

NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION

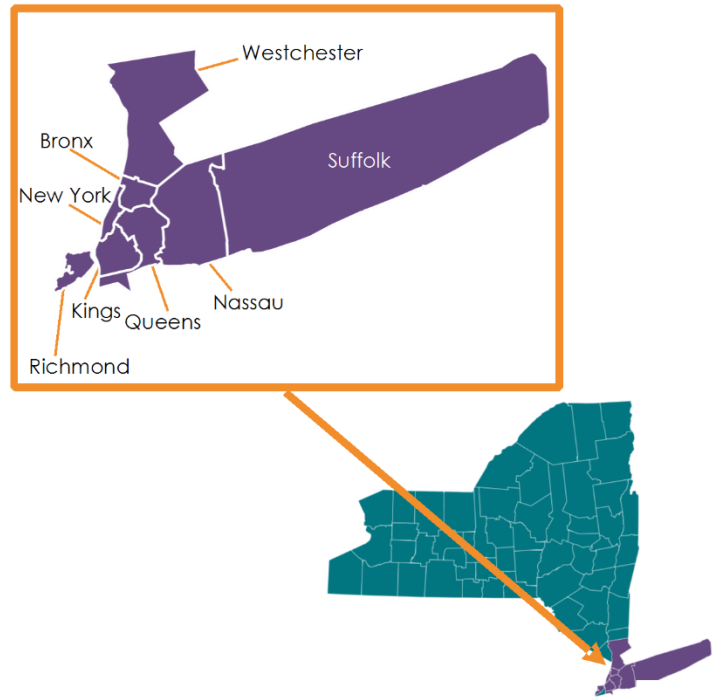
**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

In the last fiscal year, NMIC staff members conducted 5,730 unique intakes and closed 7,218 cases, affecting 13,786 members of the community. As a result, NMIC attained over \$8.6 million in back awards and settlements and \$370k in monthly benefits (un-annualized) on behalf of clients. NMIC staff also provided representation to 32 tenant groups and three impact cases, which would potentially impact over 325,000 people, including all young children living in lead-contaminated apartments.

The agency serves a largely Latinx population, many of whom are limited or non-English speaking recent immigrants or undocumented members of the community. NMIC was founded in 1979 to serve these communities and has cultivated linguistically and culturally competent service model by hiring staff that are fluent in Spanish, connected to our community, and have experience serving a predominantly Latinx population. NMIC services are open to individuals living throughout New York City, however 90% of our clients live in either Manhattan or the Bronx, and 99% live within the five boroughs.

NMIC's Housing Unit continued to provide direct legal services, preventing evictions and expanding our housing advocacy and education work. Our Assistant Director of Housing has been involved in citywide advocacy and provided internal oversight for our Right to Counsel (RTC) programming, offering services to respondents in eviction proceedings. Receiving referrals from a variety of sources, including CBOs, court, and the Office of Civil Justice, we provided pre-litigation services to hundreds of



Service Area: New York City Metropolitan Area

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 79.56
- Lawyers: 26.77
- Paralegals: 30.92
- Others: 21.87

residents, saving their tenancies. We also maintain an intake hotline that tenants can call to schedule an in person or phone intake to receive advice and counsel for advocacy issues (particularly landlord/tenant conflicts). We successfully raised millions of dollars to ensure these services remain continuously available to tenants. The past year also saw the debut of RTC Docs, an online platform hosted by NMIC, which provides document automation services to legal services providers. We worked with statewide providers and law student volunteers to develop content for the platform. With these advancements, we can continue to offer the same quality of services in a more efficient way, while increasing productivity among all providers.

The Buildings and Organizing Unit continued to work collaboratively with community partners to develop tenant coalitions and support community leadership development. We offer training and support for tenant leaders who then work with their neighbors to make their housing more affordable, higher quality, and more stable. Our target portfolio remains diverse and includes a variety of problematic landlords and the financial institutions that lend to them. Our Buildings Unit team is currently active in almost 30 buildings in Washington Heights, Inwood, and the Bronx. We have represented dozens of tenants in various group actions, such as HP Actions, Rent Overcharges, Building Wide Rent Reduction Applications, and Rent Strikes. These efforts have resulted in the placement of hundreds of HPD violations, repairs completed, hundreds of thousands of dollars in overcharge awards for tenants, and the preservation of many units of rent stabilized housing. As part of our Housing Development Work, NMIC also sponsored, and closed on, a coop conversion project that transformed 12 families into homeowners in their own HDFC.

