

Civil Action Practice Social Worker

Overview

The Bronx Defenders - an innovative, progressive, holistic indigent defense office in the South Bronx - seeks a master's level social worker with a commitment to public defense, tenants' rights, and housing advocacy to work with clients in our Civil Action Practice.

Founded in 1997, The Bronx Defenders is a public defender nonprofit that has developed a nationally recognized model of representation called holistic defense, which provides people with teams of lawyers, social workers, and advocates to defend them zealously in court as well as to address the underlying drivers and enmeshed penalties of legal system involvement.

Since opening our doors, we have grown into an organization of more than 400 staff members defending nearly 20,000 New Yorkers each year in criminal, family, civil, and immigration proceedings who face incarceration, family separation, eviction, and deportation, among other devastating consequences.

Today we are reimagining the role of public defense even further, using community organizing and engagement, legislative advocacy, and impact litigation to partner with the communities we represent to bring about long-lasting systemic change.

We also share our model and lessons learned with current and future public defenders. We run two legal clinics at NYC law schools and train public defenders from one end of the country to the next on how to move to a holistic model of representation.

Civil Action Practice

A sweeping array of civil punishments are triggered the moment someone faces arrest, deportation, or family separation. The people we represent risk losing their jobs, homes, income, property, and basic civil rights—struggles that can be more devastating and long-lasting than the charges themselves. Last year, we helped 2,200 people obtain concrete benefits like maintaining their jobs, homes, income, property, and rights.

Housing Justice & the Right to Counsel

Recognizing the challenges to accessing affordable, quality and safe housing in New York City, The Bronx Defenders has a team exclusively dedicated to providing tenants at risk of losing their homes with defense attorneys for their Housing Court cases. Our

Housing Team was developed in response to the 2017 New York City Right-to-Counsel Law which provides tenants facing eviction in Housing Court and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) administrative proceedings with access to free legal representation. The Bronx Defenders is one of six institutional providers effectuating the Right to Counsel in housing, with dedicated attorneys and advocates who exclusively work with and represent tenants in Housing Court.

In 2020, we created a dedicated, integrated civil social work team to work with our housing attorneys, supplement their legal defenses and provide additional support and resources to clients. Our social workers are committed to a Housing First perspective, an approach to homelessness that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life.

Social Work

Strategizing with lawyers and other advocates, social workers at The Bronx Defenders assist clients with issues that precipitate and are exacerbated by contact with the legal system. Social workers are responsible for assisting with advocacy on behalf of the people we work with, including preparing written work, gathering mitigating information, coordinating and connecting our clients with treatment programs and social service providers, and supporting clients as they navigate their cases.

Responsibilities

The Civil Action Practice social worker, supervised by the CAP Social Work Director, will focus on the needs of clients facing eviction and other housing instability as well as clients in need of support when facing the civil consequences of multisystem entanglement.

Client Interviewing

- Interview clients during initial housing court petition overview
- Interview and assess clients to identify strengths, resources, and needs
- Assist clients in identifying legal goals, strategize to meet those goals, and assess progress
- Prepare clients for court-related assessments, including requests for guardians ad litem, Article 81 guardians, adult protective services, and reasonable accommodations
- Visit clients at their home, inpatient treatment programs, jails, and other facilities where clients reside to gather information and offer support related to their legal case
- Oral and Written Advocacy
- Provide written and oral advocacy for clients in Housing Court and other administrative fora, including advocacy with judges, court attorneys, OPA for Order-to-Show Cases, motions for GALs and to vacate judgments

- Provide oral advocacy with supportive housing providers, Homebase, hospitals, long-term managed care facilities, and city/state/federal agencies
- Provide written advocacy including but not limited to affirmations and advocacy letters

Case Consultation

- Provide consultation to attorneys and advocates in other practices on the civil repercussions of their clients' cases
- Provide consultation to housing attorneys on housing court related matters, including but not limited to, case theory, housing court stipulations, and housing court Order-to-Show Causes
- Provide consultation to housing court attorneys on challenges in client communication, including but not limited to client's ability to talk through allegations, attorney's ability to counsel clients, attorney's ability to gather information from clients, and client competency
- Collaborate with mental health experts to determine what kinds of evaluations are necessary for the case, analyze assessment results, and identify experts who can speak to clients' narratives
- Interpret external assessments and medical & clinical records to help attorneys develop legal strategies for our clients

Case Related Advocacy and Case Management

- Assist clients outside of court to help them overcome barriers to reaching their housing court goal while potentially navigating various legal systems and civil legal processes
- Work collaboratively with clients, lawyers and other advocates on multidisciplinary holistic defense and housing teams to achieve clients' stated legal goals
- Connect clients with a wide variety of social services and benefits, and provide case management support and advocacy
- Advocate for clients across immigration, criminal and family court settings related to civil needs including, but not limited to, housing, benefits and shelter related matters
- Provide advocacy to clients applying for supportive housing
- Establish the rights of clients residing in supportive housing

