

# **JustCause**

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**2023 – 2024**

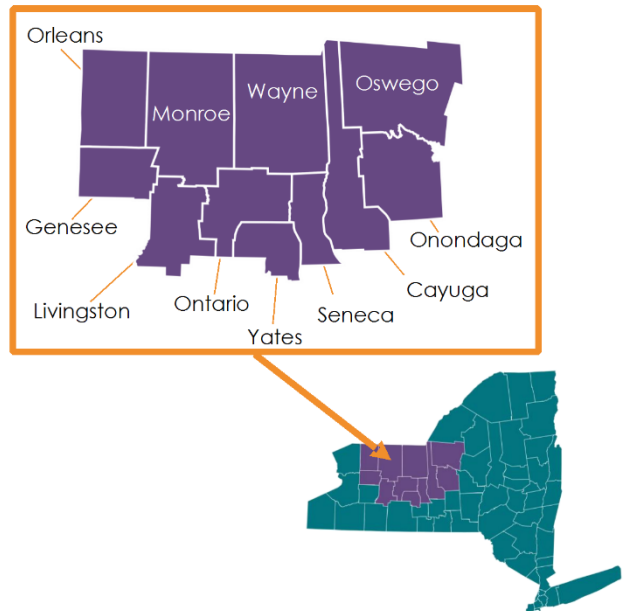
**Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Volunteer Legal Services Project of Monroe County Inc., dba JustCause closed 2,072 individual cases during the period 4/1/23-3/31/24, benefitting 4,368 people. Six hundred and sixty-four (664) cases were closed by pro bono volunteers providing representation in civil legal matters including bankruptcy and debt issues, child custody and visitation, child support, consumer problems, denial of unemployment insurance benefits, divorce, domestic violence, eviction and foreclosure prevention, immigration, and microenterprise.

JustCause’s primary geographic service area is Monroe County, New York. Select programs, notably the Immigrants Rights Program, serve clients living in surrounding rural counties including but not limited to Genesee, Livingston, Onondaga, Ontario, Orleans, Wayne, and Wyoming Counties. Our target population is residents with incomes below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As part of the Tenant Defense Program, JustCause operates a Tenant Defense Hotline, and staff and volunteers fielded 13,890 calls during FY24. The Hotline increased community awareness regarding illegal evictions and the pressing need for a multidisciplinary team to address homelessness and eviction issues. All clients who contacted the Hotline were provided either legal advice about their situation and/or accurate legal information and up-to-date resources.



JustCause’s Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice assisted 4,929 unrepresented litigants during FY24. The Help Center provides: (1) free walk-in procedural information which helps unrepresented individuals navigate the legal system to obtain fair outcomes; (2) help with court process and procedures, and access to and assistance with filling out forms; and (3) referrals to appropriate legal and social service resources.

**Service Area:** Finger Lakes Region

**Population Served:** General Low-Income Population

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 24.53 Lawyers: 7.28  
 Paralegals: 11 Others: 6.25

Legal assistance provided by JustCause prevented or delayed an eviction in two hundred and thirty-three (233) cases. In such instances, giving the client sufficient time to find somewhere else to live prevented a homeless shelter stay. The average cost of a homeless shelter stay is \$473, as reported by the Monroe County Department of Human Services Housing/Homeless Services Annual Report for 2018. A conservative estimate of the total savings for New York State taxpayers as a result of JustCause legal assistance is an estimated \$110,209 through the avoidance of shelter stays.

JustCause continues to make significant program capacity improvements through the use of technology and database upgrades. Technology advancements have allowed JustCause to streamline pro bono involvement. Our case management system for client matters (Salesforce) is fully integrated with our volunteer database and website, with secure 2-factor authentication in place for all systems. Our “Pro Bono Portal” was built to increase efficiency in placing clients with pro bono attorneys and monitoring case progress, and has undergone a technology improvement project over the past year. Forty (40) new users have signed up to use the portal since improvements were completed in July 2023. Pro bono attorneys who have been screened and accepted as JustCause volunteers are able to access real-time information on existing cases.

To support the expansion of programs and staff, JustCause acquired 2,300 square feet of space in the Telesca Center adjacent to our current offices at below market rates. The expansion provided new shared workspace for staff who are not in the office daily, as well as a multi-purpose meeting space which can be set up for special events to accommodate up to 75 in-person attendees. We updated this space with new office furniture, paint, audiovisual improvements and technology support. The space is now being utilized by JustCause and partners for large staff meetings, clinics, and community programs.

JustCause assistance resulted in significant benefits for clients. From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, clients recovered \$132,939.73 in lump sum awards, and an aggregate \$528.00 per month was awarded in child support. JustCause attorneys prevented the loss of \$403,603.25 in judgments against clients, and prevented the loss of \$495 per month in child support.

## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

JustCause staff has long-established relationships with trusted community members and organizations that serve our target client populations. Our dedicated Director of Community Partnerships, Dr. Rashid Muhammad, represents JustCause at over 20 community groups, coalitions, working groups, subcommittees, and other locations or meetings of interest to our client population. Information about JustCause programs and how to access them are available through common referral sources such as 211/lifeline, LawHelpNY.org, and other up-to-date local directories. Our services are also advertised at the Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice. JustCause Immigration Staff attend local education and outreach activities at consulates, health fairs, churches, and other “safe spaces” for undocumented workers and their families. Our Family Law Staff Attorney is a member of the Domestic Violence Consortium and has relationships with Willow Domestic Violence Center (Willow) and the HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy and Legal) Collaborative. She solicits referrals from the community for our Family Law Custody Clinics by distributing flyers to Willow, Monroe County Family Court, and the Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice. Our Health Law Staff is on-site regularly at Trillium Health, Catholic Charities Community Services, and the Strong Infectious Disease Clinic to ensure that patients and staff are aware of our services.



4,368

people  
benefited  
from

2,072

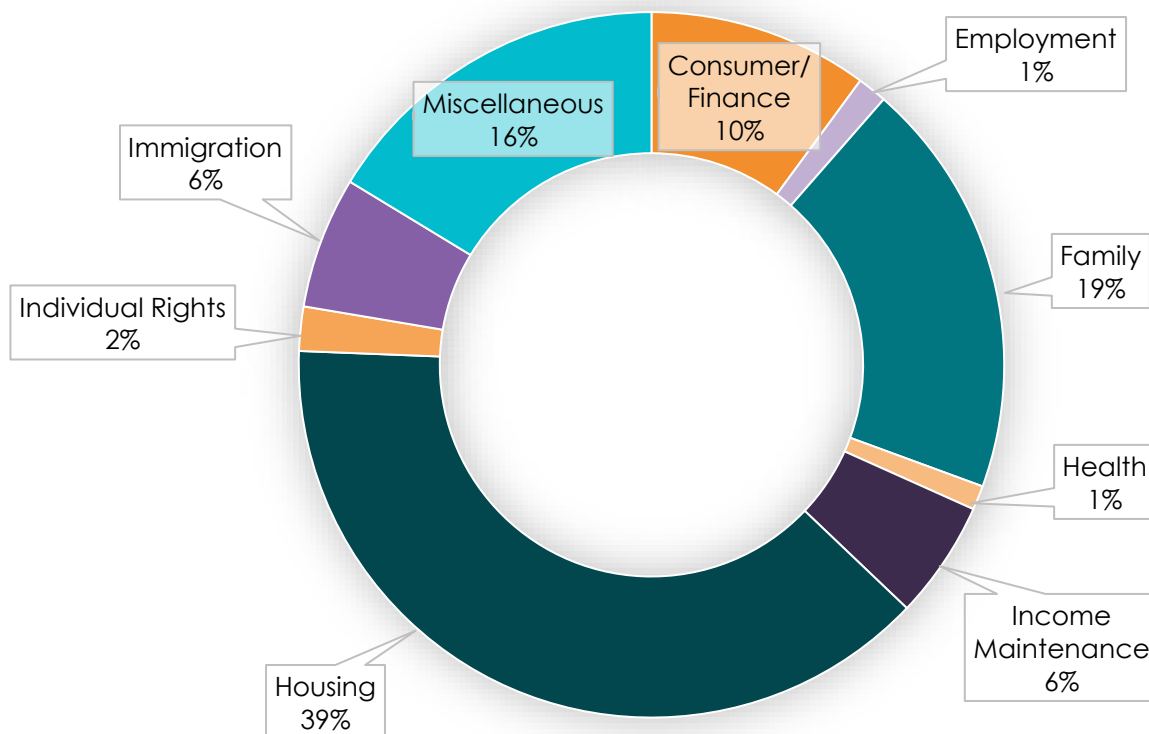
legal cases  
closed

JustCause developed an online intake system which has been live on our website home page since its soft launch in May 2018. The system is now available in English and Spanish. Applicants for services may access the tool via JustCause’s website or at [www.legalhelpprochester.com](http://www.legalhelpprochester.com) and are asked to answer brief questions about financial eligibility and the type of legal problem. Each application that is received is reviewed by a member of our intake staff who contacts the individual for income verification and follow-up via telephone within 24 hours.