NMIC's Immigration Unit continues to provide high quality and free immigration services to the community, reducing the risk for residents to fall victim to fraudulent predatory immigration practices at a time of heightened need for services. Services include family-based petitions, citizenship application assistance, U-visas, and other culturally and linguistically competent immigration services. Staff were again able to meet and consult with clients in-person, working with caseworkers and attorneys to review documents and applications prior to submission. The Immigration Unit continues to offer monthly, in-person intake days, with the option to schedule Zoom meetings, where residents can reserve an appointment for free immigration advice and to enroll in services. Caseworkers screen clients for other needs and make non-immigration and social service referrals for our clients as well, both internally and outside of NMIC. Internal referrals include to our Domestic Violence Project, Family Law, Housing, Adult Education programs and ESL, assistance with Medicaid and SNAP and other benefit enrollment/renewals and mental health counseling.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Client Story #1: NMIC's Disability Assistance Program achieved a significant victory for one of our clients, securing a decision that granted them \$21,366.00 in retroactive SSI benefits. The client, a veteran who has endured substantial challenges, including hardships stemming from military service and housing issues that nearly led to eviction, found reliable representation from Jessica Watson and her dedicated team.

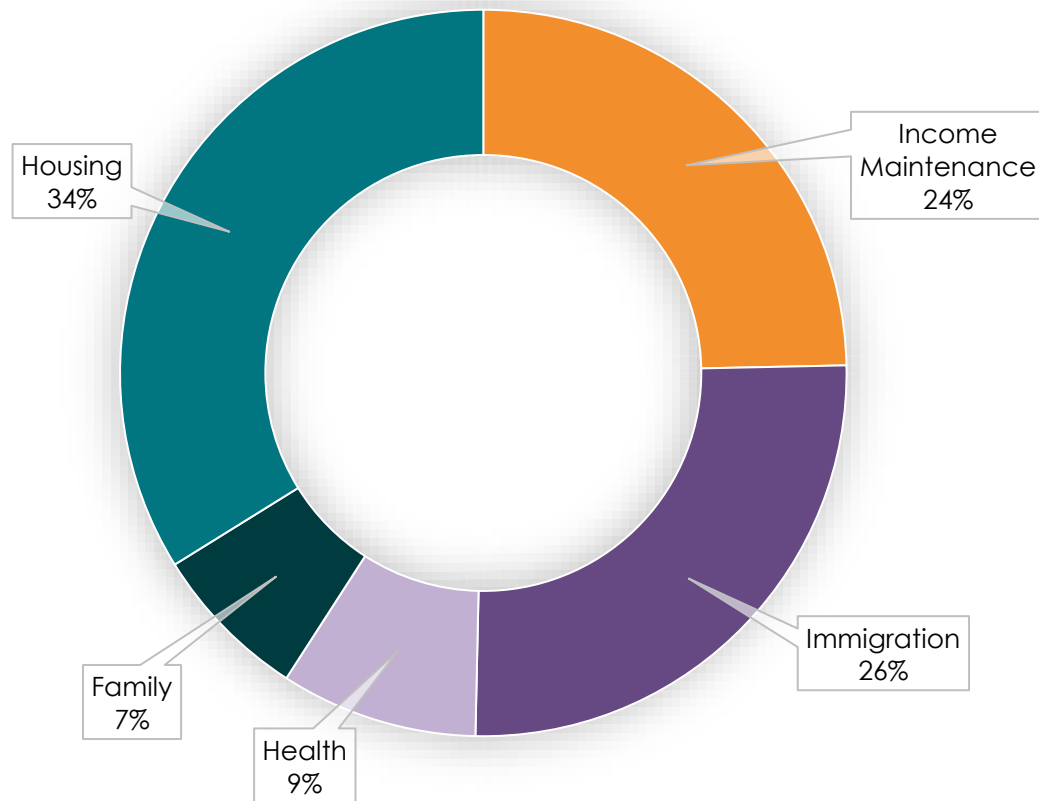
NMIC's involvement proved pivotal, not only in navigating the complexities of disability matters but also in providing crucial assistance with housing concerns. This success marks a victory for both the client and the program, underscoring NMIC's unwavering commitment to empowering individuals in need and fostering financial stability within the community.

