

**NEW YORK
LEGAL
ASSISTANCE
GROUP**

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

From April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023, NYLAG’s paid staff increased to 341 FTE, including 214.5 FTE attorneys and 80.2 FTE paralegals. We closed 31,604 cases for 76,566 people in New York City, Westchester, and Long Island. Across New York State, 7,695,858 people benefited, or may benefit, from our successful impact litigation, either through active cases or ongoing monitoring. Some 4,707 individuals attended 126 community education workshops and trainings. There were 8,123,165 beneficiaries from closed impact cases or matters during the reporting period. Clients received back awards totaling \$17,790,906 and monthly benefits totaling \$51,249, including insurance payouts, public benefits, and child/spousal support. Clients avoided \$135,305,527 in lump sum settlements and obtained \$2,354,706 in ongoing monthly savings through reductions in consumer debt, mortgage payments, and other expenses. Our pro bono program recruited 1,692 volunteer attorneys, paralegals, law students, and others, who donated 83,846.74 hours. During the period, NYLAG launched and continued several initiatives to improve New Yorkers’ access to justice, including:

Taxi Advocacy Project (TAP): Our Consumer Protection Unit (CPU) continued offering legal services to taxi drivers with medallion debt. We expanded services to help them pay down their medallion loans through the City’s launch of the Medallion Relief Program Plus and we were able to assist even more medallion owners with additional options to restructure their loans. We restructured thousands of loans and saved our clients ~ \$400,000,000 and continue to work with hundreds more.



Population Served: General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$81,373,024

Total IOLA Grant: \$2,250,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 341
- Paralegals: 81.2
- Lawyers: 215.5
- Other: 45.3

Afghan Legal Assistance Project: Launched in 2021, our Immigrant Protection Unit partnered with the International Rescue Committee and pro bono attorneys to help Afghan refugees apply for Humanitarian Parole. We helped 94 Afghan refugees with asylum, Temporary Protected Status, Special Immigrant Visas, and family-based petitions.

Ukrainian Legal Assistance Project: We launched a Project to serve Ukrainian migrants and families in Spring 2022. We have helped hundreds of newly arrived Ukrainians apply for Temporary Protected Status, employment authorization, asylum claims, deportation defense, and other relief. We are working with partners to connect Ukrainians to housing and other services as they build their lives in the U.S.

Student Borrower Advocacy Project (SBAP): CPU started a new Project to help student borrowers navigate the student loan system for private or federal loans. The Project helps borrowers with determining their best repayment options, accessing loan forgiveness, understanding cancellation and discharge programs, applying for consolidation, deferment, and forbearance, getting out of default, resolving issues with loan servicers and lenders, and developing a plan for tackling student debt.

Project Assist: Support for Family Caregivers in December 2022: Our Legal Health Unit began piloting a new program to assist older adults and adults with disabilities who have family and household members providing informal care to them. The Project strives to enable caregivers to legally make decisions regarding financial and other matters and to increase household stability by obtaining public benefits, assisting with eviction prevention, and ensuring employment is not impacted by caregiving.

Medicaid Expansion: With a statewide coalition, NYLAG won a victory in Medicaid eligibility for older New Yorkers and those with disabilities who are left out of the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion. In 2023, more New Yorkers will be eligible for Medicaid, income and resource limits will increase, and the Medicare Savings Program will subsidize Medicare premiums for more New Yorkers.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case #1

Joan, her husband, Marc, and their 5-year-old daughter, Maya, escaped from the horrors they experienced in their home country and traveled to the United States via foot, bus, and raft. They were apprehended upon their arrival in the United States, and once they were released from detention, they were sent to New York City. A Shelter Advocacy Initiative attorney first met them at a homeless outreach event, where they reported that they had been staying at a shelter for over a month and had not yet received vaccinations and/or physical examinations. The attorney immediately advocated with the director of the shelter system and succeeded in facilitating the provision of medical care and vaccinations. This family then ran into another roadblock—they could not enroll Maya in school because their birth certificates were seized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The attorney recognized that not allowing a homeless child to enroll in school is a violation of the McKinney-Vento Act. The attorney then advocated on their behalf with the Department of Education and, within a day, Maya was enrolled in school.

