

BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION A

2023 – 2024 Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A’s (“Brooklyn A” or “BKA”) mission is to wield community-focused civil legal services to confront injustice. Brooklyn A works to ensure all New Yorkers have equal access to legal services to seek justice, make their voices heard, and overcome systemic oppression and racism.

We address the myriad systemic issues facing our communities by providing a combination of legal assistance, including full legal representation, brief advice/services, and community education, to marginalized populations—including the low-income working poor, the unemployed or underemployed, the disabled, seniors, survivors of domestic violence, families in crisis, community-based organizations ("CBOs"), and largely women, immigrant, and BIPOC-owned small businesses throughout New York City ("NYC").

Our clients live in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods where many residents and small business owners have been displaced or are facing displacement and harassment. We focus our work in three areas: Consumer & Economic Advocacy ("CEA"), Community & Economic Development ("CED"), and Preserving Affordable Housing ("PAH"). The efficacy of our work is enhanced through close collaborations with other CBOs, coalitions, elected officials, and advocacy groups.

The CEA Program provides vulnerable homeowners and taxpayers with legal services around consumer advocacy to protect economic equity. During the IOLA 2023-24 grant year, we assisted 191 homeowners facing foreclosure at various stages of state and federal court litigation, including appellate and federal bankruptcy court litigation. This representation resulted in the preservation of \$20,301,309.04 of equity and the potential for greater intergenerational wealth for



Service Area: Brooklyn

Population Served: Low-Income Populations

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 90	Lawyers: 49
Paralegals: 10	Others: 31

largely BIPOC low- and moderate-income homeowners. The vast majority of our foreclosure cases were in Kings and Queens counties, the counties with the highest foreclosure rates in NYC.

Brooklyn A's Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic ("LITC") represented 179 cases in the reporting period. As a direct result of our efforts, the total dollar amount realized by low-income taxpayers was \$405,993.55. We work with and receive referrals from organizations such as Sanctuary for Families, Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners, Grow Brooklyn, elected officials, and IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Taxpayer Advocate Service sites. Our LITC work targets low-income taxpayers, which includes many non-English speaking taxpayers in the City. During the reporting period, nearly half (49%) of our LITC clients were from Brooklyn, while we also served clients from Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island, as well as clients from Cortland, Nassau, Ontario, Putnam, Schenectady, Suffolk, and Warren counties.

The 2023-2024 funding period was the first full year of Brooklyn A's domestic and family violence (DV) program, which was launched in October 2022. 23 DV cases were closed in the reporting period, impacting 46 people. Through this initiative, we provide legal advice and representation to survivors of domestic violence (including child abuse) and sexual assault on civil legal issues, including orders of protection, custody, support, and other related family law issues. We also provide advice and representation to survivors on other civil legal issues, as well as services via a social worker, including counseling, crisis intervention, safety planning, and benefits support.

The CED Program provides transactional legal counsel to small businesses and nonprofits that sustain and empower low-income communities. During the IOLA 2023-24 grant year, we provided legal assistance to 1,250 CED clients. These clients consisted of small businesses whom we represented on non-litigation matters related to commercial leases and nonprofit CBOs whom we represented on transactional projects. The target population for this work includes small businesses, particularly those that are immigrant-, BIPOC-, and women-owned, and nonprofit organizations which serve low-income and marginalized communities in NYC. The CED Program's cases during the reporting period impacted clients in all five boroughs/counties of New York City.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case #1 – Housing (Foreclosure): LB is a Black first-time homebuyer. Through her hard work, she was able to buy a home in the early 2010s. LB works as a nursing assistant and has three foster children for whom she cares. LB first came to Brooklyn A in 2016 as a referral from a housing counselor when she fell behind on mortgage payments, due to the Social Security Office improperly stopping payments on certain benefits. While LB was working on restoring these benefits, she fell behind on her mortgage obligations. By the time the benefits were reinstated, several monthly mortgage payments were not made, and the lender commenced a foreclosure action.

The lender kept denying LB a loan modification and eventually the case entered litigation. Brooklyn A represented LB and strongly advocated for her in Court. Brooklyn A prevented the lender from foreclosing on LB's home.

After seven years of litigation, the lender finally offered an affordable loan modification which LB accepted. The lawsuit was settled and discontinued. LB and her three foster children continue to reside at their Brooklyn home and remain part of their community.

Case #2 – Housing (Preserving Affordable Housing): MD and her family had been facing extraordinary hardships over the course of the last few years. MD's daughter, HD, passed away in December of 2021 from an aggressive cancer. Prior to her death, HD was paying rent for the apartment.

