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Eastside Legal Assistance Program

From early May to the end of July this summer, I worked for Eastside Legal Assistance Program (ELAP) as a legal intern, primarily in the housing stability division. In the world of tenant-side housing law, ELAP takes cases for low-income clients in King County whose issues do not require a court appearance. Under this umbrella, the work includes demand letters for landlord failure-to-repair, pay-or-vacate notices that have not yet progressed to court summons, disability accommodation letters, repayment negotiations, and more.

Within the division, I worked under the supervision of Kristin Huseby and Cloie Chapman, both staff attorneys with a combined decade plus of housing law experience. After the initial onboarding, I began shadowing both Kristin and Cloie in counseling meetings for tenants who were generally in the early stages of the eviction process. Most tenants who reach out to ELAP for eviction help have faced some crisis that shook their income consistency, most often a medical crisis. Ideally these clients could be connected to voucher programs or rental assistance, but due to shortages, there are currently few practical remedies available to those for whom rent is just unaffordable. ELAP can counsel these clients on the eviction process, but most legal defenses are procedural arguments, which are litigated by ELAP's sister housing organization – Housing Justice Project.

One of my primary projects was creating the framework for a webinar detailing the eviction process for clients who have received a pay-or-vacate notice. This involved writing a script and developing a visual presentation breaking down what a pay-or-vacate notice is, what options were available to tenants who receive one, and what steps tenants can take to protect themselves from the worst possible outcomes in an eviction process.

At the same time, after a few weeks of shadowing my supervisors, I plugged into the client intake process. My role in most cases I worked on began at this stage, wherein I interviewed clients to gain a better sense of their legal issue(s) before passing on their information to the staff attorneys. Midway through the summer, I participated in discussions with the other intake staff, and we expressed frustration at not being able to offer certain clients any solutions to their needs, particularly those whose issues went beyond the scope of ELAP. This frustration created the impetus for my second main project: the development of a comprehensive King County resource and service agency list. Mapping this landscape of service agencies involved reaching out to them to ensure the offerings listed on their sites were available given fluctuations in funding availability. Once I completed this project, my coworkers began including it in every case rejection, hopefully giving those folks a better chance at finding resources.

My proudest work involved writing demand letters for client repairs. Outside of eviction cases, one of the more common issues facing tenants is landlords failing to uphold their duty to provide safe clean living spaces. My supervising attorney passed me one of these cases, which involved delayed repairs for a broken elevator in a senior living facility. Upon research into the intersection of housing and disability/elder issues, I found her situation had an almost direct

parallel in WA case law, which strengthened her case. The landlord sent a maintenance team within days of receiving our letter.

Ultimately, I am indebted to my supervisors for being so willing to take me under their wing. Thanks to them and my other colleagues, I have gained a far deeper understanding of Washington tenant law, while also having developed my ability to research, write, and interact with clients.