

# **LEGAL SERVICES NYC**

---

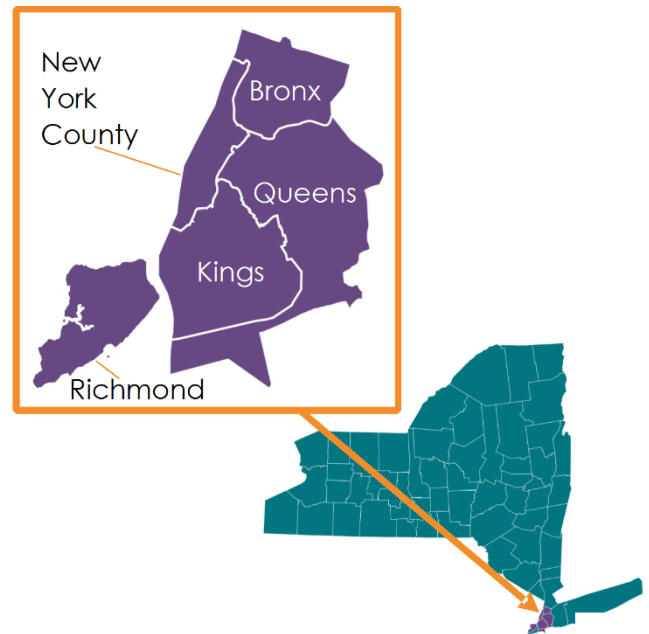
**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During the grant period, Legal Service NYC handled 51,594 individual cases (both those resolved and those still pending at the end of the period) that benefited more than 112,316 people. We obtained \$29,811,835 for people in retroactive benefits and \$713,616 in monthly prospective benefits (\$8,563,392 annualized). Our work saved the public coffers \$338,484,788. Our systemic litigation and advocacy helped more than 4.5 million low-income New Yorkers. Our achievements include:

**Protecting Vulnerable Renters** – During this reporting period, we successfully defeated efforts to roll back bedrock rental protections for over two million New Yorkers. A group of landlords in New York City brought a lawsuit in 2019 seeking to overturn virtually all rent protections in New York City, including laws giving people the right to renew their lease year-over-year and laws limiting how much rent can be increased. These laws, known as rent stabilization laws, apply to over half of all New York City rental apartments, and overturning these laws would have imperiled the ability of literally millions of New Yorkers to remain housed. During the reporting period, the case came before the United States Supreme Court, and Legal Services NYC and co-counsel, representing two local community groups that had intervened in the case in the appellate court, successfully opposed the landlords’ petition asking for Supreme Court review. For now, New York’s rent stabilization laws remain in effect and millions of New York City families can remain safely and affordably housed.

**Protecting Workers** – For years, ride-share apps have sought to dodge payroll taxes and other basic employer obligations by arguing that they do not “employ” drivers, but rather simply connect them to riders. The reality is very different. After a



**Service Area:** New York City  
**Population Served:** General Low-Income Population  
**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 672.5 Lawyers: 382.1  
 Paralegals: 154.8 Others: 135.7

years-long campaign by Legal Services NYC and the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA), New York State finally recognized in 2019 that Uber is legally an “employer” and thus that Uber drivers are entitled to unemployment insurance benefits if they are out of work. However, that was not the end of the story. Uber and Lyft consistently failed to pay their unemployment insurance taxes or cooperate with state reporting requirements, making it literally impossible for workers to prove their earnings and thus collect benefits. Because of this noncompliance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Legal Services NYC had to sue the State of New York to recover benefits for drivers who had been left without any income, ultimately recovering full benefits for 65,000 drivers. Finally, after a seven-years-long legal and advocacy campaign by Legal Services NYC and the NYTWA, including multiple federal lawsuits and extensive litigation before the Department of Labor, Uber and Lyft entered into an agreement with the State of New York during the reporting period to pay into and fully participate in New York State’s unemployment insurance system, as well as agreeing to pay a combined \$328 million in claims to some 100,000 current and former drivers who are owed benefits.

