

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

With the support of the IOLA Fund of the State of New York, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has continued to represent large numbers of low-income individuals in all five boroughs of New York City while working to achieve broader systemic changes for society as a whole. IOLA funding from April 1, 2023 –March 31, 2024 made the following accomplishments possible:

- Direct legal assistance in approximately 32,000 closed individual client matters, which benefited nearly 67,000 low-income New Yorkers. Overall, during the reporting period, we worked on over 57,000 individual client matters, which benefited nearly 127,000 people, as well as a law reform litigation docket of 37 worked on cases benefiting all 2,500,000 low-income New Yorkers (including one new filing this period).
- Our Community Development Project assisted 235 small businesses and non-profits.
- Community legal education sessions, both in-person and virtual, were attended by about 5,700 individuals. Know Your Rights (KYR) YouTube videos had nearly 22,000 unique views. The educational, client-facing materials on our website's Get Help section and on the New York Health Access (NYHA) website had nearly 338,000 views in NYS.
- The self-help materials posted on our website and on the NYHA website were downloaded over 73,000 times in NYS.



Defending the Right to Shelter: During the reporting period, LAS has vigorously defended New York City's Right to Shelter protections, which have been under threat by the Adams administration with the support of Governor Hochul. These protections, originally codified over four decades ago in *Callahan v. Carey* - a landmark class action on behalf of homeless single adults in which we represent plaintiff Coalition for the

Service Area: New York City

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
 Total Staff: 537.2 Others: 75.5
 Lawyers: 323.7
 Paralegals: 138

Homeless (CFH) - have served an estimated one million New Yorkers, saved tens of thousands of lives, and prevented NYC from experiencing the massive tent encampments so common in other major American cities. In October 2023, the City submitted a revised application to modify the 1981 Callahan consent decree. LAS advocated at the city, state, and federal levels to defend the Right to Shelter; advised the City Council on regulatory issues; negotiated on service delivery for new arrivals; and advocated around education and disability rights for families in shelters with children. Following a court-supervised mediation, LAS and CFH announced a settlement with the City to end the government's legal challenge and preserve the Right to Shelter for single adults.

Services for Recent Arrivals: LAS's Immigration Law Unit (ILU) has been working to address the immediate immigration legal needs for recent migrants in NYC shelters. Since October 2023, LAS has helped nearly 340 recent migrants apply for humanitarian parole-based work permits, change of venue motions for asylum cases, and, for those Venezuelans who are eligible, Temporary Protected Status (TPS). LAS also worked with and trained community-based organizations to better understand the legal needs of recent migrants in NYC. We provide KYR information and screen for immigration, shelter, and benefits needs. We coordinate daily with community groups and other providers to ensure access to shelter and services, such as a recent situation in which we met with the Coalition for Homeless Youth and the imams from local mosques hosting hundreds of homeless youth. LAS monitors access to shelter through daily reports, a weekly arrivals/departures census, regular meetings with city staff, and on-the-ground monitoring.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Education Law Advocacy for Troubled Student: AV is a young woman who experienced significant trauma in her childhood, beginning with her father's murder. LAS worked with her over six years to help her navigate the school system and advocate for her needs. AV initially attended charter schools with her younger brother, who was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder as a toddler, but as she grew, her academic, social emotional, and communication skills regressed.

