

Hudson Valley Justice Center

2023 – 2024

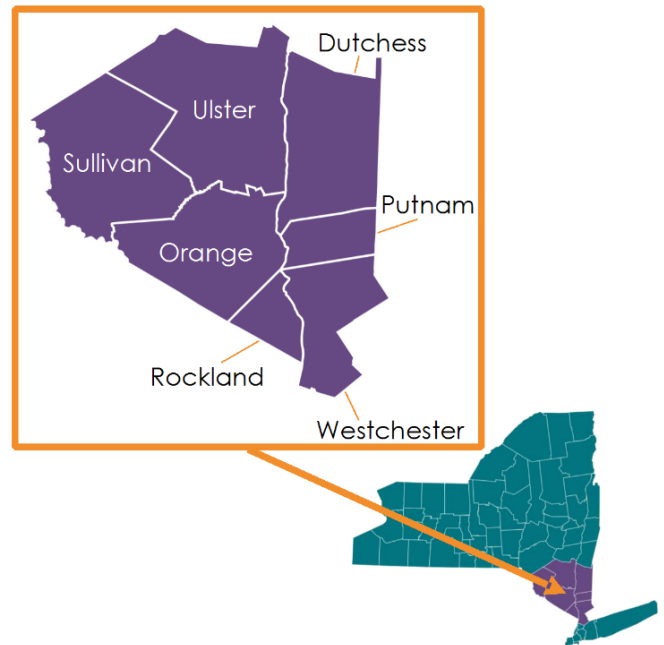
Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, we handled 1,183 legal matters, benefitting the lives of 3,107 individuals and family members. This represented nearly a 50% increase from closed cases in the previous year. Cases handled covered a variety of practice areas, including housing, immigration, family law, employment, consumer issues and individual rights matters. Our target population includes individuals living at or below 200% of the poverty level, regardless of immigration status. We serve non-citizens ineligible for assistance from LSC funded programs, as well as individuals conflicted out or turned away from other providers due to program capacity. We are the only agency that provides comprehensive representation in eviction matters for this population in all but 1 of the 7 counties we serve in the Hudson Valley. As the demand for legal assistance in housing matters continues to grow, we have seen an increasing number of citizens seeking our services in addition to non-citizens. During the reporting period, approximately 30% of clients served were non-citizens, compared to 51% in the previous year. Approximately 28% of clients served had Limited English Proficiency requiring translation to access services. The most common language spoken among LEPs served was Spanish, with only 10% of translations requiring other languages.

From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, we completed 1,528 intakes, up 34% from the previous year. Nearly 97% of intakes were seeking legal assistance with housing matters. Many tenants contacting our offices were facing eviction for non-payment and were denied by existing rental repayment programs based on eligibility issues and a general lack of funding.

During the past year, we prevented 173 evictions from public, private, and subsidized housing, preventing the displacement of 472 individuals and family members.



Service Area: Hudson Valley

Population Served: Low-Income Populations

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 30	Lawyers: 14
Paralegals: 12	Others: 4

More than 73% of those households had more than 1 occupant, 45% had 3 or more occupants, while nearly 40% of all occupants were children under the age of 18. We delayed 88 evictions, mitigating some of the most traumatic impacts of eviction for 250 individuals and family members by giving them time to secure alternative housing and secure their belongings. In addition to our housing work, we promoted economic independence and family stability by securing back wages for 7 employees and securing child custody for 6 families.

We secured \$968,107.96 in total financial benefits for the clients during the last year. Those financial benefits included direct dollar benefits of \$12,596.96 in back child support and \$440 in ongoing monthly child support awards, as well as \$19,272.00 in affirmative landlord tenant judgments and \$10,163.23 in back wages. In addition, we helped clients avoid housing arrears of \$897,491.77 and ongoing monthly costs of \$28,144.00.

During the reporting period, we opened two new offices in Poughkeepsie and Yonkers, bringing our total number of offices to four. Both new offices are open 5 days a week from 9 am-5 pm to accommodate walk-in traffic and are located within walking distance of their respective city courts. Our staff has grown significantly, with the total staff reaching 30 as of March 31, 2024, more than double the total staff during the previous year.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

We engage in outreach efforts including tabling events and/or brochure distribution and presentations to community groups. All outreach materials and presentations are provided in Spanish and English. We are part of a large network of service providers throughout the Hudson Valley and we regularly cross refer to connect individuals to necessary services. We receive referrals from the various courts in our service area as well as from the offices of elected officials. In addition to in person outreach, we engage in outreach through our website and our social media.

