

SANCTUARY FOR FAMILIES

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

From April 2023–March 2024, the IOLA Fund of the State of New York provided critical support to Sanctuary for Families’ Center for Battered Women’s Legal Services (“the Legal Center”) in its delivery of holistic, integrated civil legal services to 4,088 unduplicated clients, including low-income and indigent victims of domestic violence, sex and labor trafficking, and related forms of gender-based violence. A total of 5,413 cases were closed during the report year (a 19% increase over last year). The overall number of people who benefited from these case services (both clients and their families) was 5,640.

The Legal Center provides assistance to abuse victims in all five counties of NYC (Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond) as well as surrounding counties in New York State. Clients are among the metro region’s poorest residents—last year, over 90% living well below the poverty line. In total, 91% were people of color (13% Asian, 50% Hispanic, 27% Black, 10% Asian, 2% Middle Eastern, 2% Multiracial) and 79% of adult clients are immigrants, hailing from more than 140 countries, many of them monolingual or with limited English skills—the largest numbers being from Mexico, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Jamaica, and China. A significant majority (96%) of clients live in New York City, including the Bronx (27%), Brooklyn (24%), Queens (24%), Manhattan (14%), and Staten Island (4.5%). The majority are single parents with dependent children.

The Legal Center maintained its strong relationship with many major law firms engaged in public interest pro bono work, with 52 firms working with staff attorneys on cases during the report year. Of the aforementioned closed cases, 29 pro bono attorneys handled 122 family law cases, 19 pro



Service Area: New York City and Surrounding Counties

Population Served: Low Income Women and Families

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
 Total Staff: 122.7 Lawyers: 68.2
 Paralegals: 36 Others: 18.5

bonos handled 62 matrimonial, public benefits, and housing cases; 53 pro bonos handled 117 immigration cases; and 46 pro bonos handled 63 trafficking cases. Additionally, the Courtroom Advocates Project trained 364 advocates—law students and non-admitted firm associates—who assisted 143 litigants in Family Court.

The Legal Center’s family and matrimonial legal team helped clients obtain hundreds of thousands of dollars via successful litigation of child support, maintenance/spousal support, and equitable distribution of assets in divorces, as well as many successful enforcement actions. Legal staff also assisted 96 unduplicated clients with 179 cases related to Income Maintenance and 72 unduplicated clients with 84 housing cases—and secured many thousands of dollars in retroactive benefits in cases where errors were identified. Many immigrant clients were assisted in securing public benefits, including advocacy where public assistance (PA) authorities erroneously denied eligible immigrants, and ensuring that benefits were applied for and secured after an eligible immigration status was achieved. Lastly, the intensive advocacy of legal staff helped numerous clients to avoid eviction through settlement of arrears.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Family Law: A senior attorney at Sanctuary’s Brooklyn Family Justice Center (BFJC) office has assisted Aisha in various family law matters over the past five years. In March 2019, Aisha came to the BFJC looking initially for assistance with filing for an Order of Protection on behalf of her and her infant son. Aisha is Palestinian, but came to the U.S. from Jordan after her marriage to her husband who resided in the U.S. Soon after her marriage, Aisha’s husband started his abuse, and after she was ultimately excluded from the home after one incident, she sought help.

Sanctuary began representing Aisha in May 2019 in her Family Offense and custody proceedings, which concluded in June 2021, with Aisha getting full legal and physical custody of her child. The attorney also represented her in a writ matter and a passport application, both resolved in Aisha’s favor. Most recently, in July 2023, the attorney filed a child support violation and spousal support petition on her behalf. In March 2024, the attorney successfully resolved both support matters as the father became current on his child support obligations after initially claiming inability to pay, and Aisha received a lump sum payment of \$5,000 in spousal support. The BFJC attorney will now be handling Aisha’s hopefully uncontested divorce. She has also been referred to Sanctuary’s Immigration Intervention Project (IIP), and was accepted for services just recently.

