

Career Counseling

- Public Interest Resource Center (public interest focused career counseling) law.fordham.edu/pirc
- Career Planning Center law.fordham.edu/careerplanning

Job and Internship Postings

- See the Right to Counsel Job Board for post-grad housing attorney positions: probono.net/ny/housing/jobs
- Post-grad job and internship postings can be found on the providers' websites. The majority of these organization hire summer and semester interns, and are seeking to hire full-time permanent housing attorneys.
 - Legal Aid Society (legal-aid.org)
 - Legal Services (legalservicesnyc.org)
 - NYLAG (<https://nylag.org/>)
 - LEAP Coalition members (leap-ny.org), a coalition of smaller neighborhood-based organizations, including: BOOMHealth, the Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, CAMBA Legal Services, Catholic Migration Services, The Door, Goddard Riverside Law Project, Housing Conservation Coordinators, JASA/ Legal Services for the Elderly in Queens, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, Make the Road New York, Inc., MFY Legal Services, Inc., NYLAG, New York Lawyers for Public Interest, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation Legal Services, and the Urban Justice Center.