**Protecting Students** – Legal Services NYC filed suit against the U.S. Department of Education over deceptive loan notices that were being sent to federal student debt borrowers. These notices warned people that they were in default and that their federal tax refunds would be garnished unless they took action. These notices also encouraged borrowers to use high-cost repayment plans that exposed people to the possibility of having their tax refunds, wages and Social Security benefits garnished. LSNYC sued, alleging that the deceptive notices violated the Administrative Procedure Act as well as borrowers' due process rights. The parties settled, and the government agreed to provide new notices that specifically inform borrowers of their right to avoid garnishment and bring their loans current by consolidating their loans into a single affordable payment plan, which would avoid these potential garnishments. This option was always available to borrowers, but most borrowers would never know that due to the deceptive notices the Department of Education was sending people. Thanks to this lawsuit, student loan borrowers can make informed decisions and protect themselves from garnishment.

---

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

**Case Example #1, Housing** – One day, Ms. R went into the bathroom in her apartment and found that it was already occupied—by a big rat. This was just the latest of many problems in her apartment. There were also roaches, fly infestations, and ceiling leaks. Her stove, refrigerator, windows, and fire escape were all defective. The landlord ignored Ms. R’s repeated pleas to have these hazardous conditions addressed.

With the help of her LSNYC attorney, Ms. R exercised her right to withhold her rent—which New York law allows in certain especially severe conditions—to force her landlord to make repairs. To assert this defense in Housing Court, a tenant must post a bond. Ms. R was able to secure funds for her bond through a Defense Fund established by the Urban Homesteading Alliance Board (UHAB). She and her LSNYC attorney prevailed in her case, forcing her landlord to provide her a new oven, refrigerator, bathtub, and vanity, as well as address the building-wide violations, including the defective fire escape, illegal gate and door fastenings. This victory sent a powerful message to slumlords citywide: namely, that they cannot blatantly ignore their legal obligation to maintain safe living conditions for their tenants just because those tenants happen to be low-income.