Eligible clients are then routed to the applicable JustCause unit (e.g., housing, family, etc.) for further assistance. A dashboard system that JustCause developed includes the number of pending online intakes, the prominence of which has sped JustCause’s response rate to intakes. Applicants who call our office are routed to Central Reception which serves all of the civil legal services partners in the Telesca Center for Justice. On-site operators perform a brief screening and then submit the applicant’s screening to our intake staff. Our intake staff responds to all inquiries within 24 hours.

As part of the Tenant Defense Program, JustCause operates a Tenant Defense Hotline and staff and volunteers fielded 13,890 calls during FY24. The Hotline increased community awareness regarding illegal evictions and the pressing need for a multidisciplinary team to address homelessness and eviction issues. All clients who contacted the Hotline were provided, at minimum, information and resources or advice regarding their situation.

## CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



# CASE EXAMPLES

**Example #1:** Maria reached out to JustCause seeking help with a custody matter in Supreme Court. Despite appearing in court multiple times without representation, she hadn't been assigned counsel—a right often overlooked in Supreme Court compared to Family Court. Our Staff Attorney patiently heard Maria's story, provided advice, and took proactive steps to get her assigned counsel, engaging with the court on her behalf. This not only established rapport but led to the court recommending a volunteer attorney from our panel, based on our suggestion.

This intervention significantly impacted Maria's case and life. Without the volunteer attorney, she would have been left unrepresented, likely with a very different outcome. Our agency's involvement went beyond legal advice, providing invaluable guidance and advocacy. Maria's heartfelt appreciation highlighted how our intervention empowered her, ensuring her interests were heard and represented.

**Example #2:** Luis was born in Guatemala and arrived in the United States with his mother as a nonresident alien in 2018. After surviving a crime while in the U.S., he was granted a U Visa and became a Legal Permanent Resident. Luis needed assistance with filing a Certificate of Citizenship (N-600) application. JustCause assigned him to a pro bono attorney who helped him complete and submit the application to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. The attorney also attended Luis's naturalization interview, and JustCause is thrilled to announce that Luis is now a naturalized citizen.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

JustCause’s Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice assisted 4,929 unrepresented litigants during FY24. The Help Centers provide: (1) free walk-in procedural information which helps unrepresented individuals navigate the legal system to obtain fair outcomes; (2) help with court process and procedures, and provide access to and assistance with filling out forms; and (3) referrals to appropriate legal and social service resources.

JustCause’s Immigrant Rights Program holds multiple “Know Your Rights” presentations per year, distributing information on topics such as recent immigration reforms, Temporary Protected Status and its eligibility requirements, and the naturalization process. Approximately 174 individuals received Know Your Rights information in FY24.

**1,209**  
people  
benefited from  
**Community  
Legal  
Education**

**837**  
people  
benefited  
from  
**Pro Se  
Assistance**

JustCause staff also performed outreach at local events to reach our target population. For example, in an effort to increase our outreach towards members of the local Asian American and Pacific Islander community, staff members focused on engaging local AAPI organizations, interest groups, and community leaders. Staff attended the Asian Pacific American Heritage Celebration Day at the Memorial Art Gallery, an AAPI Heritage Month event highlighting Asian American voices in Rochester sponsored by the 7th Judicial District's Embracing Our Community Committee, and the Harvest Moon Festival presented by the Rochester chapter of the Asian Pacific Islander American Public Affairs Association (APAPA). Staff tabled at these events and distributed brochures, Know Your Rights information and direction on how to access civil legal service assistance.

In total, JustCause staff tabled and/or presented at seventy two (72) events where one thousand three hundred and fifty eight (1,358) were in attendance. One thousand and eighty (1,080) legal education brochures were distributed at JustCause's Help Center at the Hall of Justice, Family Court, Surrogate's Court, and Federal Court. Legal education materials are also distributed at community locations such as churches, libraries, and various healthcare facilities, and by staff members when attending outreach events. Two hundred and ninety five (295) people attended one of JustCause's interactive online presentations. These presentations included virtual Know Your Rights trainings for immigrants and migrant workers and virtual microentrepreneurship legal workshops.

**Know Your Rights Workshop on Temporary Protected Status (TPS):** JustCause's Immigrants Rights Program hosted a virtual workshop titled "How Can Temporary Protected Status Benefit You?" The workshop provided an overview of TPS, its eligibility requirements, and benefits. It was held via Zoom and transmitted on Facebook Live, with Spanish, Dari, and Pashto interpretation available. A total of 115 individuals attended, gaining valuable knowledge about their rights and options under TPS.

**Legal Clinic for Veterans at the Veterans Outreach Center:** JustCause hosts an ongoing legal clinic for veterans once a month at the Veterans Outreach Center. Volunteer attorneys and legal experts provide free assistance on a range of issues, including VA benefits, discharge upgrades, and housing rights. These clinics ensure that veterans receive the legal support they need to navigate the complexities of the legal system and access essential benefits and services.