MD was supporting her daughter while she was undergoing treatment by helping raise her two grandchildren. After the death of her daughter, MD was granted succession rights to the apartment and continues to raise her grandchildren. She also has a minor son, who is attending school. The family's only source of income is cash assistance from HRA and MD's son's part-time job.

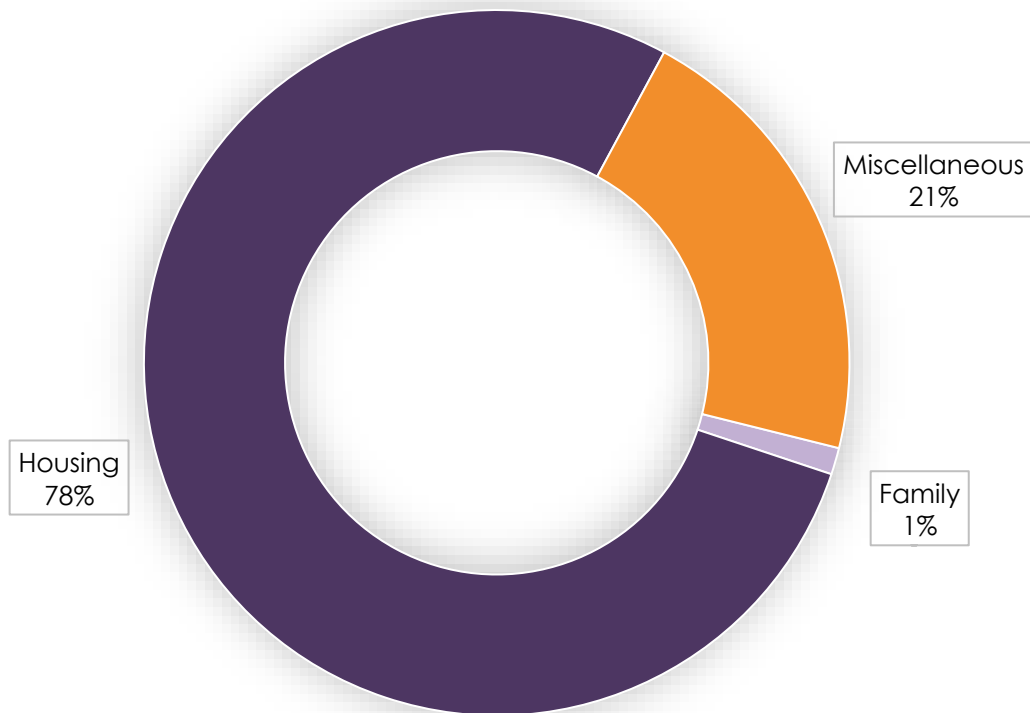
3,449

people
benefitted
from

1,555

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



As they coped with the loss of a loved one, the family accrued a large amount of rental arrears, totaling over \$47,000. With support from our office, we applied for over \$10,000 in charities. We received almost \$8,000.

We also completed and advocated for a One Shot Deal (OSD), totaling \$38,020.50. The remaining arrears, which accrued later, were covered by CityFHEPS while the voucher was processed. Our team at Brooklyn A worked hard to advocate for the OSD while a transfer CityFHEPS voucher was pending, as it typically does not get approved without future ability to pay the rent. However, a massive amount of arrears had racked up, and needed to be reduced prior to a transfer voucher being approved.

With relentless advocacy, we were able to work with the two agencies (the Rental Assistance Unite (RAU) and Homebase) to concurrently issue both the OSD and the beginning of the transfer CityFHEPS voucher, which secured their housing and saved them from eviction. Our office was able to delay the case in court so that our support team could secure the funding for rental arrears and for future rent.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Our CEA foreclosure team works with homeowners who are behind on their mortgage payments, but where a foreclosure action has not been filed yet. We have assisted numerous homeowners with pre-court issues where they would get a loan modification before proceedings start or help them apply for the Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF), Equitable Reverse Mortgage Assistance (ERMA), and Human Resources Administration (HRA) One Shot deals that enable them to reinstate their loans before court proceedings even begin. We additionally regularly conduct LITC clinics with several law firm partners.

Our PAH unit's model of group representation requires extensive outreach and education to potential new clients. These presentations allow us to expand our client base and inform our communities of the services we provide. Through this outreach, we impacted 2,528 Brooklyn residents.

Our CED Program regularly refers matters requiring special expertise to pro bono counsel at private law firms.

In total across all programs, we reached 6,382 New Yorkers through 182 community legal education outreach sessions, provided more than 11,956 residents with pro se assistance, and reached 203,593 people via online outreach.

