

CITY BAR JUSTICE CENTER

2023 – 2024

Report

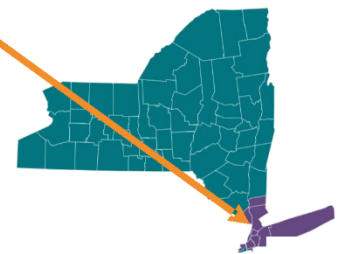
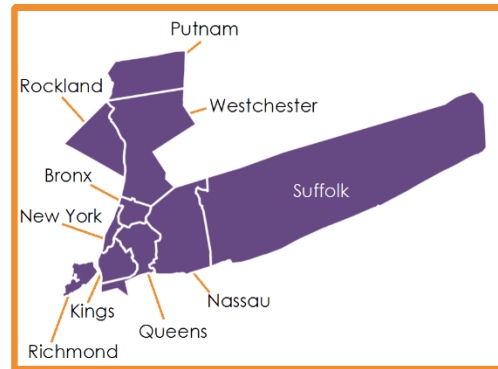
OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The City Bar Justice Center delivered diverse civil legal services in 2023-24 benefiting **25,795** New Yorkers of low income – *3% higher* than last year. Our **34-FTE** team helped clients obtain over **\$9.7** million in benefits, awards, and settlements (*9% higher*) and save nearly **\$4.7** million through debt prevention and resource preservation (*94% higher*). Our clients also benefited from thousands of pro bono hours from **3,021** volunteers and almost **\$25** million worth of legal services donated by pro bono partners (*15% higher*).

Our Legal Hotline responded to **11,728** inquiries received by phone or online (*2% higher* than last year). Hotline services cover a range of civil matters, including landlord-tenant, family/matrimonial, and consumer debt. With its attorneys staying on top of changes in the law and procedure, the Hotline provided brief services (e.g., sending legal information, links, and reviewing or drafting simple documents) to **3,556** patrons (*16% higher* than last year).

Robustly addressing New York’s asylum seeker crisis, our Immigrant Justice Project helped 593 persons from 50 countries with legal advice, application assistance (including vastly expanded pro se support), referrals, as well as full representation in many cases.

Our Legal Clinic for the Homeless maintained high client support levels while transitioning to a new project director and recruited a stand-out pro bono partner to develop two new HRA advocacy projects focused on reversing shelter denials for families in need and preventing loss of household and personal items in auctions. In February 2024, the project began assisting weekly at clinics at a church in midtown Manhattan for new arrivals from the U.S. border, assisting with obtaining public benefits, shelter, and identification documents.



Service Area: New York City Metropolitan Area

Population Served: Under-resourced New Yorkers

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
 Total Staff: 34.88 Lawyers: 19.52
 Paralegals: 9.5 Others: 5.86

Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project's expanded advocacy around student loan debt included 33 community group presentations that benefitted 482 individuals, and the distribution of educational materials on bankruptcy, managing student loan debt, and financial education that reached 254 persons.

Our Veterans Assistance Project reached many of the most vulnerable, serving veterans and surviving family members ranging from 6 to 77 years old and serving 12 female veterans and 7 additional veterans who identify as non-binary or do not wish to disclose their gender.

Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project helped clients discharge \$1.9 million in debt, protect \$120,870 in savings, tax refunds, and other assets, and avoid \$8,601.70 in wage garnishments monthly. The project's expanded student loan debt work helped clients obtain affordable repayment plans yielding substantial monthly savings and \$777,814 in loan forgiveness.

Our Homeowner Stability Project assisted homeowners in obtaining \$673,885 in cash benefits from New York State's Homeowner Assistance Fund; assisted two clients in selling their homes and retaining \$696,015 in equity; and helped 11 clients retain their homes by receiving mortgage modifications or refinances, obtaining funds to pay off liens, securing clear title to their property, or through other interventions – advocacy estimated to have realized \$3.65 million in value and thereby helping to preserve not only homeownership for vulnerable New Yorkers and their families but also their communities, many of which are communities of color long denied equal housing opportunity and, today, often the target of frauds, scams, and other predatory schemes antithetical to racial and economic justice.

Our Immigrant Justice Project saved clients at least \$60,128 through approved fee waiver requests and application fee donations from our law firm and corporate pro bono partners. Our Veterans Assistance Project helped clients obtain \$22,650 in new, recurring monthly disability benefits and \$610,358 in retroactive benefits. The project also helped clients obtain waivers for VA-claimed debts valued at \$80,079 in lump sum avoidance.