Case Example #2, Housing: Sanctuary’s housing legal team successfully assisted a long-time client of Sanctuary for Families after she was unexpectedly evicted from her home in late June 2023. Angela had not received any advance notice of the eviction. Because the eviction has been carried out legally by the City Marshal, the team petitioned the Court to reopen the case and allow Angela to move back into the apartment. Angela was evicted because, unbeknownst to her, her family’s CityFHEPS payments had ended, so the team advocated with HRA to have the payments reinstated. The team was ultimately able to restore Angela to possession of her home by early July.

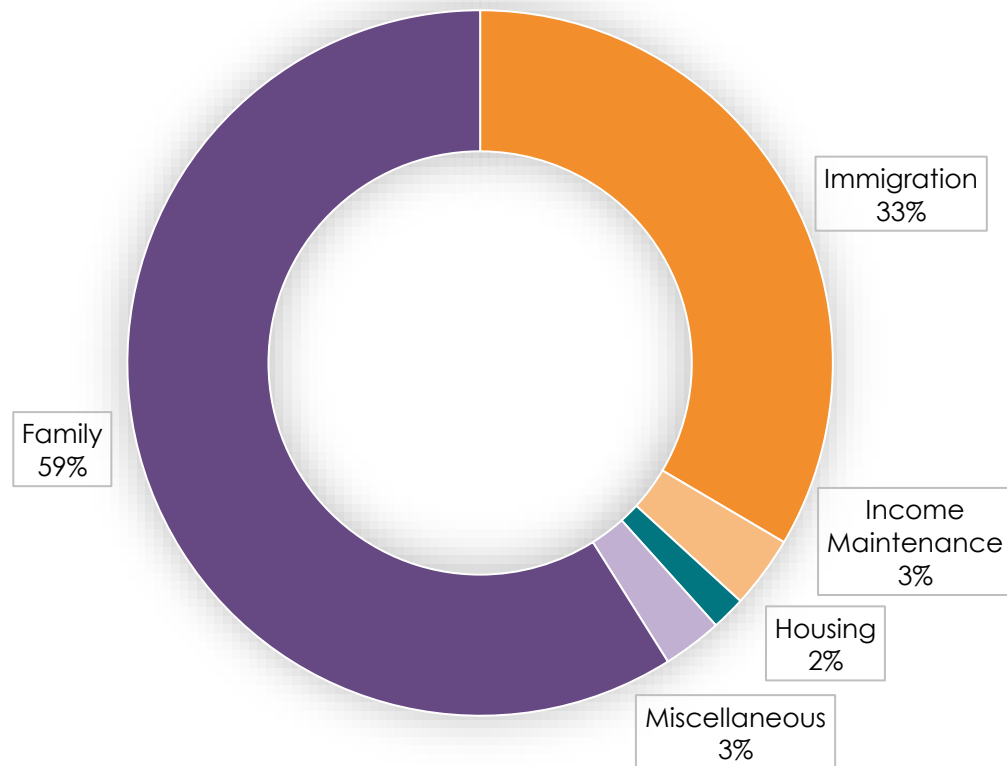
Case Example #3, Family Law: In October 2023, a senior attorney in the Legal Center’s Courtroom Advocates Project helped Patricia finish her Family Court cases with a 2-year order of protection on consent and withdrawal of the abuser’s family offense and custody modification and enforcement petitions. Patricia suffered years of physical, verbal and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband, who harbored delusions that she was engaged in myriad crimes (e.g. running a business selling social security numbers), and severe child abuse of their single child-in-common.

Despite these fantasies, the custody and family offense matters were settled in April 2022, when the parties agreed to a final order of primary physical custody to Patricia, joint legal custody, and mutual withdrawal of their family offense petitions.



However, Patricia’s husband continued to relentlessly harass her in connection with his scheduled parenting time and engaged in legal abuse, filing a baseless order to show cause alleging that she had attempted to abduct their son to Thailand, notwithstanding that he had agreed to the trip in writing. In April 2023, Patricia filed a new family offense petition, and her husband retaliated with a family offense petition of his own, followed by petitions seeking to enforce and modify the April 2022 custody and visitation order, and for a writ of habeas corpus, which was denied.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



When we appeared in Family Court in October 2023, Patricia’s husband inexplicably withdrew his modification, enforcement and family offense petitions and agreed to a two-year final order of protection on behalf of Patricia with no admission of wrongdoing. Sanctuary continues to represent Patricia in connection with a pending, pre-RJI divorce proceeding.