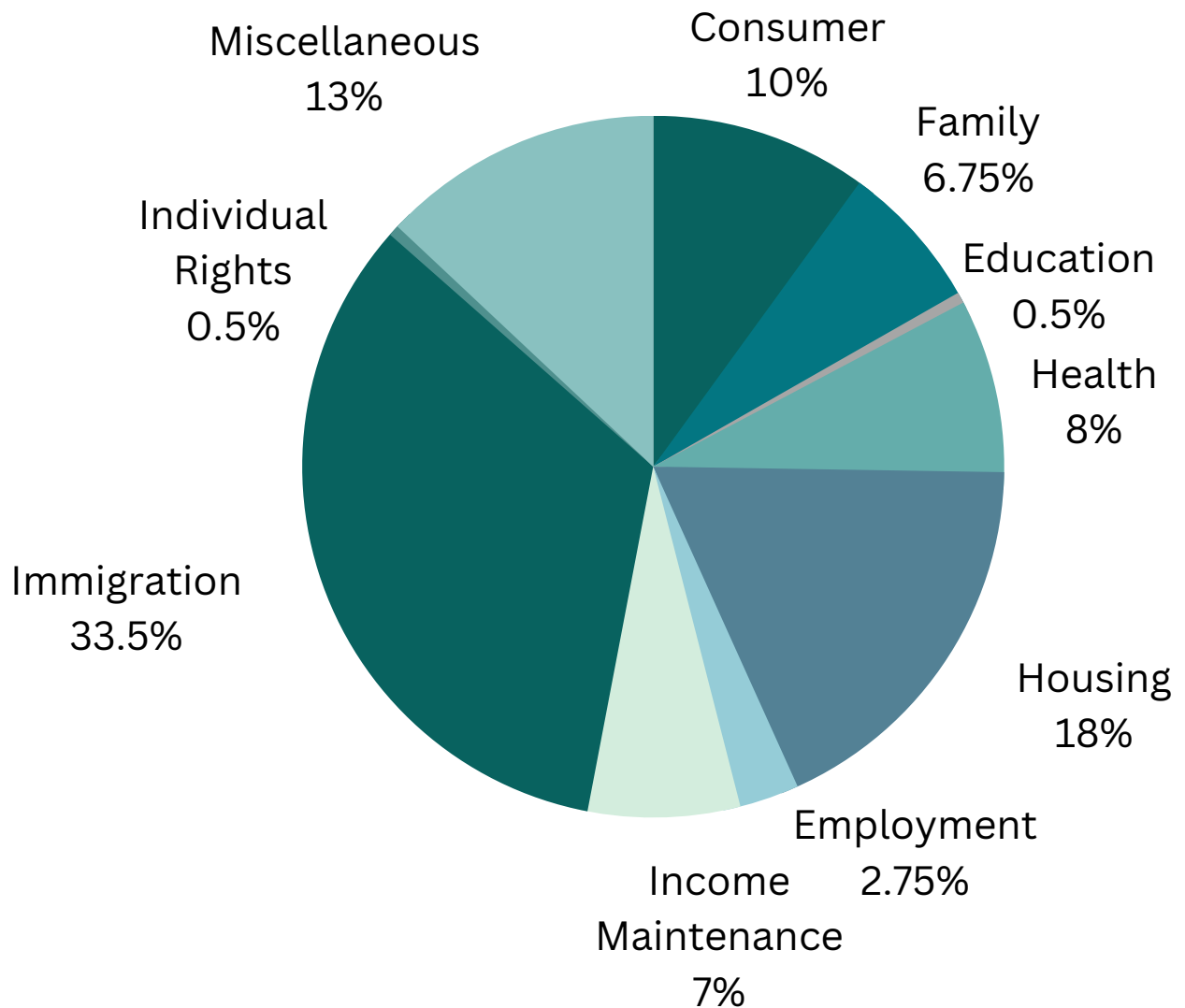
76,566
people
benefitted from
31,603
legal cases
closed

Case #2

Violet enlisted in the Navy in 2016, working as an engineer on a ship. During her enlistment, she began coming to terms with her trans identity. Violet sought mental health support and received counseling through the military. In November of 2020, Violet was forcibly discharged from the Navy. While she was given, an Honorable Discharge, the reason provided was “Gender Dysphoria.”

