



# FREDRICKSON FELLOWSHIP



Northwest Justice Project

**July 15, 2016**

“It makes no sense why a landlord would reject a tenant based on their lawful source of rental payment,” said Rachel Collins, NJP’s 2016 Steve Fredrickson Fellow. Rachel, a rising 2L at Gonzaga School of Law, is spending 10 weeks this summer with NJP’s Spokane office working on this critical problem facing low-income communities. “I am thrilled that this fellowship allows me to use my legal training to address a basic human need: housing,” she says.

As the inaugural Steve Fredrickson Fellow, Rachel provides important support for cases in which tenants have been denied housing when government or non-profit funds are available to pay tenant rents. Some landlords advertise “no Section 8” or will refuse an application for tenancy, regardless of rental and credit history, simply because the tenant qualifies for rental assistance.



This problem goes well beyond Section 8 rental assistance. Low-income housing applicants with verifiable sources of income such as Social Security, child support, or SSI are too often assumed to be unacceptable or undesirable renters. As Rachel sees it, “Every renter should be given an equal opportunity to apply.”

Blanket “no Section 8” landlord policies are a pretext for illegal discrimination and have a disproportionately negative impact on Washington’s low-income families and those on fixed incomes. Community efforts to prohibit source-of-income discrimination in the Washington State Legislature have been unsuccessful to date, yet the problem persists in every corner of the state.

For supervising attorney Eric Dunn, the Steve Fredrickson Fellowship provides valuable, much needed capacity to advance efforts to provide fair housing access for low-income renters. “This issue can be addressed directly through the courts,” says Eric. “There is already a compelling argument that housing discrimination based on a lawful source of income violates existing fair housing laws because of its disproportionate harm to people of color, people with disabilities, and other protected groups. The Steve Fredrickson Fellow is making a difference in NJP’s advocacy efforts in this area.”

Before law school, Rachel volunteered for several years as a legal assistant at Colorado Legal Services and worked as a victim’s advocate for the Denver City Attorney’s Office, where she saw first-hand the critical importance of affordable housing. “My prior experience opened my eyes to the value of legal assistance for people in poverty,” Rachel says. “This full-time fellowship focused on eliminating housing discrimination is fueling my passion for social justice and human rights. I’m especially honored to have been awarded this inaugural fellowship to celebrate Steve Fredrickson, a true champion for housing rights.”