

# **MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE**

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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

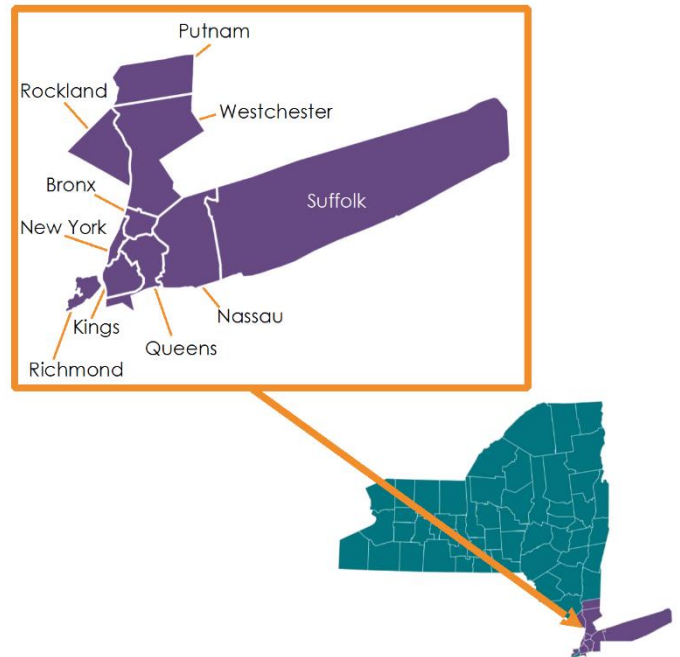
# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

At Mobilization for Justice, we continued our strong advocacy on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers to address their critical civil legal needs. During the reporting period, we served 24,413 people citywide and closed 10,645 cases. Our primary target population included people who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and the working poor, who are predominantly racial and ethnic minorities. As a result of our legal representation and advocacy, we secured more than \$3,331,700 in financial benefits for our clients.

The following is a summary of our program’s major achievements across our four main legal practice areas: Housing; Economic Justice; Disability and Aging Rights; and Children's Rights.

Our Housing work focused on preventing homelessness by defending tenants against eviction and homeowners against foreclosure, protecting tenants’ rights, improving living conditions for tenants, and fighting harassment and discrimination to keep people in their homes. During the reporting period we provided robust full legal representation in court or administrative proceedings to more than 3,100 NYC tenants, and provided advice, counsel, or advocacy services to another 3,476 NYC tenants.

Although the pandemic-related eviction moratorium lapsed in January 2022, stays related to tenants who applied for Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funds continue to remain in place until the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance makes a final determination on an application. Our Economic Justice work focused on ensuring that New Yorkers maintained financial independence and preserved economic stability by combatting



**Service Area:** New York City Metropolitan Area

**Population Served:** Low Income and Vulnerable New Yorkers

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 143    Lawyers: 108  
 Paralegals: 20    Others: 15

predatory products and deceptive practices, especially in the continued wake of the COVID-19 crisis. During this reporting period, among other services, we advocated for and provided assistance to: consumers sued in a variety of debt collection cases; those seeking to file for bankruptcy; homeowners facing foreclosure cases; workers denied wages and unemployment benefits and experiencing discrimination; taxpayers experiencing problems with the IRS; and for-hire vehicle and taxi drivers fighting summonses and crushing medallion debt.

Our Disability and Aging Rights work focused on assisting older people and people with disabilities with housing, government benefits and other legal issues. As part of our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we have continued to target our outreach efforts to BIPOC clients with disabilities in the outer boroughs, including the South Bronx. We also focused on resolving problems that New Yorkers with mental health disabilities face in supportive housing. In cooperation with The Health & Housing Consortium and other organizations, we educated supportive housing stakeholders on housing laws to facilitate improvements in supportive housing programs and prevent traumatic court involvement.

Our Adult Home Advocacy Project negotiated an 18-month extension to the settlement period of our long-standing, ground-breaking class action so that more adult home residents will be able to move to supportive housing that is integrated into the community. During this reporting period, our small Government Benefits Project helped clients who have disabilities obtain over \$450,000 in retroactive Social Security benefits.

Finally, our Children's Rights work focused on addressing the legal needs of kinship families taking care of children whose parents cannot and representing low-income students with disabilities to obtain educational supports. During this reporting period, we assisted kinship caregivers secure adoptions and guardianship and achieve legal permanency, enabling relatives to enroll children in school and secure essential medical treatment for children whose parents died during the pandemic. And we successfully litigated 43 impartial hearings and settled 13 other hearings, winning compensatory services for students in excess of 17,650 hours of tutoring, 1,900 hours of speech therapy, and 1,500 hours of Applied Behavior Analysis for children with autism. In addition, 25 students were awarded funding to attend private special education schools designed to meet their specific needs.