In May 2023, the Justice Center launched its first-ever, dedicated in-house social work program, and it has been pivotal in delivering more holistic, client-focused support, particularly for individuals aged 60 to 75 facing varying social, economic, and emotional stressors on top of legal problems. In less than a year's time, our clinical social worker and two interns assisted 125 clients referred by our civil legal projects, in addition to providing allied training and support to our lawyers and other professional staff. This continuum of services combining personalized

emotional support and guidance to clients on accessing healthcare, housing, employment, food and other basic resources helped foster stronger client relationships and improved outcomes.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

The City Bar Justice Center reaches target populations in varied ways. Many clients come to us via referral by the courts, NYC Bar’s Legal Referral Service, and other service providers. Clients also directly find us through our website, social media posts, and online legal assistance platforms. In the past year, the Justice Center also stepped up targeted outreach to local elected representatives to ensure they – and, by extension, their constituents – are aware of our services. Individual Justice Center projects also conduct outreach in varied ways:

- Our Cancer Advocacy and Elder Law Projects reached prospective clients via established contacts with 83 cancer organizations and 52 senior centers, which share information on our available remote services and presentations and distribute substantive resource materials.
- Our Veterans Assistance Project increased presence at conferences and varied community-sponsored events (e.g., “Wellness Wednesdays” at a local college) to expand client outreach.
- Our Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project continues collaborating with long-term community partners on legal presentations, webinars, and clinics, and such partners promote joint programs among their constituents. The project also conducts substantial outreach through a variety of social media platforms, which proves effective with its target client base.

The Justice Center’s intake models vary. Many projects conduct initial intakes via Avaya, a cloud-based telephone system, including our Cancer Advocacy, Elderlaw, Homeowner Stability, Planning & Estates, and Veterans Assistance Projects. Others, such as our Consumer Bankruptcy and Federal Pro Se Legal Assistance Projects, typically collect intake information via an online form before communicating with potential clients, while our Immigrant

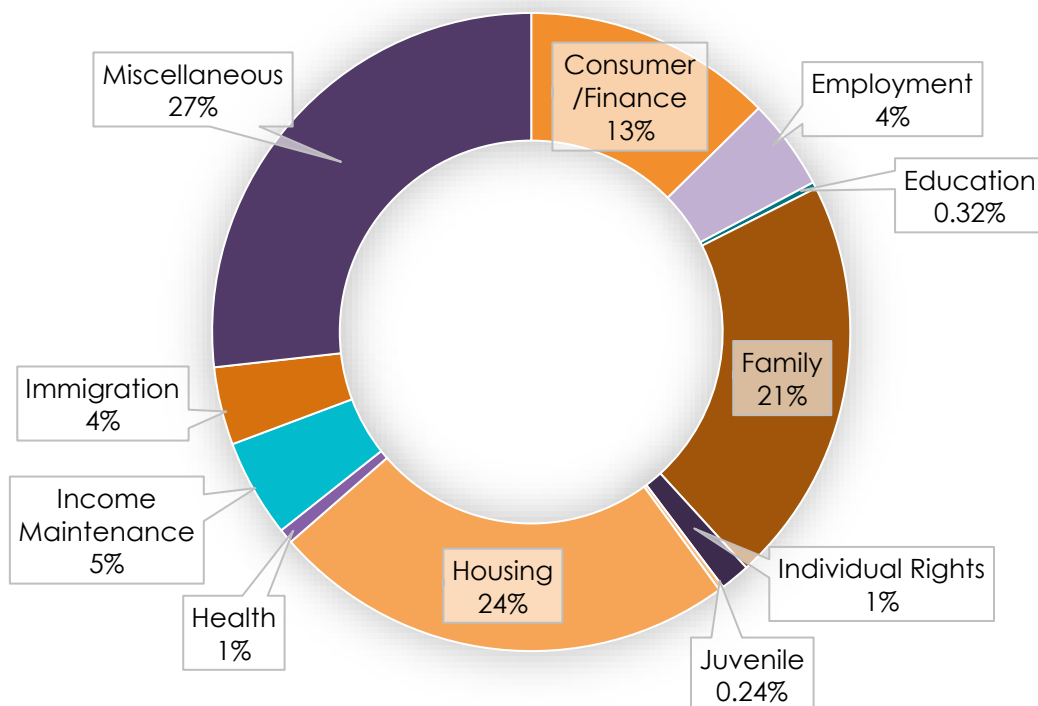


Justice Project mostly conducts in-person intake interviews. All Justice Center projects manage intake information via LegalServer, our case management system, which we also use to deploy an updated, guided navigation “Get Help” online intake application on our website. The online application allows individuals to contact us 24/7 and collects demographic information and a concise explanation of their legal issues, allowing us to respond within two business days.