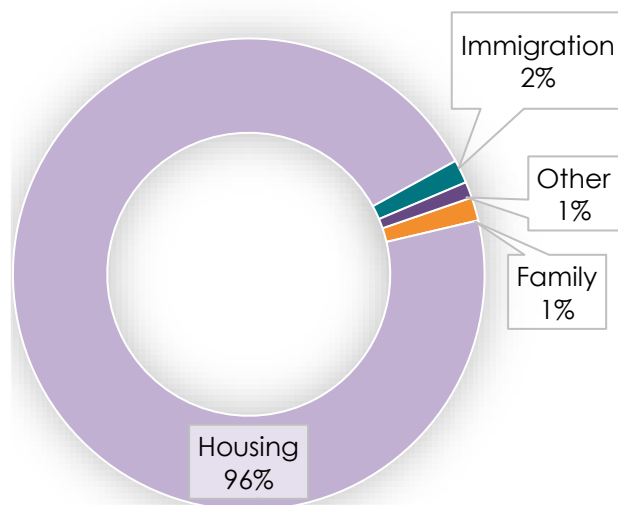


CASE EXAMPLES

Example 1: Anya came to HVJC seeking assistance with Immigration and Housing matters. She arrived in the US in 1994 from her native country and while living here was the victim of domestic violence at the hands of her former partner. At the time she came to HVJC she was a single parent to 4 minor children and had applied for a U Visa. She received her initial approval but was having difficulty navigating filings on her own and missed a critical filing deadline with USCIS. We were able to overcome the late submission and continue her application. While her immigration matter was pending, we also represented her in her housing matter and our victim advocate helped ensure she was receiving all possible support for herself and her children. Finally, after several years of representation, Anya is now a Green Card holder. She is looking forward to finding more secure employment and is finally able to make plans to travel home to see family she has not seen in 30 years.

Example 2: Art came to HVJC for help with a Housing matter after he was served with a non-payment petition. Art had been living in an ETPA apartment with his spouse and two children since 2019. The landlord was charging Art \$1,700 dollars for monthly rent. HVJC reviewed the last registered rent for the apartment and determined ETPA calculations would result in legally chargeable rent closer to \$875 dollars per month. An overcharge complaint was filed with DHCR to determine the appropriate rent amount and the tenant stopped paying the inflated rent. The Landlord through his attorney disputed the calculations and alleged the tenant owed over \$65,000 in arrears. We calculated the rent adjustment retroactive to 2019 and determined Art only owed \$4,000 in arrears. Despite the pending complaint to DHCR to determine the appropriate rent amount, the Landlord refused to agree to an interim rent amount and instead brought a non-payment proceeding against Art. We filed a Motion seeking to stay the non-payment proceeding pending a decision in the DHCR overcharge complaint. We appeared in Court and the Judge granted a stay of the proceedings pending a determination by DHCR. Art was ordered to pay into escrow with the Court the monthly rent amount as we calculated it, ~\$857 monthly. The overcharge complaint is still pending with DHCR. As a result, Art has been able to remain in his apartment and has only had to pay about half the rent that he was originally charged.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, HVJC participated in 44 outreach events reaching 1,879 community members. We seek out outreach opportunities in the communities we serve at locations that are accessible to all community members. HVJC specifically seeks out opportunities to partner with trusted community groups that have established relationships with the immigrant community. We have conducted outreach events at various locations including schools, churches, food pantries, multi-unit buildings and at parent group meetings to increase community awareness of available legal services. We also distribute brochures to local businesses and provide legal information at tabling events, local courts, and libraries. We also provide substantive 'Know Your Rights' trainings on various topics to increase knowledge of legal rights and protections. All trainings and outreach materials are provided in Spanish and English, and whenever possible we preserve time at the end of training sessions for participants to speak one on one with our staff members to complete intakes.

1,879

people
benefited
from
**Community
Legal
Education**

28

people
benefited
from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

During the reporting period, we organized an outreach event at an auditorium in our Poughkeepsie location. We provided two sessions of our Know Your Housing Rights training, one session geared toward Housing Providers, Community Partners, & Housing Advocates and one session geared toward tenants. The event included a speech by a local Assemblymember and was attended by ~50 people.

In August 2023, we were invited by a local Senator's office to staff a booth at the Healthier Mamaroneck Access to Care Fair. Our staff spent the day interacting with community members and connecting with other service providers. We distributed 126 brochures regarding our services to community members and completed several initial intake forms for clients seeking assistance.

TECHNOLOGY

As our staff grew, the increased traffic on our remote server was causing significant lag and frequent reboots during business hours. We determined the best solution was to move to a cloud-based system from the existing remote server. In December 2023, after upgrading end user hardware we completed the transition to OneDrive. Since we made the move to OneDrive, we have not experienced any downtime and our storage space is virtually unlimited. In addition to our server upgrade, HVJC's website redesign was completed during the reporting period. We now have the ability to provide remediated downloadable resources that are ADA compliant through our site. We are developing additional self-help guides and videos that we hope to have available on our site in the coming months and we look forward to expanding our impact through digital media.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

IOLA's tech grant allowed HVJC to (1) procure a contract employee to develop a comprehensive branding strategy that coincided with the launch of our new website, (2) purchase three laptops, and (3) purchase additional Adobe Pro Licenses.