Case Example #4, Family Law: After years of bringing frivolous actions in family court to harass her—empowered to do so by his free 18B attorney—Claudia’s case is finally being resolved. Throughout their long relationship, Claudia’s husband was physically abusive to her and her other children from a prior marriage. ACS initiated a case against him that was dismissed by the court because of the Judge’s bias. Throughout the litigation, Claudia has been villainized by the abuser, opposing counsel, and the Court, despite the fact that he was abusing the Court’s resources and had abused our client and her children for years. Most disturbing about the case was the Court’s lack of due diligence in ensuring that the abuser qualified for free counsel. Despite our objections, the judge appointed him an 18B attorney and allowed him to have free legal representation for years. A Sanctuary family law attorney subpoenaed his employment records and discovered that he was making well over \$120,000 at Amtrak. In response to this discovery, the father announced he was withdrawing his petition and would be requesting a modification of the final order of custody to no visitation.

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

The Legal Center implements an extensive range of both in-person and virtual Community Legal Education. The Center also implements regular pro se clinics—with extensive assistance from law firm and law school partners—in a range of practice areas including gender-based asylum, uncontested divorce, child/spousal support, and orders of protection.

Text In-Person Community Legal Education: Some highlights of in-person events included a multilingual know-your-rights training at a school assembly in Sunset Park, Brooklyn (October 2023), presenting critical information on labor law, immigration relief, and public benefits in Mandarin and Spanish to neighborhood parents—the culmination of several months of outreach in partnership with the Chinese American Planning Council.

In February 2024, a senior Sanctuary family law attorney presented alongside representatives of the Queens FJC, Queens Borough President’s Office, and Stalking Prevention & Resource Center to 40 community members at the Queens Borough President’s Office. The presenters discussed services available at the Queens FJC and Sanctuary’s attorney also discussed her special area of expertise, technology-facilitated abuse, and how to make appropriate referrals for these victims to Sanctuary. The Legal Center’s Orthodox Jewish Matrimonial Initiative has also done extensive outreach, including a legal workshop with current and former residents at the OHEL Domestic Violence Shelter (October 2023).

426

people
benefited from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

10,920

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

Pro Se Clinics: Our Pro Bono legal team offers a biweekly Pro Se Child and Spousal Support Petition Drafting Clinic (PDC) at the Family Justice Centers in all five boroughs. Building on the years of success of the Courtroom Advocates Project (CAP) and the Virtual Courtroom Advocates Project (VCAP) offered during the pandemic, and the relationships the Legal Center has built with participating law firms, the PDC utilizes pro bono attorneys to help clients draft and file child and spousal support petitions and paternity petitions, and help them complete Financial Disclosure Affidavits.

Pro bono attorneys help clients to file these documents after they have been reviewed by a Sanctuary attorney. Firms including Paul Weiss, Schulte Roth, Debevoise, Cleary Gottlieb, Sullivan & Cromwell, and Simpson Thacher have participated. This summer, we will launch a pilot using Sanctuary family law interns, supervised by FJC attorneys.

The Gender-Based Asylum Initiative (GBAI) expands on the Legal Center's successful Pilot Pro Se Asylum Initiative that we developed and implemented with Latham & Watkins in the past two years, with a 5-person staff team delivering trauma-informed pro se legal assistance and representation to a significantly larger pool of survivors of gender-based violence seeking U.S. asylum, working with five law firms to schedule clinics since Fall 2023.

Thanks to new private and public funding to address the urgent legal needs of the city's many new immigrant arrivals, we are now able to offer firms two models: the Pro Se Clinic and Pro Se PLUS Clinic. In the Pro Se model, pro bono attorneys meet with approximately 10 pre-screened survivors during one clinic day to finalize and help file their Form I-589. In the Pro Se PLUS model, pro bono attorneys meet with approximately 5-6 pre-screened survivors during a clinic day to begin working on their asylum documents. Attorneys then commit to working with their pro se client over the following weeks to (i) finalize their Form I-589, (ii) finalize their client affidavit, and (iii) help them file their pro se documents. Participating firms have included Covington & Burling; Simpson Thacher, Proskauer Rose, Weil Gotshal, and Sidley Austin. Five additional firms have committed to offer upcoming clinics, and are beginning to schedule summer clinics now.

