



Empire Justice Center Welcomes Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellow

Fellow is Focusing on the Intersection of Housing and Public Benefits

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ROCHESTER, NY – Empire Justice Center is proud to announce Zora (Zoe) Raglow-DeFranco as the Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellow. The Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellowship is a prestigious 2-year fellowship awarded to a dynamic, new attorney in public interest law. Zoe's fellowship focuses on the intersection of housing and public benefits at Empire Justice's Rochester Office.

Zoe's role reflects Empire Justice Center's unique 360-degree approach to justice. Her work ranges from individual client representation to supporting impact litigation, to engaging in legislative and administrative advocacy for lasting, impactful changes throughout the state. As part of her fellowship, Zoe works within two of Empire Justice Center's Legal Practice Units, Housing and Public Benefits. Within the Housing practice unit, she represents tenants at risk of homelessness through the Telesca Center for Justice Center Partner's Tenant Defense Project and connects with tenants' rights groups and homelessness prevention service providers. As a member of the Public Benefits Unit, she works with clients to ensure they are maximizing their eligibility for benefits and supports Empire Justice Center's work to increase the public assistance shelter allowance to better reflect the real cost of housing.

"In order to positively improve the lives of lower income individuals, change must be made both on a large-scale policy level and in individual cases on a micro-level," states Zoe. "Empire Justice Center has given me the unique opportunity to use my legal education to help individuals in both capacities. Being able to gain experience in two legal units is invaluable for both my personal growth and for my ability to be a successful advocate for lower-income individuals."

Zoe, a native of Niagara Falls, NY, received her Master's in Social Work at the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and her law degree at Case Western Reserve University School of Law in Cleveland, Ohio in May 2022.

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While in law school, she was involved in various projects and programs such as the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Right to Counsel Program and Housing Court Program, the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless to work on their Homeless Bill of Rights Project, the Ohio ACLU, New York Attorney General's Charities Bureau, and was a fellow at the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Prior to law school, Zoe volunteered with a youth organization for underprivileged children and was a project coordinator for a community investment program through AmeriCorps.

The Hanna S. Cohn Equal Justice Fellowship was established in 2002 in memory of Hanna Cohn, who was the Executive Director of the Volunteer Legal Services Project (VLSP), now JustCause, in Rochester for 20 years. The Fellowship allows the attorney to design and implement a project to increase legal advocacy for Greater Rochester's low-income families. The Fellowship is made possible by the Hannah S. and Samuel A. Cohn Memorial Foundation and by contributions from Hanna's family and friends.

Hanna's son Eli Cohn-Wein stated, "Hanna came to Rochester as a brilliant and energetic legal mind with a focus on improving the lives of those who were left behind by the legal system. Even early in her career, Zoe has established herself as a tireless pursuer of justice, and we are certain that Zoe's work through the fellowship will be a tremendous boon to Rochester and Hanna's legacy. Our gratitude to her, Empire Justice, and the Hanna and Samuel Cohn Foundation for honoring Hanna's memory in this way that knows no bounds."

Empire Justice is thrilled to bring on a law graduate whose work is fulfilling our mission of making the law work for all New Yorkers, especially for those who need its protection the most.

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Empire Justice Center is a non-profit law firm dedicated to making the law work for all New Yorkers using a powerful, 360-degree approach. We teach the law by providing training technical assistance to other advocates organizations. We practice the law by providing free, direct civil legal services and impact litigation. We change the law by engaging in legislative and administrative advocacy on issues that affect under-served communities.