

Job Announcement

Position: Housing Quality Attorney

Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota seeks to hire a Housing Quality (HQ) Attorney at its Duluth office.

Organization:

Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Minnesota (LASNEM) provides legal representation to low-income and senior citizens in 11 counties with offices in Duluth, Grand Rapids, Virginia, Brainerd, and Pine City. In the 63 years since LASNEM was founded, we have become an integral part of the justice system and a cornerstone of Northeastern Minnesota's commitment to the proposition that equal access to justice is a basic human right. In addition to a full range of general poverty law services, LASNEM operates special projects to focus on the unique needs of the clients we serve, such as the Senior Law Project, the Native American Outreach Project in Itasca County, Domestic Violence Courts in both Crow Wing and Itasca Counties, and integral work for partnerships to prevent homelessness. LASNEM is also one of the seven legal services programs that form the Minnesota Legal Services Coalition.

In every case that we handle, our goal is always to help our clients reach sustainable, holistic resolutions to the problems they face. Legal problems do not arise in a vacuum, nor does resolving a legal matter always achieve the client's goals of safety, stability, and opportunity. To that end, we work closely with a large number of community partners all across our service area to more holistically address client needs; working in tandem with our community partners often sparks a virtuous cycle of success for our mutual clients.

Position Description:

The Housing Quality (HQ) Attorney will work primarily in LASNEM's Housing Quality Improvement Project. The mission of the project is to (1) improve the quality of the rental housing stock and (2) prevent housing loss due to rental housing habitability issues facing low-income residents in Northeastern Minnesota. This project is supported by funds from the Bank of America settlement with the Department of Justice. The current grant has 12 months remaining, and then a potential renewal for another two years. The HQ Attorney will work out of the Duluth office, but may provide services and support for relevant matters in any part of our service area.

The project is based on a historical problem with substandard housing conditions for low-income residents. Many landlords who rent to low-income individuals will not make repairs because the tenants are unable to effectively advocate for themselves. The available legal actions, the rent escrow action and tenant remedies action, do have pro se forms available, but they are fairly complex and burdensome proceedings. Without an attorney to represent them, most tenants choose to simply move. Due to the shortage of affordable housing, landlords are then able to re-rent problem units without making needed repairs. As a result, the housing stock remains substandard. This cycle contributes to housing instability for low income tenants.

When disputes develop over code violations, tenants often withhold rent on their own, which results in eviction. Landlords will often terminate the tenancy of a tenant who complains about a lack of repairs. When a building loses essential utilities, either because of lack of repairs or because a landlord does not pay, tenants must find alternative housing with little warning.

The HQ Attorney will focus on rental housing habitability cases and get involved at early stages rather than waiting for the unit to become condemnable. The HQ Attorney will provide legal advice, outreach to tenants in distressed buildings or mobile home parks, and represent tenants in rent escrow, tenant remedies, and eviction actions involving habitability issues. The HQ attorney will also have the capacity to undertake major cases involving multi-unit housing and groups of tenants, seeking the appointment of receivers to collect rent and make necessary repairs. Aside from direct client service, the HQ attorney will provide community education and outreach to tenants and landlords, provide continuing legal education training to volunteer attorneys through the local pro bono program, and conduct rent escrow pro se clinics.

Qualifications:

Applicants must be licensed to practice law in Minnesota or eligible for admission by motion or reciprocity. Previous experience in housing law is preferred but not required. Demonstrable awareness and sensitivity to the needs of the population we serve and the project's mission is necessary. Candidates must have a valid driver's license, working vehicle, and willingness to travel to court proceedings, outreach opportunities, staff meetings and trainings. Excellent written and communication skills, an ability to work constructively with others, and an ability and willingness to work hard and exercise good judgment are all necessary qualifications for this position. Applicants must be flexible and able to accept additional duties as necessary.

Compensation:

DOE pursuant to salary scale. LASNEM offers a comprehensive benefits package with excellent health/dental/life/disability insurance; 403(b) retirement plan; exceptionally generous and flexible paid time off; and LASNEM observes all federal holidays.

Deadline to Apply: July 13, 2018

Please submit a cover letter, resume, and list of three references **via email only** to:

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