Because this discharge occurred before the end of her contract with the Navy—the military hit her with a bill for \$31,000, claiming she owed them because she had not completed her contract. Violet was already deep in credit card debt and trying to

support two young kids so paying off this additional debt was unthinkable. After attempting to remove the Navy’s debt herself, Violet reached out to us for assistance. Our LGBTQ Law Project submitted a request on her behalf, explaining her financial situation and noting the forced discharge from service and asking that the debt—incurred through the military’s own discrimination—be remitted. Additionally, we contacted Senator Gillibrand’s office for support navigating our communications with various departments within the military. Thanks to our advocacy Violet’s debt was remitted, and she can move forward without this unjust burden.

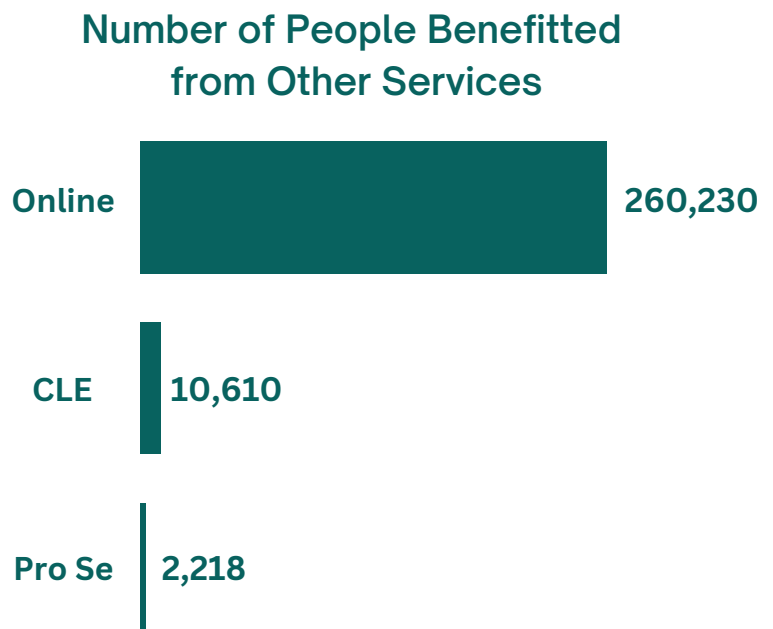


Cases by Legal Problem Area

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

Community Education: We conducted virtual and in person community education workshops in partnership with health and human service organizations, offices of elected officials, government agencies, and schools, educating New Yorkers on their rights and the availability of free legal services. Our staff held 126 community trainings and clinics for 4,707 community members. **The Immigration Protection Unit** conducts many Know your Rights presentations to address questions and concerns. The Unit’s Office of New Americans Regional Counsel Project offers monthly presentations and has been focused mostly on orienting newly arrived migrants to the immigration process. The Unit’s Asian Immigrant Justice Project also conducts regular community presentations about immigrations options for victims of crimes, workplace discrimination, and hate crime violence. **EFLRP** hosted 30 webinars, including one attended by 823 community members and professionals on how to navigate NYS’s Medicaid home care assistance system. **EFLRP and the Public Benefits Unit** collaborated with the NYC Department for the Aging to present seven webinars for hundreds of consumers, and professionals to learn about public health insurance, long term care, Social Security Disability, and other topics. **Employment Law Project** continued to provide trainings on workers' rights, including trainings on pandemic-related unemployment insurance programs, COVID-related sick and family leave, and workers’ rights to accommodations including remote work. **The Public Benefits Unit’s Elder Law Practice** educated community members on Medicaid, Medicare, Planning for Long Term Care, Pooled Income Trusts, Advance Planning, and Guardianship Alternatives.

273,058
people
benefitted from
Services Other
Than Direct
Legal Services



Pro Se Assistance & Volunteer Resources: We offer pro se assistance and resources to individuals (2,218 this period). We formerly co-ran **Project FAIR** with Legal Aid Society, where we staffed a help desk with **Public Benefits Unit** staff and law students at the Economic Justice Clinic. After being shut down since the start of the pandemic, we are working with Columbia Law School’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, Legal Aid Society, and Empire Justice Center on a website that will serve as a virtual fair hearing legal help desk, called “Fair Hearing Help New York,” that will have materials for individuals dealing with benefits issues statewide. Slated to go live in April 2023, the website will help self-represented people participate in their fair hearings and exercise their due process rights more fully.