IMPACT CASES

1. Precedent-setting decision in Hague Convention case in federal court (January 2024): a federal judge denied an abusive ex-husband's Hague Petition to return his young child to Italy, taking him from the family of the child's mother, now tragically deceased.

2. Amicus in Child Welfare Challenge (March 2024): lead amici on brief filed in a case against the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) being appealed by the Family Justice Law Center, in which the victim faced invasive, disruptive ACS supervision to maintain custody of her child, even though the accusations of maltreatment are against the father, who abused both of them.

3. Amicus in Case re: Intersection of Gun Violence and Domestic Violence (June 2023): signed on to an amicus brief submitted in the case U.S. v. Rahimi, an appeal from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, which held that the federal firearms regulation that prevents domestic violence abusers from accessing firearms was not constitutional (in partnership with O'Melveny and Myers).

4. Amicus in Harvey Weinstein Case (December 2023): filed brief with 20 local and national domestic violence and sexual assault organizations to the NY Court of Appeals, focusing on the excessive burden of proof of intent placed on complaining witnesses in sexual assault cases (in partnership with Covington & Burling).

5. Amicus in Child Maltreatment Case Affecting Abuse Victim's Employment Prospects (December 2023): filed brief in the Fourth Department challenging an administrative decision to list a victim of severe abuse in the Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment, based on her attempt to physically remove her child from the abuser's home to safety (he is now incarcerated pending charges of sexual assault against their daughter). Listing in the State Register will gravely affect her employability in her career as a schoolteacher (in partnership with Orrick).

6. Amicus in Reproductive Rights Case: brief filed in U.S. v. Idaho (March 2024), arguing that, by requiring pregnant patients to incur serious but preventable harms or suffer until their medical conditions become life-threatening before medical professionals can provide emergency abortions, Idaho's strict abortion ban amounts to state-sponsored gender-based violence (in partnership with Cleary Gottlieb).

Impact Cases Narrative, Example #1: In a case that was successfully argued by pro bono attorneys before the U.S. Supreme Court—who issued an unusual unanimous decision on behalf of Sanctuary client Narkis Golan in March 2022—this major collaboration with pro bono teams from the law firms of Skadden and Cahill has wound its way through multiple appeals in the federal courts over the past several years. In January 2024, a federal judge issued a favorable decision, denying her abusive ex-husband’s petition to return the child to Italy, where they had been living before Ms. Golan fled to the U.S. in 2020 to escape his vicious abuse. Ms. Golan’s legal team has consistently argued that the child would face grave risk of harm by the abuser and his family if he were returned to Italy. Ms. Golan tragically died just a few months after the Supreme Court decision, and her sister, who lives in New York, stepped in to care for the child. The husband put in a Notice of Appeal, but we recently received word that he has withdrawn the appeal, finally bringing the Hague litigation to a close. The Supreme Court decision and subsequent final closure of this case brings to an end a case which sets an important precedent to countless domestic violence survivors facing Hague Convention cases in the future.

Impact Cases Narrative, Example #2: The law firm of Skadden Arps is drafting a DV Service Providers’ amicus brief in support of a survivor of domestic violence, Ms. W, in a Second Department appeal, with Sanctuary as the lead amici on the brief and supervising the team. Ms. W was a victim of physical and verbal abuse by the father of her child, which occurred in front of the child. When Ms. W told her therapist about the abuse, ACS was called. ACS investigated and ultimately filed an abuse and neglect case against the father. They found no wrongdoing on the part of the mother and named her simply as a “non-respondent” in the case. Both the court and the Attorney for the Child agreed that Ms. W had done nothing wrong. Nonetheless, ACS sought to impose invasive requirements on Ms. W, including ACS supervision of her parenting and unannounced visits to her home. The NYU Family Defense Clinic and the Family Justice Law Center have brought an important appeal on Ms. W’s behalf, arguing that the decision to impose invasive requirements on a non-respondent mother who has no finding (or even allegation) of wrongdoing is unconstitutional.