## TECHNOLOGY

In Fiscal Year 2024, JustCause made significant improvements in its use of technology and implemented new procedures to enhance staff training and development. One major advancement was the transition to a new accounting system, Sage Intacct, and the engagement of The Bonadio Group's Outsource Accounting and Finance team to provide accounting services. This transition allows us to optimize our accounting practices and procedures, develop financial reports, and provide timely information needed for decision-making.

Additionally, we revamped our onboarding procedures to include access to HR Works trainings, ensuring that new staff members are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles. This investment in professional development enhances our organizational capacity and ensures staff are well-prepared to serve our clients effectively.



Furthermore, we expanded our relationship with JustSolutions to provide technology training modules through their platform. These modules are now mandatory for all staff, further enhancing our team's technological proficiency. By leveraging JustSolutions' platform, we are empowering our staff with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate modern technological tools efficiently.

These initiatives have had a positive impact on client access and program efficiency. Improved financial management systems enable us to allocate resources more effectively, while comprehensive staff training ensures that our team is equipped to deliver high-quality services. By investing in technology and training, we are better positioned to fulfill our mission and meet the needs of our community effectively.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

JustCause utilized the supplemental 2023 IOLA Technology Grant funds to enhance our accounting and grants management systems. The grant supported the purchase of Sage Intacct accounting software and the hiring of developers from GRF to customize and integrate the platform with our other systems.

These funds were critical in ensuring that we could afford all the relevant modules of the software and avoid limitations on user licenses and functionality. Without the grant, our organization would have struggled to afford the necessary technology upgrades.

The new system, now operational, enables us to accurately track and allocate revenue and expenses, particularly important as our budget has expanded significantly with funding from state agency contracts. The integration with our other systems allows for seamless data management and reporting.

This initiative aligns with our strategic technology goals of improving financial management and efficiency. With the enhanced capabilities of Sage Intacct, including dynamic allocations, we can better manage staff allocations in real time and maximize grant revenues. Overall, the grant has been instrumental in advancing our organization's financial management practices and ensuring we can effectively fulfill our mission.

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

JustCause's mission is to improve the quality of life of low-income people in Monroe County by ensuring the existence of a readily available panel of skilled pro bono attorneys to resolve serious civil legal problems of the indigent. From April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024, pro bono volunteers donated approximately 5,437.99 hours of pro bono time. JustCause is a certified CLE provider and provides regular trainings for the private bar and non-attorneys, where appropriate. Our access to private, government attorneys and corporate counsel in Monroe County is unmatched by any other local legal services provider. Levels of service range from providing legal information and referrals at JustCause's Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice, to brief service and limited scope engagements, to extended representation in a complex matter.

JustCause offers a broad range of volunteer opportunities for non-attorney advocates including, for example, paralegals, law students, college students, law school graduates awaiting admission to the bar and legal secretaries.

JustCause's "Pro Bono Portal" increased efficiency in placing clients with pro bono attorneys and monitoring case progress. Pro bono attorneys who have been screened and accepted as JustCause volunteers are able to access real-time information on existing cases and receive instant alerts via email and text message when new cases are available for placement. The portal confidentially and securely facilitates conflict checks, automatic updates, and attorney time entry. The portal is integrated with our case management system and our website. Attorneys are also able to collaborate on cases that require representation from multiple areas of expertise.

**281** attorneys volunteered **4,564** hours

**20** law students volunteered **348** hours

**42** other volunteers volunteered **526** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Though it is an independent agency, JustCause proudly serves as the pro bono “arm” of the other civil legal services providers in the Rochester community. The legal service providers meet on a regular basis to facilitate service delivery and coordinate services so as to avoid duplication. The Tenant Defense Program, a collaboration between JustCause, Legal Assistance of Western New York, Empire Justice Center, and the Legal Aid Society of Rochester, continues to be a unique model of legal services organizations working together to enhance client services. Developed in partnership with a diverse group of community stakeholders as part of the NYS Court’s Justice for All initiative, the Project integrates legal services with current and future homelessness prevention programs offered by local, state, and federal agencies. JustCause’s attorneys and paralegals are staffing the Tenant Defense Hotline, and Program attorneys from each collaborating agency are providing direct services to tenants referred from the hotline and directly in Court. The Tenant Defense Hotline fielded 13,890 calls during FY24.

# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 2,514,044**

<b>IOLA</b>	<b>\$ 310,136</b>
<b>City &amp; County</b>	<b>\$ 102,488</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>\$ 1,527,302</b>
<b>Federal</b>	<b>\$ 243,145</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$ 206,436</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 51,923</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$ 72,614</b>