The vast bulk of our matters are handled by our Legal Hotline, which remotely provides legal information and advice to upwards of 1,000 New Yorkers in need each month via telephone during business hours and by responding to inquiries submitted 24/7 via an online intake application integrated with LegalServer, our case management system, that we updated this year. During this grant period, Legal Hotline staff attorneys responded to 11,728 inquiries and online applications.

Justice Center projects’ adoption of virtual programming has expanded the reach of our services while lessening office travel burdens on clients. We also have seen our office renovation investment pay off for clients with limited tech or privacy at home. A great many have taken to using specialized space we created in our offices where they can use cutting-edge tech to remotely connect with pro bono attorneys; attend virtual clinics, presentations, or court conferences; complete online legal forms and applications or conduct research; or otherwise benefit from remote services.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



CASE EXAMPLES

Immigration: Our Immigrant Justice Project's NYC Migrant Youth Initiative (and similar expanded Recent Arrivals Project) has designed and implemented a cadenced, pro-bono-supported clinical model to assist greater numbers of "new New Yorkers" needing quality help for varied stages of the immigration relief legal process. In one example, our project provided comprehensive legal assessment and assistance to Mr. R, a recently arrived youth from Venezuela. Mr. R first participated in a pro bono screening clinic to better understand his needs and assess his eligibility for relief. After determining Mr. R was eligible for asylum, our team assisted Mr. R in filing a pro se asylum application in April 2023 with assistance from pro bono attorneys we recruited, trained, and supervised. Subsequently, after the re-designation of Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status, we assisted Mr. R in applying for and securing that status via another pro se clinic; at yet other pro se clinics, our team, and pro bono partners helped ensure Mr. R timely and accurately filed for work authorization and application fee waivers. This programmatic focus on maintaining contact and providing ongoing support to new arrivals, especially as new relief options emerge or regulations shift, is an important component of our capacity-expanding pro se clinics amidst a growing crisis for New York City and State.

Income Maintenance: All City Bar Justice Center projects assist clients in ways that support their and their family members' income maintenance and overall well-being. A case in point is our assistance to Mr. F, a 65-year-old U.S. Marine veteran living in the Bronx. While serving his country in the Marines, Mr. F sustained disabling injuries and was assaulted multiple times. In the last few years, he has experienced a house fire and homelessness. When Mr. F sought help from our Veterans Assistance Project, his 10% disability benefits rating was insufficient to pay for the medications he needed. Our project's recruited and supervised volunteer attorneys secured an 80% service-connected disability rating for Mr. F, translating to \$1,778 in recurring monthly benefits and \$25,983 in retroactive benefits. This significant result made it possible for Mr. F to provide a financially stable future for himself and his wife as they age.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

The City Bar Justice Center provides community legal education, pro se assistance, and outreach to thousands of New Yorkers of limited income through presentations, workshops, clinics, distribution of materials, and online resources. During this grant year, Justice Center staff – with assistance from 84 pro bono volunteers who allocated 2,794 hours of service to our Other Legal Related Services – provided community legal education to 23,516 New Yorkers in need via presentations and distributed materials, representing a *168% increase* from last year. In addition, online resources covering diverse subjects were viewed and/or downloaded 104,935 times, a *17% increase* from last year.

Our success at reaching more New Yorkers needing free legal help stems from a concerted community outreach and services messaging strategy made possible by new dedicated communications and outreach staffing, further concretized by and implemented following the October 2023 launch of the Justice Center’s new, three-year strategic plan, *Honoring Our Roots, Revisioning Our Commitments* ([link](#)). This grant year, we also launched a substantially revamped and more user-friendly Online Legal Resource Library ([link](#)) containing over 80 self-help resources to increase access to legal information and assistance.

499

people
benefitted from

**Pro Se
Assistance**

23,516

people benefitted
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

104,935

people
benefitted from

**Web-Based
Assistance**

City Bar Justice Center projects also assisted 172 people at dedicated pro se clinics on varied topics (often also providing short, one-on-one follow-up consultations) and assisted at least 613 pro se parties through our Consumer Bankruptcy and Federal Pro Se Legal Assistance Projects alone – two projects primarily oriented to provide pro se support, but services statistics for which are recorded under Direct Civil Legal Assistance given the level of service provided. By this autumn, we will launch two other pro se-focused initiatives: an uncontested divorce project at the request of the NYC Courts' Access to Justice Initiatives Office and a reboot of the City Bar's vaunted Monday Night Law program, on hiatus since the pandemic.