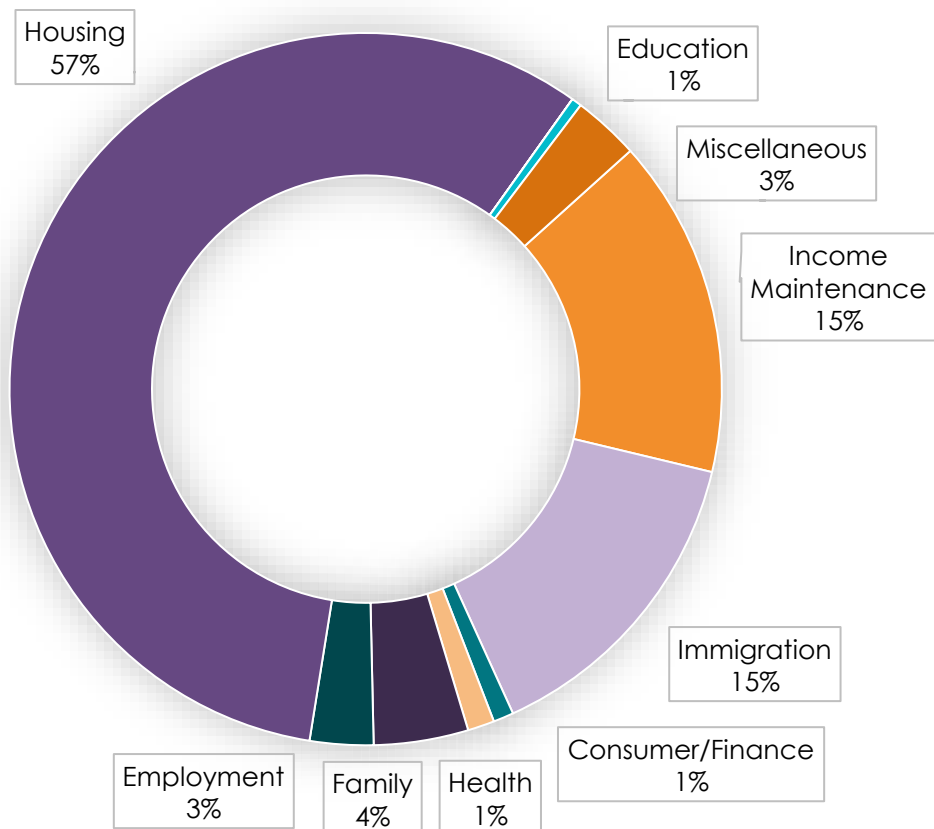
When AV was in seventh grade, we advocated with NYC Public Schools (NYCPS) to fund a private, in-depth evaluation for her. She was diagnosed with a math learning disorder and depression. While her presentation also strongly suggested attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, the evaluator noted that her attentional difficulties may have stemmed from her other

diagnoses. Armed with this evaluation, our team secured funding from NYCPS for AV to attend a private high school with clinical programming. Unfortunately, the Covid shutdown exacerbated AV's symptoms and she was admitted for inpatient psychiatric treatment in summer 2020. After she returned to school, her symptoms continued to prevent her from succeeding even with a high level of support.

Our team helped AV apply for a seat in a therapeutic public-school program. In early 2023, after AV's close school friend passed away, her emotional stability faltered, and she was threatened with expulsion from the program for behavior issues. We successfully advocated for AV to remain enrolled there and she graduated with a high school diploma in June 2023.



CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Community Legal Education: Each Civil Practice unit offers trainings to low-income New Yorkers and community advocates across the five boroughs of NYC. During the reporting period, LAS delivered 150 webinars and in-person trainings attended by over 5,700 clients and advocates on a wide range of civil legal topics. Our specialized programs and units routinely develop or update educational materials, available in multiple languages and a range of formats, to ensure that our clients can access up-to-date information.

We updated and expanded client-facing content for our website, including KYR articles on a range of topics, such as unemployment insurance eligibility for striking writers and trust formation under housing law. The most viewed articles during the reporting period covered 2023 Medicaid expansion in NYS (38,400 views), housing repair and service rights (31,500 views), and cash assistance from HRA (23,600 views). We also developed and distributed new tailored KYR materials for A2B and Housing Justice helpline callers and informational videos on immigration topics for new arrivals.

Web-Based Assistance: This includes downloads from the “Get Help” section of our website (over 6,500 in NYS during the reporting period) and from the NYHA website (over 65,000), our collaboration with NYLAG and Empire Justice Center to educate clients and advocates on healthcare access.