56,244

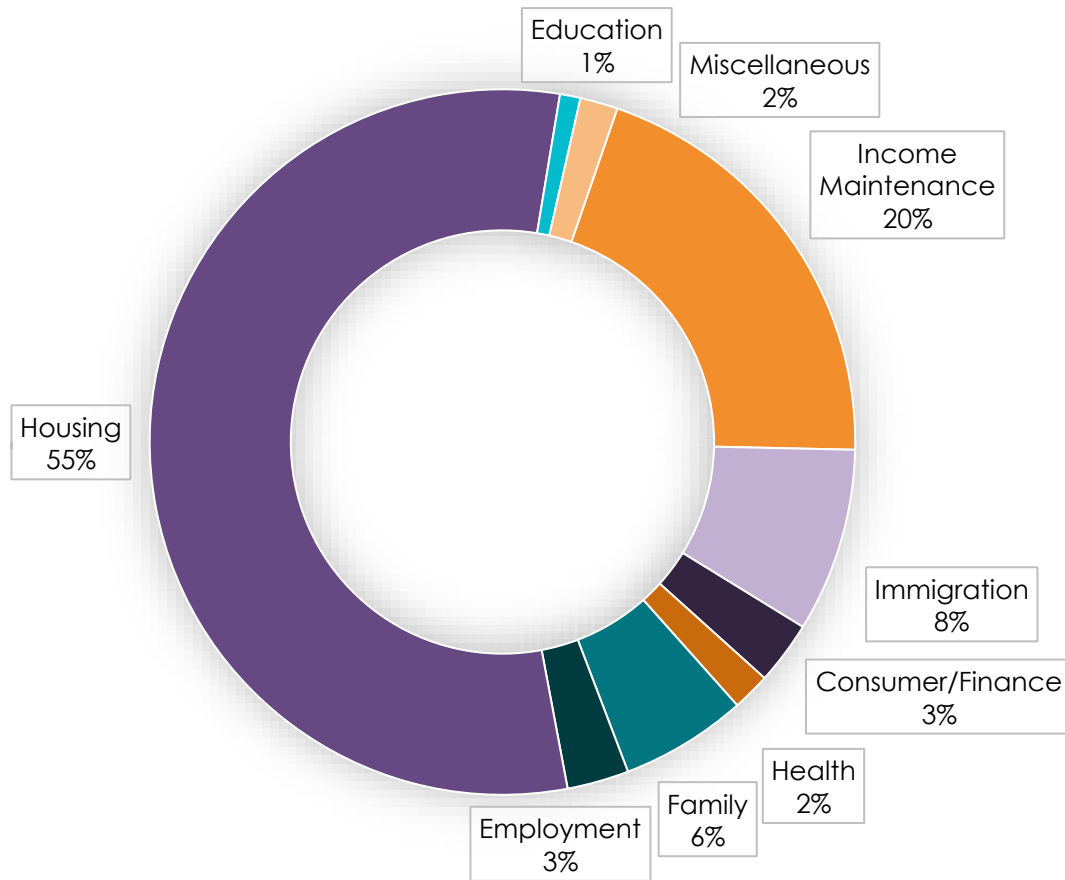
people  
benefited  
from

26,585

legal cases  
closed

**Case Example #2, Employment** – Our client was a 72-year-old cleaner at a local supermarket, who was the primary breadwinner and caretaker for his wife who suffered from Alzheimer's. When our client learned that he needed an eye operation, he informed his employer and supplied them with a note from his doctor stating he would be able to return to work in a month. The employer agreed to his leave. But when he attempted to return to work, he learned that someone had been hired in his place. The employer put him off repeatedly, saying he would be added back to the schedule week after week.

# CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Eventually, it became clear that he had been constructively fired. That’s when he sought help from Legal Services NYC. We assessed his situation and discovered that not only had he been unlawfully terminated for taking medical leave, but he also had not been paid minimum wage. We were able to connect him and his family to social services to get immediate relief, including food and cash assistance. We then raised the claims with his employer and have thus far secured \$40,000 (almost twice his annual salary) in settlement of his overtime claims. The disability discrimination case is ongoing.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

From April 2023 through March 2024, our community legal education and outreach and online outreach assisted 1,376,330 people. This included 4,938 people reached through in-person events, 7,202 people participating in interactive online events, and 1,364,190 people accessing pre-recorded or static online content.

We provided Know Your Rights (KYR) community education in many languages to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers through in-person presentations, radio and television placements, YouTube videos, Zoom sessions, Facebook Live, Twitter, and LawHelpNYC. We operated “Legal Hand” centers— neighborhood storefronts where community members can get help with urgent matters before they turn into legal actions—in the Bronx and Queens.

**Example 1, Legal Education for Low-Income Older Adults and/or Their Caregivers:** LSNYC advocates provide legal assistance to thousands of adults over 60 each year. We also offer targeted trainings for older adults and their caregivers including:

- A Medicare Savings Program and Extra Help 101 presentation for clients and caregivers in partnership with the PSS Circle of Care, a citywide organization that provides support to those who care for older adults who are disabled, chronically ill, or suffering from memory loss;
- Presentations on Wills and Advance Directives and Name and Gender Marker Changes for the SAGE Lesbian Group, the SAGE Trans Elders, and the SAGE Crotona Latino Gay Men’s Group. SAGE is a nationwide organization that supports and advocates for LGBTQ+ older adults;
- A training called Planning for Your Future: Wills & Advance Directives for Destination Tomorrow, a grassroots LGBTQ community and advocacy organization in the Bronx; and

**4,717**

people  
benefited  
from

**Pro Se  
Assistance**

**1,376,330**

people  
benefited  
from

**Community  
Legal  
Education**

**77,564**

people  
benefited  
from

**Web-Based  
Assistance**

- Presentations to older adults on Elder Abuse and Applying for Replacement Benefits for Food Stamps at the Cypress Hills Older Adult Center, which provides meals, social support and transportation for older adults at the Shalom Senior Center in Brooklyn.