TECHNOLOGY

In the past several years, Sanctuary has streamlined, standardized, and digitized intake procedures to ensure that the full range of client needs and risks are assessed during intake, and appropriate referrals to other programs and departments can be made at that time. Other developments include further digitization of processes to increase accessibility, and support communication across staff and departments working remotely. These include digitization of

Sanctuary’s emergency client grants system, which has facilitated faster, more efficient financial assistance to clients in need for expenses including rent, utility bills, moving costs, and medical expenses.

After months of work by Sanctuary’s Data team, we were able to launch new automated email check-ins on publication divorce cases to pro bono teams and pro bono coordinators. These emails will be sent every three months and request updates on case status and any staffing changes. We hope that they will allow for better communication, accountability, and organization between Sanctuary supervisors and legal teams on cases with lengthy wait times.

Pro Bono Portal: Pro Bono Director Nicole Fidler is constantly seeking to expand and improve the Pro Bono Portal—a major source of training and support for Sanctuary pro bono attorneys. Most recently, the law firm Covington & Burling helped update the country condition reports on the asylum section of the Portal, ensuring that we have the most up-to-date information for our immigration pro bono partners. In Fall 2023, the Pro Bono Project conducted a survey to assess the accessibility and efficacy of the Pro Bono Portal. The survey was sent to over 500 registered Portal users. Results show that over 60% of responding users used the Portal throughout the case; 31% used it at the beginning of the case; and only 8% did not use it. Regarding accessibility, over 58% found the Portal user-friendly (with 33% having a neutral response).

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

This grant allowed Sanctuary to purchase 11 laptops and 6 monitors for Legal Center staff working in our main Manhattan office and the Queens Family Justice Center. This has increased the number of legal staff who have laptops in order to more efficiently work outside the office—whether at home, in court, or meeting clients in the field.

Monitors facilitated legal staff having two monitors, very valuable when working with a number of documents at once. Sanctuary’s larger strategic goal, in line with a hybrid/remote work that is the “new normal” for the foreseeable future, is to transition virtually all agency computers to laptop units, with monitors still being available in our physical offices to be used with laptops when staff are working in the offices.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Law Students: The Legal Center has extensive engagement with law students, including the long-standing Courtroom Advocates Project (CAP), which trains hundreds of students from 12 metro NYC law schools as well as unadmitted summer associates from major law firms to assist pro se petitioners seeking orders of protection in family court. After training 123 associates from 29 participating firms in summer 2023, 91 of these associates assisted 33 petitioners seeking orders of protection. The Uncontested Divorce Project trains law students from five area law schools to handle these cases. In June 2023, the Director of the Immigration Intervention Project conducted a training on VAWA Self Petitions, Battered Spouse Waivers, and Affidavit Writing to over 100 associates at Latham & Watkins at the start of the firm's summer program. A Financial Support Enforcement Externship at Columbia Law School trains a dynamic group of law students, who go on to prepare support enforcement motions to be filed in the Supreme Court, as well as drafting motions and petitions for cases currently being litigated in Family Court.

Pro Bono Attorneys: In October 2023, two senior staff attorneys joined a number of other trainers to conduct a half-day CLE training, Trauma-Informed Language Services: Best Practices and Ethics. The program targeted legal services, nonprofit, and pro bono attorneys and allied professionals who represent and/or advocate on behalf of linguistically diverse clients. Experts discussed language access and language justice fundamentals and trauma-informed approaches to working with clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

1,085

attorneys volunteered 67,050 hours

116

law students volunteered 1,028 hours

45

other volunteers volunteered 4,796 hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Barrier Free Living: One of the Legal Center's most vital direct civil legal service collaborations is with Barrier Free Living (BFL), an agency that offers accessible services for domestic violence survivors with disabilities. Through a New York State grant, BFL has a dedicated attorney embedded as a Legal Center staff attorney, since March 2023. This attorney receives extensive referrals from BFL, and visits BFL's nonresidential service center to meet the staff and familiarize herself with the services BFL clients are receiving.