Our **Consumer Protection Unit’s** Volunteer Lawyer for The Day (VLFD) Project now allows incourt staff to enter data from client intakes and court appearances to our Legal Server database in real time, ensuring accurate and timely client and case data. On October 27, 2022, VLFD staff participated in a city-wide training for future pro bono assistance and participation in VLFD. We provided consumer law and VLFD trainings for Civil Court judges in the Bronx, Richmond, and New York counties in May 2022 to educate participants about consumer practice issues and increase access to justice initiatives.

OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

Given the rapid shift to remote work with the onset of the pandemic, all our Units and Projects have learned to rely on mobile technology to offer high quality virtual services to clients. Throughout the year, our staff have continued offering trainings and meeting with clients through videoconferencing platforms, using Microsoft Teams to facilitate internal communications, and relying on SharePoint to organize and share documents, while also moving to more in person formats. Online access to the Legal Server database facilitates effective offsite work, which has been invaluable for the agency’s community collaborations. PWe have also continued to utilize online intake, enabling clients and case workers to fill out basic contact, demographic, and legal information, which is automatically uploaded to our case management database before the client connects with a case handler. We have designed online intake forms for several practice areas to ensure the best information is captured for clients. We are finishing our rollout of laptops to all staff this fiscal year (as of last June, we rolled out laptops to 85% of our staff enabling them to access all NYLAG systems whether on or off-site).

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

NYLAG cultivates the professional development of all staff. The agency has mandatory implicit bias, sexual harassment, and a cyber security trainings. We ran a virtual Continuing Legal Education (CLE) program for interns and staff in the summer of 2022, hosting 94 CLE trainings. We implemented a new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training, which will strive to make our staff the best advocates for clients and communities by equipping them with tools to identify and dismantle systems of oppression. In the Summer of 2022, managers attended a series hosted by Just Roots on white supremacy, combatting racial capitalism in the legal profession, challenging white dominant culture in legal services, and interrupting and healing from implicit bias and internalized white supremacy. Our Director of Training designed and launched two new employee trainings, including a four part series training new staff on client communication, oral advocacy written advocacy, and negotiation, and continued our four part trauma-informed lawyering training. Our Training Director also created a legal interpretation training for staff. Several staff attended the National Consumer Law Center Annual Conference and presented at the Partnership Conference in Albany. Nearly 40 NYLAG staff attended the NYSBA's biennial Legal Assistance Partnership Conference, including the Director of our Pro Bono and Volunteer Unit.

Our Foreclosure Prevention Project's team attended the New York State Homeowner Protection Program conference. Our Domestic Violence Law Unit has structured monthly meetings, which include substantive learning or vicarious trauma/wellness to help our staff more holistically respond to client needs. Our Public Benefits Unit Elder Law Practice participates in regular trainings that focus on updates and changes to home care and Medicaid. Our Immigrant Protection Unit has weekly trainings on immigration law and presented at an annual Asylum Law Conference and national trainings on Post-Order Advocacy. EFLRP attorneys and volunteers attended the Annual Meeting of the NYSBA Elder Law and Special Needs Section in January 2023. Our Employment Law Project regularly attends virtual PLI trainings on all substantive areas of employment law, including discrimination, wage and hour, and sick and family leave. Five LegalHealth staff attended the NYSBA's Partnership Conference in October 2022, and provided a debrief to all other LegalHealth staff at a following staff meeting.

IMPACT CASES

NYCHA/Section 8:

In March 2022, we sent an urgent letter to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), stating that they were erroneously sending notices of terminations to Section 8 voucher holders due to failure to recertify, when in fact these tenants had submitted their recertification materials. We demanded that NYCHA immediately pause all Section 8 terminations for failure to recertify, conduct a comprehensive investigation of the cause of this problem, and process all recertification materials that NYCHA had received but not processed. Upon receipt of our demand letter, NYCHA agreed to pause all Section 8 terminations for the 32,000 tenants impacted by NYCHA's error, work with NYLAG to identify and resolve the source of the problem and process all outstanding recertification materials. NYCHA's pause in terminations will expire June 30, 2023—a 15 month pause.