Client Support

- Provide crisis intervention
- Provide supportive counseling to clients as they navigate their legal cases
- Help prepare clients for trial and other hearings in Housing Court and to access benefits

- Attend appointments, meetings, and court events with clients

Community Education and Training

- Advocate for clients across immigration, criminal and family court settings related to civil needs including but not limited to, housing, benefits and shelter related matters
- Prepare clients for court-related assessments, including requests for guardians ad litem, Article 81 guardians, adult protective services and reasonable accommodations
- Collaborate with mental health experts to determine what kinds of evaluations are necessary for the case, analyze assessment results, identify experts who can speak to clients' narratives, and help prepare clients for trial and other hearings in Housing Court and to access benefits
- Interpret external assessments and medical & clinical records to help attorneys develop legal strategies for our clients
- Visit clients at their home, inpatient treatment programs, jails, and other facilities where clients reside to gather information and offer support related to the legal case
- Provide supportive counseling to clients as they navigate their legal cases
- Facilitate and support meetings and trainings for the Civil Action Practice and the Social Work Practice to provide information on CAP Social Work's scope of work
- Provide community-facing education on CAPSW related areas
- Support and participate in pipelines, including intern trainings, supervision and mentorship

Qualifications

To be eligible, candidates must have:

Any **combination** of the following levels of experience:

- M.S.W. from an accredited School of Social Work **AND**
- One year of case management/advocacy experience **OR**
- At least two years of education in a related field

Candidates must demonstrate:

- Commitment to challenging systemic injustice and carceral systems
- Commitment to anti-eviction and housing first perspective
- Commitment to directly defending people ensnared in family, criminal, civil, and immigration legal systems
- Experience working in and with racially, ethnically and socioeconomically marginalized communities
- Ability to effectively and respectfully communicate, collaborate and connect with people with various backgrounds, identities and experiences

- Ability to work well independently and collaboratively with an interdisciplinary team of lawyers, non-lawyers and external service providers
- Commitment to fierce advocacy, and willingness to strategically challenge authority in defense of clients
- Strong analytical skills and capacity to employ non-legal resources
- Meticulous attention to detail
- Effective verbal and written advocacy skills
- Ability to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with external partners and service providers
- Ability to multitask, maintain order and meet deadlines in a fast-paced, high-stakes environment
- Ability to think critically and creatively in fast-paced settings, finding innovative solutions to unique obstacles
- Ability to receive constructive feedback, demonstrate introspection and shift behavior accordingly
- Ability to exercise excellent judgment, discretion, and confidentiality with sensitive matters
- Commitment to raising one's cultural consciousness and challenging oppressive practices on an interpersonal and institutional level
- Knowledge and comfort working with people who experience mental health, substance use, and trauma

Preferred, but not required:

- Experience providing client advocacy related to housing and benefits
- Spanish language proficiency
- Knowledge of New York City's institutions and social service systems
- SIFI Seminar Training in Field Instruction (SIFI) Certification

This is an in-person position subject to the organization's hybrid work policies.

Salary is commensurate with experience. For candidates with 1-10 years of directly relevant experience, the salary range for this position would be approximately \$87,177 to \$119,577. Full-time employees are also eligible for a comprehensive benefits package including but not limited to medical, dental and vision coverage; a 403(b) plan with employer contribution; and a generous vacation, sick leave, and parental leave policy. More specific information about salary and benefits will be provided when and if an offer is extended.

Approximately 70% of The Bronx Defenders' staff, including attorneys and non-attorneys, are represented by UAW Local 2325 - Association of Legal Aid Attorneys (AFL-CIO). This position is within the bargaining unit.

This position is exempt. By law, non-exempt employees are compensated hourly based on their annual rate and therefore are entitled to overtime, whereas exempt employees are not.

[To apply, upload your resume and cover letter in one document and submit online.](#)

The Bronx Defenders is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to maintaining a workplace that embraces staff with a diversity of backgrounds, identities, and experiences. We acknowledge the ways in which systemic oppression and injustice can undermine access to professional opportunities and are committed to conducting hiring and promotion processes that are equitable and accessible to those commonly excluded from the workforce. We do not discriminate against and in fact specifically encourage applicants from marginalized communities to apply, including those who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of color, queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, disabled, neurodivergent, and those directly impacted by criminal, civil, family, and immigration legal systems. We value lived as well as professional experience and particularly welcome applications from the Bronx community that we serve.