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## DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

**Example 1 - Housing Case:** Ms. L and Mr. H are both seniors and longtime Chinatown residents. Like many low-income seniors, their housing situation is precarious. For over a decade, they were subleasing from a prime tenant who had illegally subdivided a one-bedroom into four Single Room Occupancy units and operated it as a boarding house. When the landlord found out, it sued Ms. L and Mr. H in a holdover eviction case. They retained MFJ and asserted an illusory prime tenancy defense, a complicated, fact-intensive legal doctrine. Since both of the clients are native Chinese speakers, most of their documentary evidence was in Chinese.

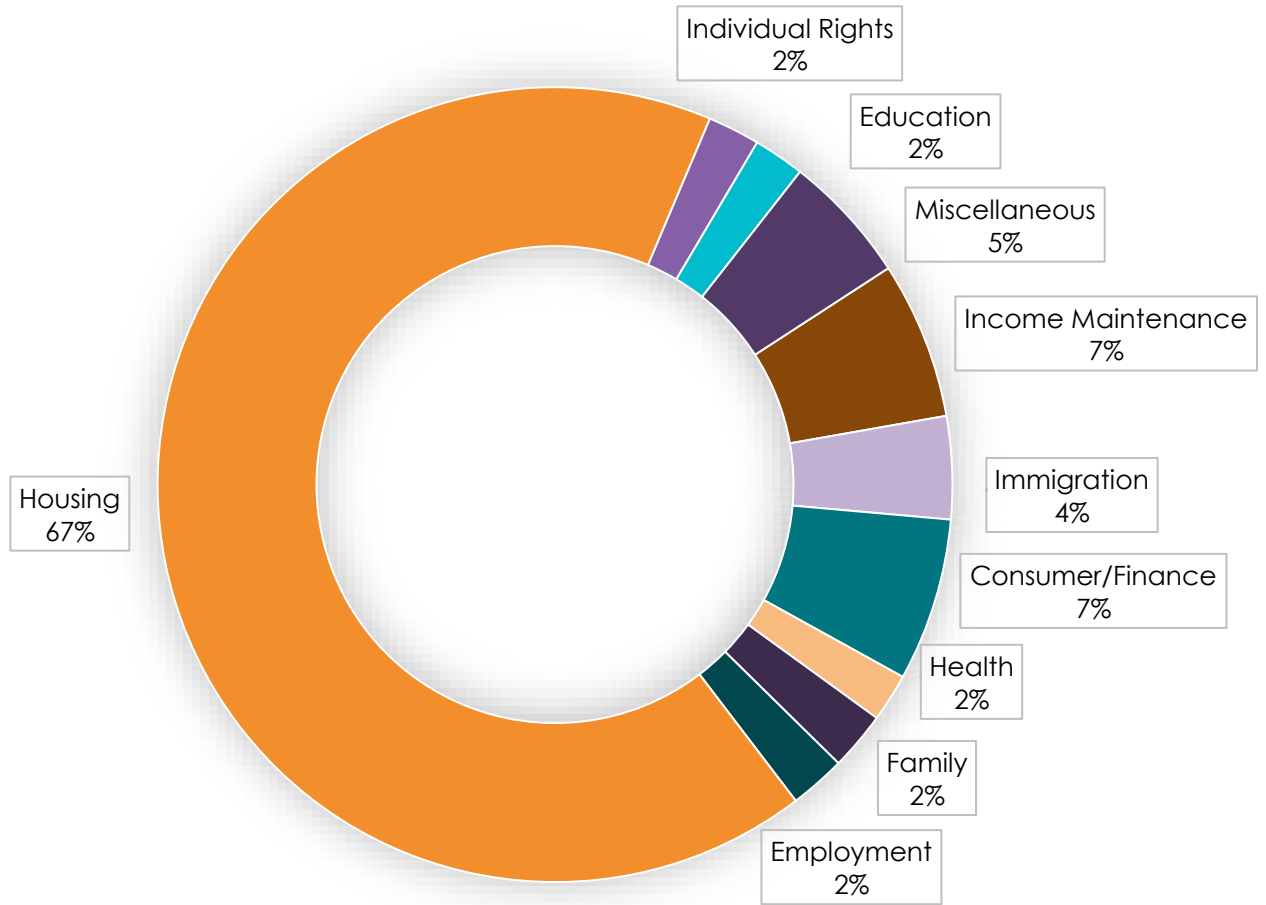
Their MFJ case handler tracked down and translated important documents for discovery, interpreted complex legal doctrine during client meetings, and translated numerous affidavits for motion practice. The case handler also facilitated the clients through an onerous, months' long Affordable Housing Lottery process. In the end, Ms. L and Mr. H signed a lease for an affordable, rent-stabilized apartment in a luxury building in the nearby SoHo neighborhood.



