

Court-Watching Internship at DC Superior Court (Academic Year or Semester Opportunity)

The Legal Aid Society has an office based in the Landlord Tenant Branch in DC Superior Court that we share with another legal services organization. The office provides same-day representation to low-income tenants in eviction suits. This internship project involves working out of the courthouse office to monitor trends in case filings, including those related to foreclosure and to eviction suits based on reasons other than nonpayment of rent.

As with much of the country, DC has been hit hard by the ongoing foreclosure crisis. In DC, tenants have the right to remain in a foreclosed property - by operation of law they become tenants of the new owner, whether that be a bank or a new individual. The challenge is ensuring that tenants come to court and are represented so that these rights can be protected. We have been using our court-based office to target foreclosure cases and offer representation to tenants living in these properties. The intern assists Legal Aid staff attorneys with monitoring foreclosure case filings, so that the legal services organization staffing the courthouse office each day has notice of which cases involving foreclosure will be on the docket.

Building on the success of this first court-watching project, Legal Aid has begun monitoring trends in other eviction suits as well. We have focused on cases brought for reasons other than nonpayment of rent - lease violations, criminal activity, etc. The intern assists Legal Aid staff attorneys with monitoring these case filings, looking for trends and irregularities, and keeping a running list of cases and outcomes. This data is used to alert the legal services organization staffing the courthouse office each day of which cases will be on the docket and to gather data relevant to law reform issues.

The internship would require 12-15 hours per week, working ideally on Mondays (most of the day) and/or Wednesdays (most of the day), and possibly in the later afternoons on Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday. All or most of this time would be spent at the landlord-tenant courthouse. Depending on intern interest and availability, we also would have some research assignments related to housing law. The intern also would have the chance to sit in on client interviews at the courthouse and to observe court proceedings.