Example #1, Development of Immigration KYR Videos: During the reporting period, LAS created 12 new KYR videos (six in English and six in Spanish) on common and emerging immigration-related issues. These included guides on Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelan nationals, immigration courts, ICE, asylum, and the New York Immigrant Family Unit Project. These videos were viewed nearly 3,000 times during the grant period.

367,661

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

73,311

people
benefited
from

**Web-Based
Assistance**

Example #2, KYR Trainings for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

Residents: During the reporting period, the first two NYCHA public housing developments to vote under the 2022 Public Housing Preservation Trust legislation were selected: the Nostrand Houses in Brooklyn (1,148 households) and the Bronx River Addition (199 households) in the Bronx. Through KYR trainings, tabling, and distribution of educational materials, LAS and our partners worked to ensure that residents of these developments were aware of their rights and had sufficient information to make an educated decision between the three options on the ballot: to join the Preservation Trust, join the NYCHA PACT Program, or remain in the existing Section 9 Program.

Each development voted to join the Trust by a significant majority. Importantly, the robust participation rate among heads of household – 56% at Nostrand and 61% at Bronx River – far surpassed the 20% minimum threshold for a valid election. This is particularly significant considering the historically low voter turnout among NYCHA residents in recent years. Our work undoubtedly contributed to this high level of participation.

All Impact Cases

- Bucci v. Zucker
- Butler vs. City of New York and Gilbert
- Lovely H. v. Eggleston
- Ciaramella v. Zucker
- Boston v. City of New York
- Callahan v. Carey
- E.G v. NYC
- Eldredge v. Koch
- Fisher v. NYC
- Newark v. NYC
- 335-7 v. State of New York
- 55 Lenox LLC v. CAMBA
- 74 Pinehurst v. City
- Britt v. NYCHA and Diamond v. NYCHA

IMPACT CASES

CityFHEPS Voucher Eligibility Litigation: On July 13, 2023, the City Council voted to override a mayoral veto and enact four bills aimed at expanding and improving the New York City Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS). This legislation would also expand CityFHEPS to elderly and disabled tenants on disability or social security income. While the local laws were due to come into effect in January 2024, the Mayor's office has unfortunately refused to implement those reforms. LAS filed suit on February 14, 2024 to compel the Mayor's office to implement the new legislation. This advocacy has already resulted in the city extending CityFHEPS voucher eligibility to one of the named plaintiffs in the case.

Defending Against Challenges to Rent Stabilization Reform:

LAS formed a central part of a coalition defending New York's Rent Stabilization Law and the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 against a group of five lawsuits brought by landlords. The courts held up existing rent stabilization protections against these challenges on several appeals, culminating with an excellent decision by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals and a denial of certiorari by the United States Supreme Court. Thanks to LAS and its partners, notably Legal Services NYC, New York's rent stabilization law will remain in place and will continue to help millions of residents secure and maintain affordable housing.

Challenging Abusive Debt Collection: LAS's Consumer Law Project won a unanimous decision in *Esgro Capital Management, LLC v. Sharae Banks*, upending over a decade of bad case law. Alongside the New Economy Project and Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP, LAS represented Sharae Banks, a Harlem resident and single mother of three.

A debt buyer fraudulently garnished \$16,000 of her wages over three years for tuition allegedly owed to a trade school that was upending over a decade of bad case law. Alongside the New Economy Project and Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, LLP, LAS represented Sharae Banks, a Harlem resident and single mother of three. A debt buyer fraudulently garnished \$16,000 of her wages over three years for tuition allegedly owed to a trade school that was shut down in 2006.