11,956

people
benefited
from

**Pro Se
Assistance**

6,382

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

203,593

people
benefited
from

**Web-Based
Assistance**

IMPACT CASES

Brooklyn A continues to represent 53 clients in seven NYCHA buildings in Coney Island, Brooklyn. The clients (and nearly 450 additional residents in the buildings) had been experiencing a litany of issues: no gas, exposed wiring, cracked windows, leaking sinks and pipes, and more.

Brooklyn A has been representing these residents in the courts throughout the past two years and is incrementally seeing the gas restored and other improvements made and will continue advocating on behalf of the clients.



TECHNOLOGY

Brooklyn A continues to regularly use Microsoft Teams and Zoom, which allow us to continue efficient client outreach, intake, and representation, which has remained essential since some of our client interactions continue to take place virtually. We've also continued our use of tools such as DocuSign and GoTo to ensure our programs continue running smoothly.

Other notable technological improvements included our continued improvements to our cyber security via JustTech, our IT firm, including firewall upgrades, email security, and cloud server backup. Additionally, our Director of Operations has initiated an in-house centralization of all maintenance of our client case management system.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Brooklyn A used the \$10,000 technology grant to pay for cyber security costs, specifically related to firewall upgrades, email security (phishing and other malicious attacks), and backing up cloud server files. These funds served a valuable role in advancing Brooklyn A's strategic technology goals, as we continue to take all available precautions to protect our client and staff data. Without this funding, we likely would not have been able to complete upgrades at our preferred levels.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Our basic training for all staff, law student interns, and volunteers is the same, depending on which kind of casework the individual will complete. Everyone receives training on our case management system, conducting client intakes, and how to complete critical forms, such as power of attorney. This training also includes guidance on how to properly handle client files that contain sensitive information and keep records of time spent on work.

All Brooklyn A programs worked with a talented group of law student interns and volunteers during the reporting period. Under the supervision of our staff attorneys and program directors, these interns and volunteers worked on matters including preparing discovery demands in bankruptcy cases, drafting motions, and representing clients in nonpayment and holdover cases. This work is extremely helpful to our attorneys. Notable schools from which our interns came include Elisabeth Haub School of Law, Brooklyn Law School, Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Boston University School of Law, Georgetown Law School University School of Law.

Our CED Program completed its 15th year of its Simpson Thacher Bartlett LLP Externship. As part of the program, we host an associate with corporate transactional experience (usually a 2nd to 5th-year associate) for a 4-month rotation who works in the unit full time. The extern works on a wide variety of client matters, including non-litigation commercial lease matters for small business clients, the initial formation of start-up nonprofit organizations, and real estate and project finance transactions for non-profit organizations.

99attorneys volunteered **3,169** hours**48**law students volunteered **5,775** hours**1**other volunteer volunteered **60** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

NHS Brooklyn: Our CEA Program works closely with NHS Brooklyn, a CBO that provides various services to homeowners and tenants in NYC, including helping homeowners save their properties. We and NHS Brooklyn have partnered at various virtual community education and outreach events. We also do extensive work with homeowners in Queens, where we provide anti-displacement workshops with partners that include the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, NHS Queens, NHS Jamaica, and JASA.

We and NHS Brooklyn also have a referral partnership. NHS Brooklyn refers many clients to us who need assistance with filing bankruptcy and saving their homes through loss mitigation procedures in the bankruptcy courts. We have helped many NYC residents save their homes in bankruptcy proceedings, and many of them were referred by NHS Brooklyn. During the grant period, we also continued referral relationships with elected officials, NHS Jamaica, NHS Queens, the Brooklyn and Queens Supreme Courts, Cypress Hills LDC, Brooklyn Legal Services, Access Justice Brooklyn, MHANY Management, Chhaya Community Development Corp., the Center for New York City Neighborhoods, and JASA. Our LITC program works closely with Sanctuary for Families, Neighborhood Trust Financial Partners, Grow Brooklyn, various elected officials, IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites, and IRS Taxpayer Advocate Services. Our DV/Family program works closely with – and receives referrals from – the Brooklyn Family Justice Center. We also conducted LITC clinics with the firms Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates; Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP; and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison.