The rebranding contractor authored agencywide brand guidelines, including color palates, typography, logo usage, and overall messaging principles. These new guidelines give HVJC a unique and distinctive visual identity, easily recognizable across various digital platforms. We incorporated these guidelines into our outreach materials and strategies, including on our newly launched website.

In addition to direct outreach, one of HVJC's main goals is to increase collaboration with other community-based organizations pursuing similar missions. This branding strategy has made it easier and quicker for HVJC to develop tailored outreach materials for community-based events. Further, when clients first contact HVJC at these outreach events, a unique and recognizable brand helps clients connect the agency to the original point of contact. The additional Adobe Pro licenses have also helped in this regard. More of our staff can help produce the appropriate outreach material when needed. This means outreach material can be updated more frequently, which in turns means it can include more updated information.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

During the past year, we increased efforts to engage volunteers to grow our capacity. We hosted 6 non-attorney volunteers, including a law student who worked with our immigration attorney on USCIS submissions. We have more volunteers committed for the coming year and expect to host a pro bono scholar as well. We have conducted outreach with local law schools in an effort to increase student interest in non-profit legal services, specifically in landlord/tenant matters. We continue to work with a retired law professor from the Elisabeth Haub School of Law who ran the law school clinical program with the goal of creating a more formal program utilizing our existing student practice order.

1

attorney
volunteered **10** hours

1

law student
volunteered **240** hours

5

other volunteers
volunteered **187** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

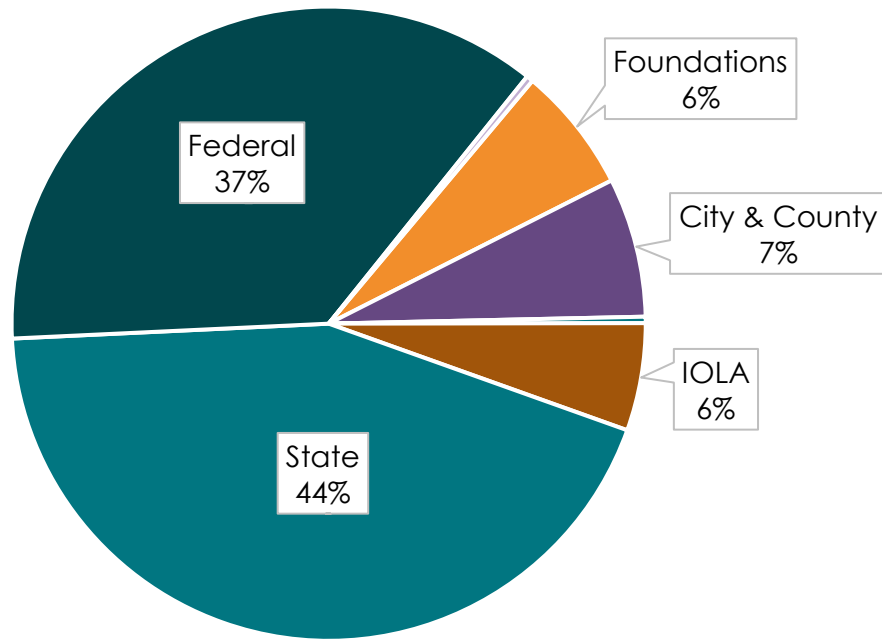
Our two most significant collaborations are with Legal Services of the Hudson Valley (LSHV), on eviction prevention projects.

We are a subgrantee of LSHV on OTDA's ERAP Representation Grant, which provides eviction prevention services to tenants throughout the Hudson Valley region. In October 2023, the funding was extended, and a portion of the award was made available to establish an arrears repayment program for our clients. With access to both legal representation and essential funding for arrears, we are confident that we can preserve the housing of even more tenants going forward. We expect to issue our first arrears payments this quarter.

Our second collaboration is a HUD funded Eviction Prevention Project with LSHV and Community Voices Heard. For the last year and half, we have provided legal services to underserved communities in Dutchess County with a focus on the City of Poughkeepsie and surrounding areas. The goal of the project is to combine tenant advocacy with tenant organizing to increase access to services. The project has been very successful and the connections we made through our networking helped support the opening of our fourth location in the city of Poughkeepsie.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 2,507,368



IOLA Funding	\$ 135,000
City & County Funding	\$ 174,988
State Funding	\$ 1,078,145
Federal Funding	\$ 899,069
Foundations	\$ 158,302
Fundraising	\$ 8,400
Other Funding	\$ 8,014