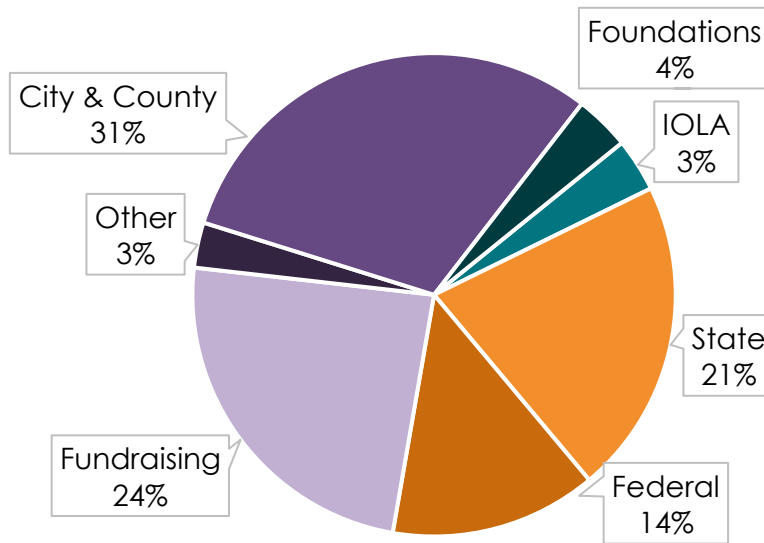
The Lawyers Committee Against Domestic Violence: The Legal Center actively participates in and co-chairs the Lawyers Committee against Domestic Violence (LCADV), a coalition of lawyers from public and private bars who work with abuse victims and join forces to sensitize the legal system to their needs. Staff attorneys participate in the LCADV's Judges Working Groups in Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, and take the lead on organizing its annual Fordham Law School Conference to improve the court system's response to domestic violence. The Legal Center also continued to convene and chair monthly meetings of the NYS Anti-Trafficking Coalition (NYSATC), comprised of more than 140 organizations working together to improve the State's response to human trafficking. In October 2023, Jennifer Friedman organized and led a virtual presentation, Transforming and Reforming the Family Law System in New York, at a meeting of the Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims, with 70 attendees, focusing on the challenges faced by survivors and introduced the policy reforms proposed in the Family law Roundtable's recently published report.

Cyber Sexual Abuse Task Force: Senior staff attorney Lindsey Song co-chairs the citywide Cyber Sexual Abuse Task Force, created in 2016 by Sanctuary staff in collaboration with civil attorney Carrie Goldberg and others. The Task Force includes representatives from government, nonprofit agencies, and independent civil attorneys, including Mayor's Office to End Domestic & Gender Based Violence, Day One, Legal Momentum, Legal Services NYC and others. The Task Force continues to grow and meets at least quarterly. In her leadership role in this novel area of law, Ms. Song offers appears at a wide range of conferences and panels, including two events at the White House in the past two years. In March 2024, Ms. Song presented as part of a panel, "Beyond Consent: Unsolicited Images and Deepfake Pornography" as a part of the NO MORE Tech Conference's "Silicon Saviors or Digital Threats? Exploring Tech's Impact on Domestic and Sexual Violence." Along with panelists Adam Dodge of ENDTAB and Sophie Mortimer of the UK Revenge Porn Helpline, she discussed image-based abuse and other forms of technology-based abuse and stalking and its intersection with domestic violence. The conference had over 1,000 registrations and over 1,700 views.

Bar Committees: Legal Center attorneys continue to be active members of a range of Bar Committees, including the Women’s Bar Association (Domestic Violence Committee, Judiciary Committee, Family and Matrimonial Law Committee); Association of the Bar of the City of New York (Domestic Violence Committee); NYC Bar Association (Pro Bono & Legal Services Committee); Association of the Bar of NY (Animal Law Committee); and Bronx Bar Association (Family and Matrimonial Law Committee).

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 12,872,376



IOLA Funding	\$ 460,000
City & County Funding	\$ 3,944,968
State Funding	\$ 2,723,375
Federal Funding	\$ 1,782,100
Foundations	\$ 474,442
Fundraising	\$ 3,097,311
Other Funding	\$ 390,180