Community Legal Education: Our Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project provided legal education presentations to 565 micro-entrepreneurs on topics such as business entity formation, employment law, ADA compliance for small businesses, commercial leasing, and intellectual property.

Pro Se Assistance: Our Federal Pro Se Project conducted three remote presentations with pro bono volunteers that reached 41 pro se litigants and covered litigation-related topics such as discovery and the Court's Alternative Dispute Resolution program. Presentations were held via Zoom, and pro bono attorneys offered follow-up, case-specific phone consultations with individual litigants.

Web-Based Assistance: Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project developed a website for its Student Loan Initiative, where individuals can view infographics, watch a video on managing student loan debt (the video alone has been viewed 62 times), sign up for events, and complete a form for 1:1 assistance.

HOUSING JUSTICE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

This grant cycle the Justice Center continued subcontracting IOLA funds to New York Law School's Housing Justice Leadership Institute (HJLI) to provide the comprehensive training needed to increase the number of qualified legal supervisors in the NYC eviction-prevention provider community. HJLI's community lawyering, racial justice, and housing rights curriculum, developed with the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, addresses strategic thinking, supervising across differences, providing constructive feedback, engaging difficult conversations, debiasing, structural racialization, and improving legal skills. HJLI is especially important now as Right to Counsel programs see enormous expansion, hiring, and promotion to meet the need for counsel and address the loss of personnel during the "great resignation."

Curriculum topics addressing such issues include: managing the housing crisis; supervising newly hired attorneys practicing law in a crisis mode; and meeting the flood of eviction cases filed after the post-pandemic reopening of Housing Court and lifting of the eviction moratorium. Over 600 staff attorneys now represent tenants under NYC's Right to Counsel program; HJLI trained most of the supervisors, and helped forge a supportive community among them. A program for HJLI's sixth cohort wrapped up in January 2024, and planning is underway for a September 2024 seventh cohort. Incidentally, the new director of the Justice Center's Legal Clinic for the Homeless is an alum of HJLI's first cohort; she credits HJLI with empowering her to develop strong client advocacy, supervisory, and coalition-building skills – skills the Justice Center is grateful to see in action!

TECHNOLOGY

During the reporting period, the Justice Center made significant strides in leveraging technology to enhance legal services delivery. After moving essential work functions to Microsoft 365, our organization experienced significant improvements including more streamlined collaboration, increased accessibility, and enhanced security – all of which helped boost productivity and communications. We also updated key organization technology materials including our cybersecurity guide and a client text messaging policy that reflect improved processes and practices. New office technology purchased or brought online in the past year include tablets that streamline the capacity of our Legal Clinic for the Homeless to assist recently arrived migrants at coalition-organized clinics based at a midtown church with a range of online

applications, and dedicated private office space has been instrumental in supporting clients with limited technology access or proficiency, enabling them to complete case-related documents or connect remotely with pro bono volunteers or online programming.

Our investment in a revamped online intake process paid off in terms of client services impact, with **4,644** online intakes processed during this grant period, representing a *13% increase* from last year. This underscores both the growing demand for our services and the need to continue implementing responsive tech solutions. To expand our intake capacity, we are further building out guided navigation that will more effectively filter requests for help. We also continue to lead the collaborative NYC Consumer HelpFinder, an online intake tool that uses an intelligent case routing system to provide access to legal assistance from any web browser.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

IOLA's 2023 technology grant helped the Justice Center enhance legal services delivery and maximize operational efficiency. Related technology upgrades and improvements include:

- **Accessibility:** Technology is essential to providing increasingly accessible and streamlined legal services. We purchased tablets that enhanced in-person clinical programming via faster intake processes and document collection; translated applications that helped address language barriers; and helped us show clients how to access online resources and information.
- **Equipment:** The Justice Center implemented a new policy requiring staff to only use organization-owned devices for work, and established guidelines for proper device use, management, and security. The significant investment required to purchase new laptops for staff, many of whom were using personal devices when working remotely, advanced data security goals but also provided an opportunity to assess and train on best practices.
- **Software:** The Justice Center's purchase of new Adobe Acrobat licenses for staff helped us implement our commitment to upgrading essential software to enhance security, ensure compatibility with newer systems, and access updated features and improvements.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

The City Bar Justice Center relies on strong partnerships with law firms, corporate legal departments, and the wider legal community to recruit and train thousands of volunteer lawyers annually to support client services ranging from advice-only clinics to pro se assistance, limited to full-scope representation, research and writing projects, and presentations. Our volunteers also include law students, pro bono scholars, law school clinic interns, graduates seeking to satisfy their 50-hour pro bono requirement, and retired attorneys participating in New York's Attorney Emeritus Program. In this grant period, 2,277 volunteers contributed nearly 33,497 hours to direct client services, and 84 additional volunteers contributed 2,794 hours towards other legal services.