**Example 2, Video Series for SSI and SSD:** In partnership with NYLAG and Legal Hand, we created and launched a new, six-part video series that helps New Yorkers learn to better access and navigate the systems to receive life-saving Social Security Disability (SSD) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. The videos help troubleshoot common issues related to applications for SSI/SSD and to preserving existing benefits. Topics covered include general information on the programs, eligibility criteria, how to apply, how to submit requests for reconsideration, what to do when you've received a termination notice, and overpayments. The series also educates the public about LSNYC/NYLAG's capacity to assist recipients facing challenges with their federal disability benefits.

**Example 3, Fellowship Addressing School Avoidance and Chronic Absenteeism:** Last fall, our Manhattan practice received funding from Kirkland & Ellis LLP to hire an Education Legal Fellow to advocate for students experiencing school avoidance and chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism has spiked since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and its concomitant mental health crisis among young people. Students of color, students with disabilities, and students who live in poverty are particularly at risk due to heightened levels of trauma in their lives and communities. When students miss school, it significantly heightens their risk of long-term health issues, dropping out of school altogether, future homelessness, and incarceration.

Since September 2023, the Fellow has worked with more than 25 BIPOC students with disabilities, representing several children through the suspension process and filing Impartial Hearing Requests. The Fellow has also presented at three community board committees and conducted seven Know Your Rights (KYR) Community trainings for families struggling with attendance issues and providers who work directly with families, including Vibrant Emotional Health, Mount Sinai, and the Manhattan Borough Based Council. In these trainings, we discuss the rights that students, and particularly those with disabilities, are afforded under federal, state, and city laws, and concrete tools to get students back into school as soon as possible.

# IMPACT CASES

**Tenants' Rights** – Residents of three Bronx buildings spent years fighting for desperately needed repairs in their buildings, owned by Emerald Equity Group/Living Emerald NY LLC. Among other hazards, many of our clients and their families lived without heat or hot water, and with mold and rodents. The tenants organized, with the help of the nonprofit Community Action for Safe Apartments, and two of the three buildings engaged in a rent strike over the deplorable and unsafe conditions. Moreover, the landlords were seeking to deregulate the buildings, jeopardizing our clients' continued tenancies. LSNYC represented these tenants and successfully obtained repair orders, won an extraordinary \$400,000 in rent abatements for our clients, and maintained the building's rent stabilization status, preserving long-term affordable housing for our clients and their families, over 100 people in total.

LSNYC brings such cases against abusive landlords regularly, but it is not every day that the landlords face criminal justice sanctions for endangering our clients. During the reporting period, LSNYC engaged in substantial advocacy on behalf of over 100 clients who had suffered severe hazardous conditions for years in two buildings owned by the same landlord—including lack of heat, roach and rodent infestations, chronic leaks, exposed electrical wiring. In March of 2024, a court found that the landlord had failed to address nearly 700 violations in two buildings for more than a year and that his failures were so severe and chronic that the judge ordered he be arrested. The

## All Impact Work

- 1025-1027 Leggett Ave HDFC
- 125 Lenox Rd.
- 1372 Franklin Ave HDFC
- 1915 Billingsley Terrace Building Collapse
- 2074 Crotona Parkway
- 254 East 184th Street HDFC
- Atlantic Plaza Towers Portfolio
- Baptiste-Elmine v. Richland & Falkowski
- Baychester Villas Homeowners Association, Inc
- Emerald Equities Bronx
- Emerald Equities East Harlem
- Emerald Equities Upper East Side
- Fee Waivers in Surrogate's Court
- Gilman Portfolio
- HP - 65 Ft. Washington
- HP advocacy for Ohebshalom tenants
- Jacob Riis Houses Advocacy
- Launch Fair Housing Complaints and Litigation
- LeFrak Case
- Liboy v. Russ
- Nelson v. Razzaq
- Newson v. Vivaldi et. al
- NYCHA Domestic Violence Transfer delays
- NYCHA income recertification case
- NYCHA Section 8 Conversions