**Example 2 - Family Case:** Ms. B, a Queens resident, contacted MFJ seeking assistance with guardianship and related issues concerning her goddaughter's 4-year-old child, Tracy. Tracy's mom was a product of the foster care system and also battling mental health diagnoses, so unfortunately, Tracy was also placed into foster care and ultimately placed with a kinship guardian, Ms. B's sister.

Unfortunately, Tracy's Kinship Guardian passed away due to COVID-19 and related complications. During this moment of tremendous loss, Ms. B stepped in to care for Tracy and contacted MFJ for help.

# CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



After assessing the facts of the case, MFJ represented Ms. B in her petition for guardianship of Tracy. After several court appearances, Ms. B was granted guardianship of Tracy in August of 2023, offering her permanency once again in her life. This matter also had a financial benefit for Ms. B and Tracy as MFJ advocated for the kinship guardianship payments to be succeeded to Ms. B since Tracy's former kinship guardian passed away.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

**Trainings & Town Halls:** Community-based legal education is an integral component of all of our practice areas. During the reporting period, our attorneys and paralegals conducted trainings and town halls (both in-person and virtual) attended by more than 1,900 people. Workshops and other trainings were held for community organizations, elected officials and their constituents, and others on topics including housing, immigration matters, government benefits, mental health, kinship caregiving, and special education. Town halls serve to provide crucial information to large groups of people and help empower everyday New Yorkers with the information and tools they need to navigate legal crises.

**Informational Resources:** We provide free fact sheets and self-help guides in multiple languages on our website. Many of these fact sheets and guides are also distributed in hard copy form when appropriate, including placing them with partner organizations and elected officials for posting and distribution. Target populations include tenants, consumers, Medicare and Medicaid recipients, nursing and adults home residents, immigrants, seniors, and people with disabilities. During the reporting period, more than 3,000 fact sheets and guides were downloaded from our website.

**Referral Service:** During the reporting period, MFJ made more than 1,000 referrals to other organizations on matters that fall outside of our four program areas or were not legal matters.

470

people  
benefited  
from

**Pro Se  
Assistance**

4,993

people  
benefited  
from

**Community  
Legal  
Education**

3,072

people  
benefited  
from

**Web-Based  
Assistance**

# IMPACT CASES

**Impact Case #1: D.W., et al. v. New York City Department of Education, et al., 23-cv-03179 (S.D.N.Y.):** Alongside pro bono co-counsel Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP, we represent three students with disabilities in the New York City public school system in a proposed class action lawsuit challenging the extensive delays that students with disabilities experience in obtaining special education evaluations both through the NYCDOE itself as well as through private evaluators.

Our lawsuit describes the harm caused by these delays, including excessive waits to obtain appropriate technology for learning, neuropsychology evaluations for placement, and other critical services that students with learning disabilities require to flourish. Our lawsuit also describes how the City's delays in paying independent providers pushes them to serve only families who can pay out-of-pocket, which winnows the pool of providers willing to work with low-income families, primarily of color.

**MILESTONE:** We filed the lawsuit during the grant year.

**IMPACT:** We estimate that tens or even hundreds of thousands of students with disabilities would benefit from the remedies that the lawsuit is seeking.

## All Impact Cases

- Almanzar et al. v. C&I Associates, Inc. et al., 14-cv-1810 (S.D.N.Y.)
- Bagley et al. v. The New York State Department of Health, 1:15-cv-04845-FB-CLP (E.D.N.Y.)
- Barker v. Rokosz, 19-cv-00514 (E.D.N.Y.)
- Chapman v. 1834 Caton Partners LLC & US Realty Corp., 518839/2020, Supreme Court, Kings County
- Fair Housing Justice Center, Inc. et al. v. Cuomo et al., 18 Civ. 3196 (S.D.N.Y.)
- O'Toole v. Cuomo, 13-cv-4166 (E.D.N.Y.)
- Ramirez v. 2020 Grand Realty, LLC, 20-cv-9385 (S.D.N.Y.)
- Tejada Gonzalez & FHJC v. Ved Parkash & Parkash 2051 LLC, 250329/2017, Supreme Court, Bronx
- Valerie Britt et al. v. Metropolitan Transit Authority et al, No. 22-Civ-151336, Sup. Ct., NY County
- Watt v. Bank of America, 23-cv-00233-RPK-JRC (EDNY)
- Miller v. City of New York, 23-cv-00065 (E.D.N.Y.)