Client Story #2: Our client, a 57-year-old female from Guyana, hoped to become a U.S. citizen upon first entering the country. This dream was unfortunately put on hold by a stroke, which posed significant hurdles. Hope reignited when one of NMIC's immigration attorneys evaluated her case, offering renewed optimism despite her struggle to learn civic questions due to the stroke's impact. Through diligent advocacy, our team identified a potential solution: a neurologist's assessment documenting her learning limitations. Despite technological barriers, the client persistently submitted Form N-648, with our attorneys meticulously reviewing and providing feedback to her neurologist.

After multiple attempts, the last N-648 medical certification submission marked a breakthrough, leading to the case's assignment. Living in a shelter since 2022, the client's recent transition to her own apartment signifies a newfound stability, despite mobility challenges from the stroke. She utilized Lyft vouchers to personally sign her application, underscoring her determination and the unwavering support of our team throughout her journey.



CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Client Story #3: We provided representation to a rent-stabilized tenant who found himself embroiled in a legal dispute due to nonpayment of rent. As a fruit cart vendor, his income suffered a severe blow during the Covid-19 pandemic, causing him to fall behind on rent payments. Navigating the complexities of the housing court system and rental assistance programs posed an additional challenge, compounded by his lack of proficiency in English and the rarity of his native language, Urdu, in New York.

NMIC stepped in to assist, facilitating the acquisition of approximately \$14,000 to cover his outstanding arrears and ultimately securing the discontinuation of his case in May 2023—two years after its initiation. This intervention safeguarded the tenancy of Mr. John, his wife, and their two children, preserving their 15-year occupancy in their rent-stabilized, affordable residence.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

NMIC staff are actively engaged in addressing various issues related to legal service provision, exemplified most notably by our community education and tenant rights workshops (discussed in detail below). We offer pro se assistance to ensure that all individuals seeking help receive advice on their legal matters during intake and are referred to other eligible services if necessary. For instance, when clients approach us for housing assistance, our LOA staff conduct screenings to identify additional needs, including eligibility for public benefits. If eligible but not currently receiving assistance, clients are seamlessly referred to our Benefits Access team for support. Furthermore, we've intensified advocacy efforts, participating in dozens of community events to disseminate information about our services and empower individuals with knowledge of their legal rights, particularly concerning benefits, housing, and immigration.

Moreover, our LOA staff collaboratively interface with our Wellness Services program to address clients' holistic needs. Recognizing that clients seeking legal assistance often contend with health-related concerns impacting their overall well-being, we've established this invaluable partnership that addresses client needs while fostering conversations about mental health with staff members. Through this collaboration, our community health workers collaborate with stakeholders to assess social determinants of health, ensuring comprehensive support. Addressing untreated trauma, which can impede legal aid services, is a priority. By providing essential support, we equip our attorneys and paralegals with the tools necessary to offer optimal representation, thereby fostering positive outcomes for our clients.

1,458

people
benefited from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

2,780

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Community Education Workshops: NMIC continues to host Community Education Workshops to provide legal information to a wider range of community members and increase social capital within the neighborhood. One notable workshop series has been the “Know Your Rights” trainings hosted by the NMIC Immigration Unit. At these events, immigration staff members provide educational workshops on immigrant rights issues relevant to specific communities or seasons.