- Perez v. Cardona
- Renaissance Portfolio
- Rent Stabilization Laws
- Shaffner, et al. v. Sterling PL Condo LLC v. Shaffner
- St. Clare's Hospital Litigation
- Transportation for students with disabilities
- Watson v. Dukler
- Westhab/DHS
- Amicus--Esgro v. Banks (App. Div., 1st Dep't)
- Amicus--Bethea v. Winfield (SDNY)
- Amicus--Ferreira v. Garland (1st Cir.)
- Amicus--Hudson Valley Property Owners Association, Inc. v. City of Kingston, New York (App. Div., 3rd Dep't)
- Amicus--Board of Immigration Appeals Amicus Invitation No. 23-01-08

landlord turned himself in to the city's sheriff on March 21st and was transported to Rikers Island to begin his jail sentence. He remains at Rikers today but may be released and sentenced to live in his own building until repairs are made.

**Protecting Low-Income Homeowners –**

Legal Services NYC also succeeded in bringing a unique claim of race discrimination against deed thieves at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”). For years, LSNYC has represented homeowners who were targeted by criminals who scammed them out of their homes under the guise of offering mortgage modification or similar products. In many cases, our clients only discovered the theft when they received a notice of eviction, telling them to vacate the homes they thought they owned. Legal Services NYC has engaged in a multipronged campaign to bring these criminals to justice, including civil actions to recover the homes for our clients and partnering with the United States Attorney’s office to arrest and prosecute the bad actors (some of whom have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms). We also filed a complaint of race discrimination with HUD, arguing that the deed thieves specifically targeted low- and moderate-income Black Caribbean households for their scams. During the reporting period, HUD took the unusual step of issuing a lengthy opinion agreeing with our assessment and finding that these scammers engaged in a pattern of racially discriminatory deed theft specifically targeted at Black immigrants in New York City.



# TECHNOLOGY

During the reporting period, LNSYC made a number of technological improvements and launched new tech-based initiatives to support our clients, advocates, and organization. The centerpiece of these improvements is LSNYC's Knowledge Management initiative—a project to bring the best practices of private sector legal knowledge management to public interest law. For the past year, LSNYC has worked with private sector firms, expert consultants, and tech firms to develop a comprehensive, custom-built knowledge management platform that allows all employees to share, store, and retrieve knowledge and benefit from new technologies in document management, automation, and generative AI safely, securely, and efficiently. Once launched, the LSNYC KM system will ease headcount pressure by raising the productivity of advocates, make it easier for attorneys to support their clients and advocate for them effectively in court, and preserve and promulgate legal strategies and work product that has been proven to win for our clients.

In addition, we improved our internal systems and hardware in a variety of ways: We developed an automated system that transfers changes in employee data from our HRIS system Sage to LegalServer, our Case Management System. This system cuts the time required to provision and deprovision accounts in LegalServer, which makes our operations both more efficient and secure.

We completed the integration of our Justice Learning Center application with Zoom for remote learning and training, allowing us to reach more public interest attorneys with essential professional development. We introduced a new, automated applicant tracking system for our Housing practice to help speed up recruitment and increase our headcount. We began development of an application to assist employees applying for student loan reimbursement. And we completed a desktop hardware refresh and now have all employees on Windows 10.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

We utilized the 2023 IOLA Technology Grant to develop custom software that automatically transfers changes in employee information from our HR system, Sage, to our case management system, Legal Server. This new application helps our IT systems respond to and support changes in staffing rapidly, reducing the amount of manual work for our lean administrative teams—and in turn makes our system and infrastructure more secure.

