

Everybody does

Pro Bono

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Improving housing conditions and preventing evictions for the City's most vulnerable

I have had the opportunity to work on a range of pro bono matters. One in particular stands out to me is class action litigation that we have brought on behalf of low income individuals to live in residences known as three quarter houses. Three quarter houses are relatively a new form of housing targeted at people who are on the brink of homelessness; people with disabilities and a history of substance abuse as well as people living in shelters or re-entering the community after serving time in prison. These three quarter houses are for-profit entities that market themselves to tenants as stepping stones to a better life. Our clients who are residents of these houses, often find themselves in substandard, over crowded apartments, many of these apartments are infested with rats and other vermin. In addition, many of them lack heat in the winter. So, as if that weren't bad enough, the manager of these houses subject their tenants to fairly draconian rules. For example, they don't allow their tenants to have keys to their apartments. They force them to vacate the apartments every day between 10:00 am and 2:00 p.m. In addition, they subject tenants to constant harassment and threats of eviction for perceived violation of these rules. In fact, many of our clients have actually been evicted in the middle of the night. Subjected to people knocking on their doors, waking them up and literally throwing them with their belongings out in the middle of the street.

So, together with MFY Legal Services, we represent these tenants, people who reside in three quarter houses in Brooklyn and Queens. We brought a class action on their behalf and have sought to obtain improved housing conditions and leases for our clients so that they can at least feel safe and secure in their homes as they seek to move forward in their lives.

I think overall, this case has really been an opportunity early in my career to take a senior role in a fairly large complex litigation. The litigation has presented a number of novel legal questions, and one that really, truly presents the highest stakes for our clients. We know when we go into court, if we fail to succeed on the motion, it's likely that a client could face eviction that night, or that there could be very real consequences for the people who live in these houses. When I talk to people who are interested in the firm, I really highlight this case, not only for the opportunities it has presented to me as a young litigator, but also as really typifying the type of commitment that the firm makes to its pro bono cases, because this has been a fairly significant amount of my time here at the firm, but in addition, we have really spent just collectively as the team, a lot of firm resources in making sure that we truly do our best.