A lower court relied on case law to rule that Ms. Banks had waited too long to challenge the garnishment, despite never receiving notice of the lawsuit. This

- Building & Realty Institute of Westchester and Putnam Counties v. State of New York and HCR
- CHIP v. City
- Davis v. NYCHA
- G-Max Management v. State of New York
- Gomez v. Ulrich
- Housing Rights Initiative v. Compass
- Housing Rights Initiative v. Corcoran
- Gomez v. Ulrich
- Housing Rights Initiative v. Compass
- Housing Rights Initiative v. Corcoran
- Quinatoa v. Hewlett Associates and City of New York
- Safe Horizon v. 3823 Carpenter Ave LLC
- Sapp v. Clark Wilson
- Vincent, Tejada, Cronneit, and Acks v. Adams and City of New York
- Esgro Capital Management, LLC v. Sharae Banks
- Esgro Capital Management, LLC v. Sharae Banks
- Doe v. Pompeo
- Doe v. USICE
- Keisy G.M. v. Decker
- MTRNY v. Cuccinelli

- R.F.M. v. Nielsen
- Toliver v. NYC DSS
- Chen v. US Dept of Agriculture
- Davila v. Turner
- Forest v. DSS
- Piron v. Giuliani
- Reynolds v. Giuliani

ruling corrects that flawed precedent and empowers New Yorkers to challenge “sewer service,” a rampant practice in which debt collectors falsely claim to courts that they served people with notice of a lawsuit to obtain a default judgment. The decision will rein in widespread debt collection schemes to fraudulently garnish wages and freeze bank accounts in violation of New Yorker’s constitutional due process rights

TECHNOLOGY

Telephone Helpline Infrastructure Upgrades: In November 2023, we switched our A2B Benefits and Housing Justice helpline operations from Spectrum to a dedicated call center software by Genesys Telecommunications Laboratories. The new Genesys-supported helpline brings several key features that will improve our call service delivery. Genesys allows LAS to receive an unlimited number of simultaneous calls without creating overloads, system crashes, or burdensome wait times for callers.

The detailed intake data collection and extensive support services offered by Genesys allow the generation of customized reports detailing fine-grained caller data to continually improve service delivery.

To ensure a smooth transition, all helpline staff were trained on the new Genesys call center technology and updated intake protocols. We have expanded our capacity to perform detailed intake of new clients through a triage system that identifies clients in priority order and allocates our supervisors’ attention to the areas of most urgent need.



IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

LAS used the supplemental 2023 IOLA Technology Grant funds (\$15,000) to purchase seven new laptops for LAS staff. In line with our FY24 asset management strategy, LAS endeavors to replace staff IT equipment on a three-year basis. The IOLA Technology Grant enabled us to do so and thus contributed to our improved readiness to serve clients, assess remote proceedings, and securely maintain client records and program data.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

In contrast to the traditional “referral panel” model, LAS integrates volunteers into our delivery of civil legal services. Volunteers serve “of counsel” to LAS, which remains the attorney of record. LAS screens matters, conducts CLE trainings, and mentors each case. Many firms also act as co-counsel on affirmative litigation matters. In collaboration with Fried Frank, the Immigration Law Unit hosts long-term pro bono clinics for naturalization (8-10 attorneys) and DACA (3 attorneys). We also have retired attorneys who volunteer on a long-term basis in various programs, as part of the Attorney Emeritus Program.

Examples of our cooperation with volunteers during the reporting period include volunteer participation in the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) clinic hosted by our Immigration Law Unit (ILU), which has had about 35 pro bono and law student volunteers aside from those from within LAS during the program period. ILU staff developed two training videos, corresponding written materials, and a 45-minute in-person training to prepare volunteers to assist clients. Under the supervision of experienced ILU staff and our Director of Community Engagement, TPS clinic volunteers assess eligibility and complete applications for TPS, Work Permits, Fee Waivers, and/or Change of Venue motions. From October 2023 – March 2024, the TPS clinic assisted nearly 340 clients to file one or more of these applications depending on their need.