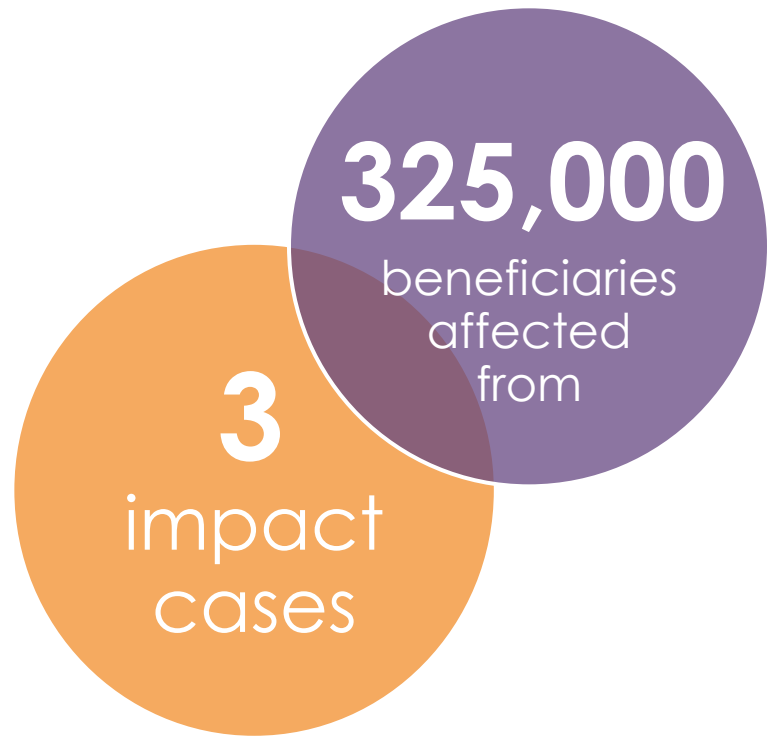
Tenant Rights Workshops: To support community advocates, the NMIC Organizing Unit continues to host tenant rights workshops to bring together those with vested interests and provide them with necessary skills. We focus on skills like leadership development, public speaking, campaign development, power mapping, direct action, media, running effective meetings, inter-generational organizing, and tenant movement history in NYC. This helps residents gain the skills, tools, and confidence to become effective leaders in their buildings.

IMPACT CASES

600 WEST 183RD STREET TENANTS ASSOCIATION, et al., Plaintiffs, - v - 600 WEST 183RD STREET REALTY CORP., ELYSEE INVESTMENT CO., AVI DISHI, ARMANDO GUZMAN, HAIM YEHEZKEL, ABRAHAM YEHEZKEL: NMIC represented a group of 31 tenants and secured a money judgement for over \$5 million dollars by a New York County Supreme Court Special Referee in October 2023 because of rent overcharges. This decision was upheld by a New York County Supreme Court Justice on April 5, 2024. The decision was significant because of the large amount of damages awarded and because of the court’s analysis about how Section 8 vouchers impact overcharge damages calculations. As a result, this decision could impact at least 50,000 New Yorkers litigating overcharge matters in housing court or other venues.

Reynolds v. Giuliani: The 2005 judgment in Reynolds requires timely processing of benefits applications. This includes issuance of expedited SNAP and immediate need grants given eligibility, and issuance of timely and adequate notices, as well as separate determinations for SNAP benefits and Medicaid where public assistance is denied. To expand benefits access, we work with our clients to seek relief under this decision to increase food, health, and cash benefits. We are also partnering with Legal Aid Society, NYLAG, and LSNY to further this work. Our Coordinating Attorney for Policy and Advocacy is working with a coalition of agencies specifically seeking to enforce the Reynolds decision. This has the capacity to reach 100,000 New Yorkers applying for emergency SNAP benefits, averaging 25,000 clients per agency.

New York Coalition to End Lead Poisoning v. Koch: NMIC continues to represent the New York Coalition to End Lead Poisoning in a class action lawsuit that seeks adequate and timely enforcement of the NYC childhood lead poisoning prevention laws. This law affects at least 250,000 children living in NYC rental apartments, the majority of whom come from low-income and working-class families. NMIC has been involved in this case for over 20 years and continues to participate in ongoing negotiations with the city.



For example, Matthew Chachere, our Attorney Emeritus, participated in a panel at a joint hearing of the NYC Council's Housing and Health Committees on Lead Poisoning. At this hearing, six different bills that were drafted by our attorney were on the agenda, potentially expanding much needed protections for our community. Included among these were Intros 5, 6, and 193, which would address issues like peeling lead paint in common areas of residential buildings.