Each Justice Center legal project is led by a subject matter expert who offers training and ongoing supervision and mentoring across pro bono assignments. Training encompasses relevant substantive law, as well as cultural competency skills necessary to work with diverse populations facing poverty. In addition, our standalone pro bono advocacy-focused DEI CLE is available not only to our pro bono partners but also has been presented to the NYC Bar Association and other constituencies, attracting several hundred attendees this year. Our Consumer Bankruptcy Project also presented a pro bono bankruptcy services-focused DEI CLE in collaboration with Access Justice Brooklyn for 87 Upstate Bankruptcy Bar Associations' annual conference attendees.

2,071attorneys volunteered **27,786** hours**28**law students volunteered **4,426** hours**262**other volunteers volunteered **4,080** hours

The Justice Center continues to address emerging community needs. For example, our Immigrant Justice Project's expanding work focused on new arrivals includes trainings not only for prospective pro bono volunteers who support our pro se clinics, but also of the staff at housing and other social services agencies to ensure they have up-to-date knowledge of the shifting legal terrain impacting those recently arrived in New York from the U.S. southern border.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

All Justice Center staff collaborate with the public interest community and law firms, corporate legal departments, and others comprising our pro bono partner network. Of recent import, our executive director worked closely with the New York Legal Services Coalition and a broad and rapidly-assembled cross-section of the private bar to oppose Governor Hochul's IOLA Fund sweep, underscoring the value of collaboration to support access to justice.

Additionally:

- In February 2024, our Legal Clinic for the Homeless joined a coalition run by Artists Athletes Activists to assist newly arrived migrants at Metro Baptist Church in midtown Manhattan, focusing on public benefits, NYC ID, immigration, and other resources. This new initiative is critical as NYC faces record homelessness and continuous new arrivals. Our initiative now serves, on average, 13 households encompassing roughly 30 persons on a weekly basis.
- Our Immigrant Justice Project's (IJP) Migrant Youth Initiative has continued a now nearly two-years-running collaboration with Covenant House New York, and in January 2024 IJP kicked off expanded asylum advocacy via its Recent Arrivals Project (RAP). RAP relies on pro bono volunteers from law firms and corporate law departments to provide cadenced pro se assistance clinics focused on different immigration processes; Know Your Rights clinics for migrants; and trainings to bolster nonprofit agency staff knowledge of the rapidly shifting immigration law terrain. Importantly, all of these initiatives rely on – and could not occur at their scale without – our pro bono partnerships, along with a great many local nonprofit community partners. Just one example: IJP recently worked with Mexican Coalition to provide staff training on humanitarian immigration relief, a screening clinic for new arrivals and longtime Bronx residents, application help for certain referrals, and an Advance Parole clinic so DACA beneficiaries could travel abroad on an educational trip with the organization, and for which IJP secured a law firm donation for the USCIS fees.

- The Justice Center’s Legal Hotline utilizes an online request-for-help portal shared with the New York State Courts’ Access to Justice Initiatives to match pro se litigants with pro bono volunteers we train and supervise to provide advice and brief services in civil court matters.
- Our Planning and Estates Law Project works with the Mount Sinai Hospital Medical Legal Partnership to help patients needing emergency wills and powers of attorney and to advise family members on care for patients’ children and preservation of housing for the family.
- Collaborating with the Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP) to provide legal assistance, community education, and outreach addressing student loan debt relief, our Consumer Bankruptcy Project is one of few EDCAP providers with the expertise to advise on the limited circumstances where student loan debt can be discharged in bankruptcy.
- Our Cancer Advocacy and Elderlaw Projects’ network of 135 cancer-related organizations and senior centers are a distribution hub extending the projects’ remote presentations’ reach.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$4,895,410.00	
IOLA Funding	\$ 683,000.00
City & County Funding	\$ 225,000.00
State Funding	\$ 1,369,917.00
Federal Funding	\$ 153,345.00
Foundations	\$ 206,250.00
Fundraising	\$ 2,106,451.00
Other Funding	\$ 151,447.00