- Greater Chautauqua Federal Credit Union v. Quattrone, 22-cv-02753 (S.D.N.Y.)
- Vasquez et al. v. 309 Menahan Fee Owner LLC et al., LT-309862-21, Civil Court, Kings County
- Ransley v. 150 West 21st LLC et al., 24-cv-1730(GHW)(RFT)
- Rodriguez v. Fordham Bedford Housing Company et al., 22-cv-06974-JLR

**Impact Case #2 – Expanding Safety Net Assistance Eligibility to Numerous Categories of Non-Citizens, including Asylum Seekers:** Alongside Sanford Heisler Sharp LLP, we worked behind-the-scenes to expand eligibility for a critical New York State emergency cash benefit called Safety Net Assistance (SNA). We identified several humanitarian-based categories of immigrants who we believed were most in need of this benefit, namely non-citizen individuals who have applied for Asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, Cancellation of Removal, and Temporary Protected Status.

We developed legal arguments for why these categories should become eligible for this benefit as non-citizens who are Permanently Residing Under Color of Law (PRUCOL) and engaged in many months of pre-lawsuit advocacy with New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) over the issue.

**MILESTONE:** In May 2023, OTDA formally amended its policies to make these categories of immigrants (and more) immediately eligible for SNA. We were thrilled that our advocacy efforts (along with efforts by a host of other groups, including Legal Aid) played a role in this incredible benefit expansion, which will allow so many immigrant individuals and families the opportunity to receive cash assistance while their humanitarian-based applications are pending.

**IMPACT:** This change stands to benefit tens of thousands of arriving immigrants.





# TECHNOLOGY

During the reporting period, we continued to upgrade desktop computers and laptops, as needed. This has improved staff's ability to seamlessly provide services both from home and in the office. We also made significant improvements to the computers, web cameras, and general teleconferencing capabilities of our conference rooms on both floors of our Manhattan office. This greatly improved our ability to both hold in-person team meetings during which teams can access case records together, as well as host hybrid (some attendees in-person and others virtual) meetings and presentations for staff and external partners.

Finally, we continued to engage a communications consultant and our Board's Communications Committee to enhance our social media strategy increase our footprint on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, where we provide important legal information to varied audiences.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Our 2023 Technology Grant was used to make needed upgrades to our main office's network switches. This was necessary to ensure reliable functioning of our network, which is even more critical in the wake of the pandemic as many services, including hearings and trials, continue to be conducted virtually. The switch upgrade is also tied to our strategic goal of moving everything to the cloud, as opposed to on-site servers, which improves our ability to work dynamically and securely. The switches had not been upgraded since their initial installation in 2017 and while we may have been able to make the purchase without the IOLA funds, doing so would have meant moving the funds from other initiatives.

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## PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

During the reporting period year, 178 pro bono attorneys, law students and volunteers provided approximately 15,174 hours of service to MFJ and our clients. We have one longstanding externship program in which associates from Willkie Farr and Gallagher LLP serve four-month rotations in our housing unit. In addition, approximately 39 attorneys participate in our Pro Bono Kinship Caregiver Law Project every year, working on private placement adoption cases. Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP and Sidley Austin LLP provide assistance on special education matters.

We have a longstanding and active network of pro bono partners from NYC law firms, banks and corporations who work with our attorneys to leverage the resources available to comprehensively support the legal needs of low-income New Yorkers. Eleven volunteer attorneys and two law graduates provided assistance in-house this year. We host dozens of law students and Pro Bono Scholars every academic year, each of whom is assigned to one of our four aforementioned practice areas. Several firms also provide pro bono assistance by co-counseling class action lawsuits and other litigation with attorneys which are ongoing and will continue to be litigated over the next year, such as Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison, Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, and Pillsbury Winthrop, who are co-counseling with us on longstanding impact litigations involving our Disability and Aging Rights clients.