807

attorneys volunteered **20,763** hours

114

law students volunteered **25,040** hours

164

other volunteers volunteered **2,090** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

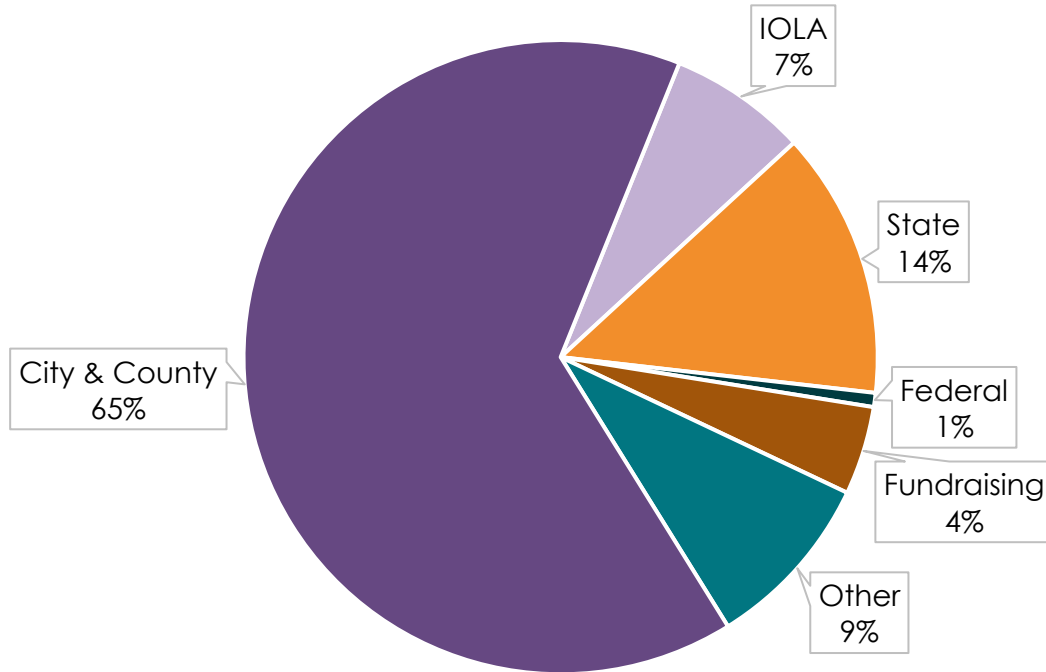
CityFHEPS Reform and Expansion Coalition: LAS's Law Reform Unit led advocacy efforts to reduce homelessness and promote housing stability through reform and expansion of the CityFHEPS rental subsidy. Working with the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), Neighbors Together, Community Voices Heard, Make the Road New York, VOCAL-NY, and other allies, LAS has coordinated a multi-pronged campaign of legislative advocacy, community mobilization, and education to achieve policy change.

Collaboration with Victim Services Providers: LAS's Family Law and Domestic Violence Practice collaborates with CBOs and dedicated victim service providers (including Garden of Hope, Sakhi for South Asian Women, the Safe Homes Project, and VIP Mujeres (a new partner in FY24)). These organizations provide services including crisis intervention, safety planning, and counseling, which contribute to clients' stability, autonomy, and economic self-sufficiency.

Housing Collaboration with Montefiore Medical Center: As part of our efforts to increase the accessibility of KYR resources to those facing both medical issues and housing insecurity, we developed housing rights and benefits trainings for staff at the Montefiore Medical Center Housing at Risk Program (H@RP). Training topics include housing court, evictions, breaking lease agreements, repair and service rights, SSI eligibility, and overpayments. We delivered the first two trainings in March 2024 with a total attendance of 32 staff.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 108,141,164



IOLA Funding	\$ 7,515,000
City & County Funding	\$ 69,162,119
State Funding	\$ 14,514,698
Federal Funding	\$ 766,714
Foundations	\$ 1,672,217
Fundraising	\$ 4,807,112
Other Funding	\$ 9,703,304