TECHNOLOGY

NMIC is at the forefront of creating innovative tools to increase attorney efficiency. Philip Duncan, NMIC's Assistant Director for Housing, has developed two tools for document automation, one distributed internally and available as a button in MS Word, and the other an online Webapp targeted toward other legal services organizations. The tools produce well-formatted and professional documents with a few mouse clicks, including more complex documents like Answers and Motions. The tools save significant time for attorneys in the initial stages of document production, and also serve pedagogical functions for our more inexperienced staff attorneys. We introduced the MS Word tool internally at the beginning of February, and our attorneys have reported that the tool both saves time and suggests defenses and arguments that they previously had not considered. Externally we demonstrated the MS Word tool at a Roundtable attended by about 100 attorneys, who expressed a strong interest

in the technology. We have subsequently developed and soft-launched the Webapp, and are planning a more public launch in the next few days. It is viewable at www.rtcdocs.org

We have also created a more time-efficient workplace by investing in two cloud-based accounting systems, BILL and Tallie. As staffing recently transitioned within our fiscal department, this necessitated steps that would create a standardized process that was less reliant on staff energy. This shift has allowed for more space for staff and leadership to focus on delivering the programmatic work that our clients depend on. Going forward, we are confident that these technological upgrades have better positioned us to continue achieving positive outcomes in the years ahead.

NMIC also continues to use ClientTrack, our proprietary case management system, to collect and store client information and service provision data. The ClientTrack system has been specifically designed for NMIC and is fully customizable, allowing designated staff to alter frameworks within the system to meet the agency's evolving needs. We also simplified intake by connecting web-based forms to our database. Ultimately, the information entered by the client will automatically create a client record in ClientTrack, allowing staff members time to research relevant options for services before the intake and decreasing administrative burden for both staff members conducting the intake and new clients.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The grant funds were instrumental in facilitating the acquisition of new software systems, including onboarding software from Clear Company and employee evaluation software from HR Performance Solutions. These purchases were confirmed as allowable expenses under the category of "software upgrades" by IOLA, ensuring compliance with grant guidelines. Particularly significant was the acquisition of the onboarding software, a long-awaited addition that promises to streamline the interview and onboarding processes for new hires, centralizing all relevant information in a cohesive database. Importantly, utilizing grant funds for these software upgrades relieves pressure on NMIC's general operating funds, which support various other programs, preserving financial resources for broader organizational objectives. These technological investments align with NMIC's overarching goal of leveraging technology to enhance operational efficiency across its programs, reflecting a strategic approach to advancing organizational missions and objectives.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Recognizing the importance of pro bono attorneys, law students, and volunteers in the delivery of our legal services, we continue to develop partnerships that will benefit this vital form of recruitment. NMIC is actively engaged in a complex legal matter alongside Schulte Roth involving a group of four tenants facing overcharge issues in the Supreme Court. With the case progressing beyond motion practice and now in the final stages of discovery, it is anticipated to proceed to trial. Notably, these tenants reside in the same building where a significant settlement was previously secured by our housing unit for 33 tenants, underscoring NMIC's ongoing commitment to advocating for tenants' rights and addressing overcharge concerns.

Furthermore, NMIC has invested in nurturing pro bono and clinical partnerships, spearheaded by a coordinating attorney responsible for developing relationships with pro bono partners and crafting a comprehensive training model for attorneys and interns. Although facing challenges due to the departure of the coordinating attorney, resulting in lower intern and pro bono numbers for the fiscal year, NMIC is actively seeking to fill the position to sustain and expand these vital partnerships. Despite setbacks, efforts to recruit new talent remain robust. We continue to participate in law school recruitment fairs, like the NY Public Interest Career Fair, and engage in strategic dissemination of internship opportunities to foster relationships with academic institutions and attract qualified candidates.

4attorneys volunteered **400** hours**6**law students volunteered **1,156** hours**24**other volunteers volunteered **6,545** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

LEAP Coalition, Founding Member: LEAP is a NYC, member-based partnership composed of direct civil legal service providers. 18 member groups and over 400 lawyers, LEAP benefits nearly 120,000 individuals each year. NMIC, one of the founding members, continues to participate in the LEAP coalition and serves as the borough lead organization in the Bronx. The Director of LOA serves on the LEAP Steering Committee, granting opportunities to engage with local and state elected officials and agency representatives, advocating for the preservation and expansion of legal services funding.