**131**attorneys volunteered **7,627** hours**35**law students volunteered **7,401** hours**12**other volunteers volunteered **146** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

During the reporting period, some of our most significant collaborations were the following:

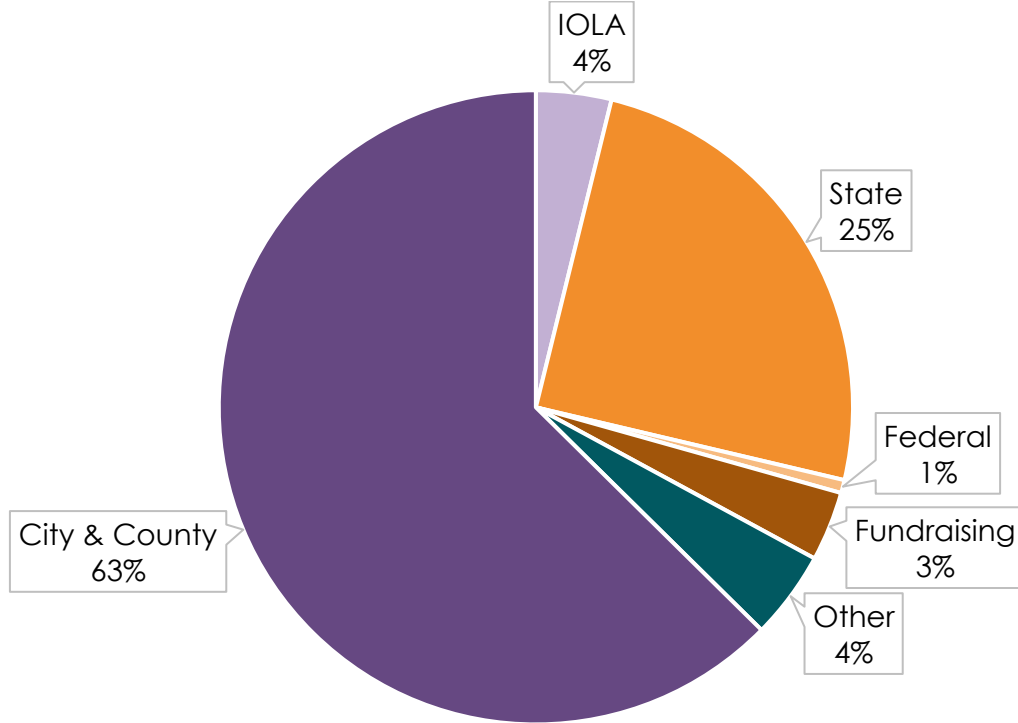
**The Office of State Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest:** Over the grant year, we continued to partner extensively with Assemblymember Souffrant Forrest's office, including hosting a series of housing clinics for her Brooklyn constituents. At the clinics, MFJ attorneys meet with community members to address their housing concerns, including repairs and conditions, harassment, evictions, and related issues. Also, during the grant year, Assemblymember Souffrant Forrest allocated funding to us to set up a brand new client fund, from which we can provide our clients with needed essentials such as food, clothing, transportation, furniture, and other needs that many clients struggle to otherwise afford.

**African Communities Together (ACT):** ACT is a community-based organization in Harlem that provides social services, civic engagement opportunities, and leadership training to African immigrants residing in NYC. ACT and MFJ continue to collaboratively conduct legal clinics to African immigrants seeking assistance with immigration matters. Such matters include, for example, application assistance, and advice, counsel, or representation on matters regarding Citizenship, Adjustment of Status, or Asylum claims. We held monthly clinics with ACT over the course of the grant year and are in talks with ACT to increase these to twice monthly in the coming year.

**The Office of State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal:** As Senator Hoylman-Sigal's district is home to a number of our clients, we've endeavored in recent years to partner with the Senator more actively to develop an educational series of trainings designed to educate the Senator's staff and constituents about their rights. During the grant year we partnered with his office to hold two Know Your Rights trainings on NYCHA and the RAD/PACT initiatives for various NYCHA buildings in his district; and our Disability and Aging Rights attorneys partnered with his office to provide legal information at a Senior Fair his office hosted, which had more than 360 attendees. We are currently planning additional trainings related to Fair Housing, in addition to scheduling more Know Your Rights trainings for both NYCHA and private tenants.

# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 22,910,530**



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 865,000</b>
<b>City &amp; County Funding</b>	<b>\$ 14,098,337</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 5,595,392</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$ 150,000</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$ 969,617</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 800,000</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$ 1,010,000</b>