The development of this software included unusual technical and logistical challenges, including ensuring that our older, locally hosted systems communicated smoothly and securely with our newer, cloud-based systems. In addition, we had to modify our traditional software development process to build and test smaller functional components first, a step at a time, before envisioning the complete and final software's form. But through this careful work, we now have a modern, secure application that automatically creates accounts and provides role-based access for our attorneys directly in our case management system. This type of rapid creation and suspension of Legal Server accounts is crucial to maintaining security and to providing our clients with immediate access to our services. By reducing manual data entry and eliminating lags in account creation after the hiring process is complete, our new attorneys can immediately get to work serving our clients and delivering civil legal services to New Yorkers in need.

## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

LSNYC's pro bono program handled more than 3,500 matters over the past year. We utilized approximately 4,300 volunteers from law firms, corporations, law schools, and beyond to serve clients who would otherwise be turned away because of limited resources.

Our pro bono unit also created innovative new programming to respond to emergent client needs during the period. First, we created clinics for immigrants to apply for essential public

**4,145** attorneys volunteered **78,481** hours

**204** law students volunteered **15,333** hours

**23** other volunteers volunteered **2,304** hours

benefits. Thanks to changes last summer, immigrants are now eligible for cash assistance and Medicaid once they file for asylum or other immigration relief related to violence or persecution. Now, LSNYC partners with law firms and corporations to immediately secure these essential benefits for immigrants while they wait for work authorization and other relief. Second, LSNYC created a Venezuelan Temporary Protected Status (TPS) clinic in response to the U.S. government's declaration last fall extending TPS. This work directly impacts some of the many recent migrants to NYC. In addition to TPS, pro bono volunteers also help clients to pursue work authorization as part of this clinic.

Finally, LSNYC launched a new reasonable accommodations pro bono clinic for disabled tenants. Despite muscular federal and local laws protecting people with disabilities, many disabled tenants languish in apartments that are unsafe or inaccessible simply because they do not have attorneys to help them enforce their rights. This clinic allows tenants to have their claims evaluated and helps prepare demand letters and doctors' notes to share with landlords. For tenants with strong claims with landlords who refuse to make necessary changes (or transfers), LSNYC will work with law firms to pursue their cases all the way to federal court.

## SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Throughout the city and across all our practices, LSNYC engages with hundreds of collaborators and partners to help deliver on our mission of fighting poverty and seeking racial, social, and economic justice for New Yorkers in need. These collaborators include dozens of private law firms; CBOs and poverty-advocacy groups; community healthcare providers; law schools; courts and elected officials; and the larger community of legal services providers across the nation.

Many of our collaborations are years-long relationships, including those with nonprofit partners like Callen-Lorde, HELP USA, FedCap, Montefiore Hospital, and Catholic Charities; and with corporate/pro bono partners including Skadden, Simpson Thacher, MetLife, Bloomberg, and Morgan Stanley. Our Director of Pro Bono is a founder and key leader in New York City's Public Interest Pro Bono Association's (PIPBA). We are also the Legal Training and Technical Support provider for the entire NYC foreclosure prevention network; while our Executive Director serves on the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice and the New York State Legal Services Coalition's Board of Directors. Below are examples of partnerships from the past fiscal year.

LSNYC's LGBTQ/HIV Advocacy Unit partners with **TransLatinx Network** (TLN) to offer legal advice and education to queer and trans New Yorkers. TLN, a trans-Latina-led organization, provides health services and community support to trans, queer, and HIV-affected individuals. LSNYC hosts a monthly Legal Clinic and conducts regular legal training for TLN community members, accommodating up to four individuals monthly at the Clinic and around 30 attendees at each training.