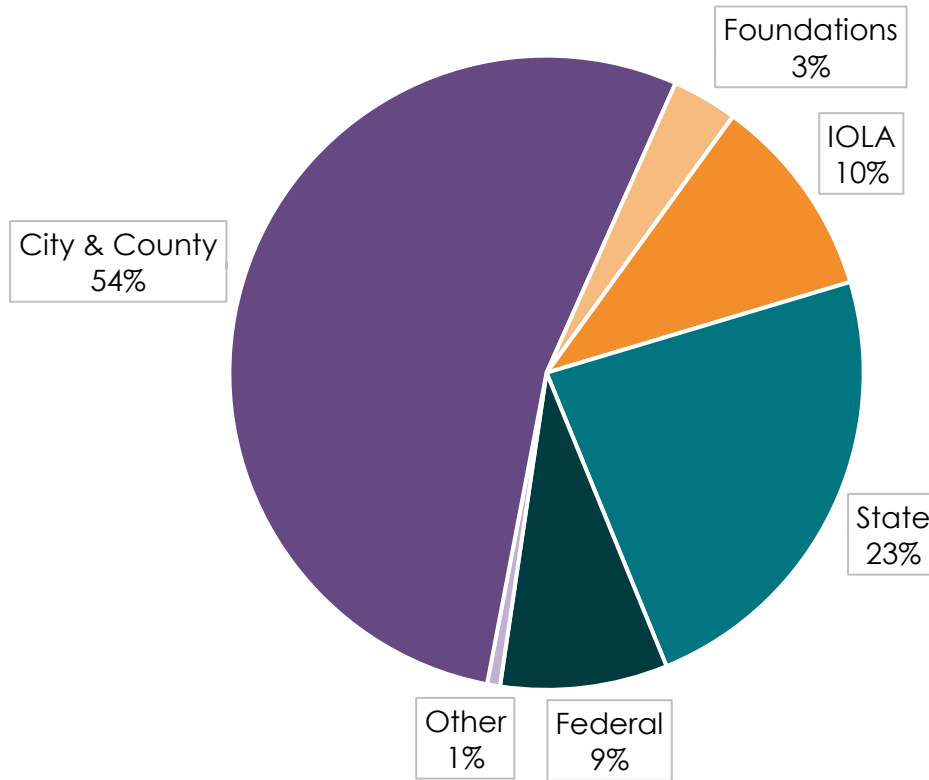
New York Legal Services Coalition, Founding Member: The New York Legal Services Coalition (NYLSC) is a collection of 50 legal service providers from across the state committed to ensuring fairness for all in the New York judicial system. With the Director of LOA serving as a board member, NMIC continues to collaborate with NYLSC to deliver effective legal services to low-income New Yorkers. Activities include the provision of educational opportunities; advocacy on legal issues affecting low-income communities and the delivery of civil legal aid; identifying and promoting best practices in the civil legal aid community; and providing technical assistance and capacity building resources for our members.

United Neighborhood Houses: UNH is a coalition of 45 settlement houses throughout NYC who work together to advocate for and provide essential services to underserved New Yorkers. As an active member, NMIC works with UNH to consolidate resources to distribute among settlement houses. In the past year, this collaboration led to more NMIC clients receiving relief through rental assistance and helped fund the addition of a new Counselor Advocate to our Domestic Violence Project.

Partnerships with Community Stakeholders: This year, NMIC continued partnerships with several agencies including New York Presbyterian (NYP) and the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). We continue our partnership with NYP to manage a community health worker program to serve elderly and homebound clients. We continue to partner with WSCAH's mobile pantry. WSCAH provides all the food for our monthly pantry days. We distribute 27lbs bags of food to 210 clients each month, allowing them to access a variety of healthy and culturally inclusive foods. Our pantry has been so successful that we have developed other partnerships with companies like Purina to distribute pet food.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 11,313,321



IOLA Funding	\$ 1,173,632
City & County Funding	\$ 6,071,414
State Funding	\$ 2,652,475
Federal Funding	\$ 964,722
Foundations	\$ 376,538
Other Funding	\$ 74,540