CBOs and Other Partners: Our CED Program works with a large number of CBOs, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and other partners to assist with outreach to small businesses and to make them aware of the legal services we provide. Amongst those partners in the reporting period were the Asian American Federation, Accompany Capital, CHHAYA, Cooper Square Development Committee, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, NY Communities for Change, the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, the Staten Island Urban Center, Sunset Park Business Improvement District, Washington Heights Inwood Development Corporation, and the Yemeni American Merchants Association (YAMA), each of whom works closely with BIPOC business owners in their communities and refers potential clients to Brooklyn A. Referrals were received from the Brooklyn Law School clinical program, North Star Fund, Columbia Business School Office of Community Partnerships, NYC Network of Worker Cooperatives, Legal Services of NYC – Brooklyn CED Program, CUNY Law School CED Clinic, and the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition. Additionally, we worked

collaboratively on multiple matters through pro bono support from firms including Denton US LLP, Greenberg Traurig LLP, Millbank, Davis Polk, Cozen O’Conner, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, Fried Frank, Wilkie Farr & Gallagher LLP, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale, Skadden Arps Slate Meagher & Flom LLP, Brown Rudnick, DLA Piper, Duane Morris LLP, Paul Weis Rifkind Wharton & Garrison, Mayer Brown LLP, Lowenstein Sandler LLP. We also continue to host an externship program with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett in which corporate associates from the firm are rotated in for 4-month cycles to work full time within our CED team.

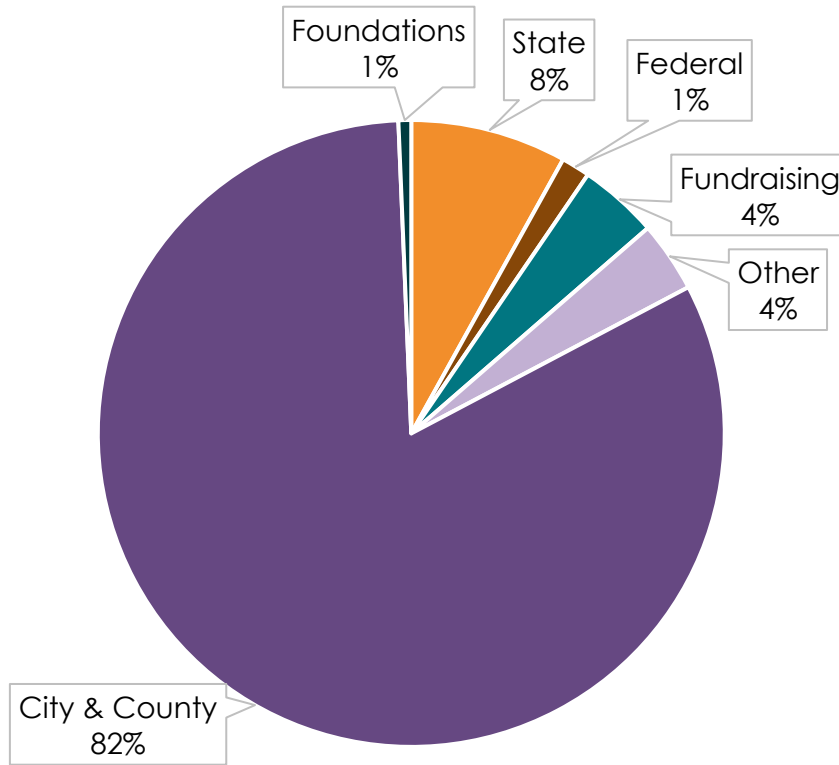
Right to Counsel Coalition: Our PAH team continues to actively participate in the Right to Counsel Coalition. We also collaborated with Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, St. Nicks Alliance, NYC Housing Partnership, NYC Justice Center, City Bar Justice Center, and local elected officials. We have been working side by side with these and other community partners for decades as thought partners and, in many cases, helping them navigate through the complex legal aspects of their work in empowering communities.

LEAP: Brooklyn A remains an active member of LEAP, a membership coalition comprised of direct civil legal services providers serving the low-income communities of New York City. The LEAP member organizations – consisting of the Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defenders, Brooklyn A, CAMBA, Catholic Migration Services, Goddard Riverside, Housing Conservation Coordinators, JASA, Make the Road NY, Mobilization for Justice, Neighborhood Defenders Harlem, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, TakeRoot Justice, The Door, the Urban Justice Center, and Volunteers of Legal Services (VOLS) -- work to increase the availability of quality civil legal services for low-income New Yorkers. LEAP supports diversity and innovation in organizational models, delivery systems and methodology, and specifically recognizes the need to maintain community-based service delivery.

New York Legal Services Coalition: Brooklyn A is also a member of the New York Legal Services coalition. The coalition’s nearly 50 member organizations provide civil legal representation to low-income persons and families in matters involving essentials of life. The Coalition works to ensure fairness for all in the judicial system through a wide range of educational activities; advocates on legal issues affecting low-income communities and the delivery of civil legal aid; identifies and promotes best practices in the civil legal aid community; and provides technical assistance and capacity building resources for our members.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 14,191,010



IOLA Funding	\$ 77,981
City & County Funding	\$ 11,582,706
State Funding	\$ 1,136,864
Federal Funding	\$ 208,637
Foundations	\$ 92,856
Fundraising	\$ 577,025
Other Funding	\$ 514,939