**NYCBenefits** is a new citywide initiative comprised of 39 community-based organizations (CBOs) collaborating with city agencies and CUNY to expand public benefit access. LSNYC, as a primary technical assistance provider, supports 12 CBOs that offer frontline benefits aid to vulnerable NYC residents. We help those CBOs identify and address client benefit access issues, and advocate for solutions with the city and NYC DSS. We achieve these outcomes through community events and initiatives like “skimming” clinics that assist individuals with claims and provide benefit information to recent arrivals from the southern border, having served 2,500 clients in the last fiscal year.

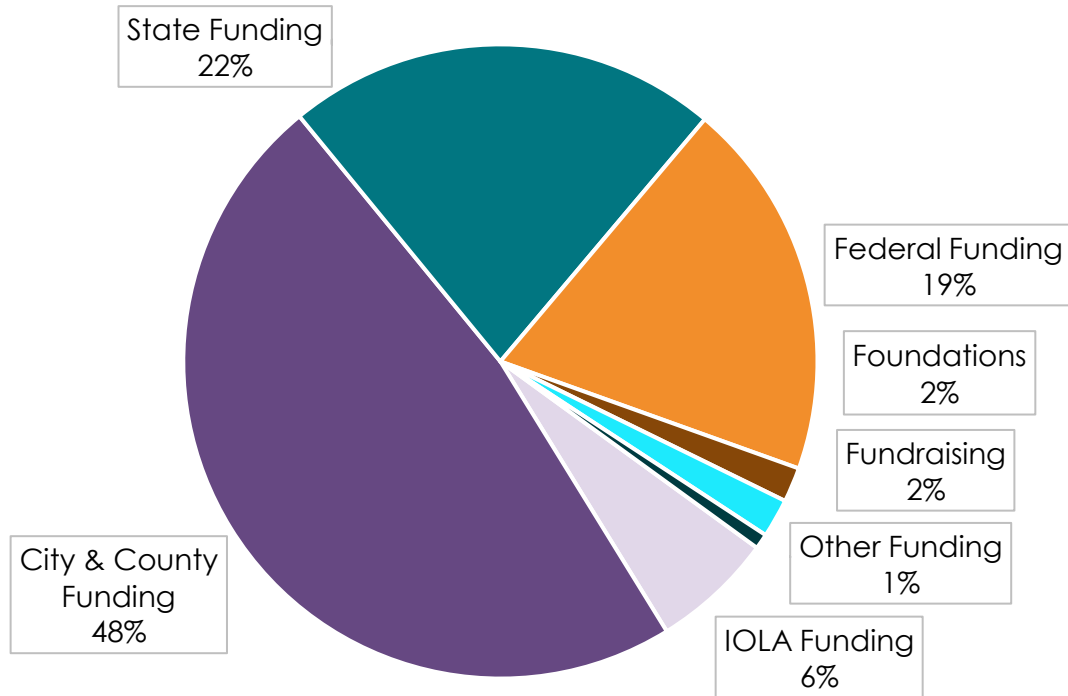
**Bushwick Community Residents** HDFC is a housing cooperative comprising 17 buildings in Bushwick, Brooklyn, for low-income tenants of color. LSNYC assists residents navigating a complex conversion process to purchase apartments through an HDFC co-op atop a Community Land Trust, preserving their homes' affordability. We work with residents and building management to address maintenance issues and ensure the sponsor organization meets tenant expectations for building conditions.

LSNYC, in partnership with the **Healing Centered Schools Working Group**, collaborates with the **Department of Education** for the Healing Centered Schools initiative, which introduces trauma-informed approaches in Bronx schools to replace punitive measures with supportive interventions. Transformation Teams engage school stakeholders in workshops and mentoring to foster a trauma-sensitive school culture. Thanks to the success of this partnership and initiative, there are now plans to expand it citywide.

---

# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

## \$141,780,221



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 7,515,000</b>
<b>City &amp; County Funding</b>	<b>\$ 57,972,213</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 26,749,550</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$ 23,402,402</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$ 2,143,163</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 2,393,151</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$ 935,860</b>