Milestones: NYCHA acquiesced to NYLAG's demand that it pause terminations based on failure to recertify. We also continue to work with NYCHA to resolve this problem and to prevent it from happening again, and with NYCHA on communications to impacted Section 8 voucher holders.

Impact: 32,000 Section 8 voucher holders retained their vouchers and therefore remain in their homes.

Soto v. Houslanger

Class Action filed in November 2019 against the law firm Houslanger & Associates and two of its attorneys, alleging that they unlawfully garnished wages or restrained bank accounts without possessing or reviewing necessary documents against consumers in NYC Civil Court.

Milestones: On October 12, 2022, the Court granted final approval to a class-wide Settlement. The Defendants agreed to stop collecting on judgments against Class Members and certain NYC Civil Court judgments, pay \$155,000, and change certain practices prior to executing judgments against consumers.

Impact: The settlement provided relief to 3,196 consumers who had a judgment entered against them in NYC Civil Court. The case also required Defendants to

15,819,023
beneficiaries
were
affected by
17
Impact Cases

change business practices before they execute judgments in New York City Civil Court. Monetary awards were also distributed to Class Members.

Forest v. City of New York

Class action filed in January 2023 against the City of New York, New York City Department of Social Services (DSS), and the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) for failing to process Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and cash assistance benefits applications and recertifications and maintain functional application and recertification systems, preventing more than 28,000 New Yorkers from receiving crucial benefits.

Milestones: In January 2023, NYLAG and its co-counsel filed a motion for class certification and preliminary injunction, which are pending while we negotiate preliminary relief with the defendants.

Impact: We seek to force the City of New York, DSS, and HRA to comply with their legal obligations to maintain functional SNAP and cash assistance application and recertification processes and to quickly process these applications and recertifications. DSS and HRA have received waivers from state and federal governments to allow additional time to process applications and recertifications, ensuring that class members will not lose benefits while the city works to reduce its backlog. DSS and HRA have obtained exceptions from citywide staffing reductions, and permission to increase salaries for HRA workers who assess clients' eligibility for benefits, which should improve their ability to fill vacant positions. HRA is implementing on-demand interviews for recipients of Cash Assistance.

All Impact Cases

*Burks v. Gotham
Process; Campos et al. v. Kijakazi*

Cassidy v. Zucker (previously Guadagna)

Forest v. New York

Jaquez v. Daniel Tietz et al.

*Josefina S. et. al. v. The City of New
York*

*J.S.M. v. New York City Department of
Education*

*NYLAG v. United States Department of
Homeland Security*

*NYLAG v. United States Department of
Education*

Pino-Porras v. Attorney General

*New York City Housing Authority Section 8
Wrongful Terminations*

Chapple v. Comerica Bank et al.

Colaj v. Roberts, et al.

Ershteyn v. Berryhill

NYLAG v. EOIR

*Soto v. Houslanger & Associates, et
al.*

Shakhnes v. Proud

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Our Immigrant Protection Unit continued partnering with law firms for our Afghan Humanitarian Parole Program and our Ukrainian Immigrant Assistance Program. For the latter, we have filed more than 20 Temporary Protected Status cases. During the reporting timeframe, 1,489 pro bono attorneys volunteered 31,536 hours.

Our Veterans Practice launched the Columbia Law Veterans Rights Externship in Spring of 2023, based on the former project with Columbia Law. The Project allows seven law students to learn about the legal issues impacting military veterans while simultaneously developing valuable lawyering skills through direct assistance to our Veteran clients navigating eligibility and access to federal benefits. In the past year alone, Columbia law students have contributed over 1,200 hours. The Practice also trained pro bono attorneys with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, Paul Weiss, and Kirkland Ellis to assist in an expanded Veterans Document Review Project, addressing the disparity and eligibility issues veterans face, related to their benefits claims process.


The Mediation Project continues to deliver high quality services by relying heavily on pro bono volunteers who serve as co-mediators and consulting pro bono attorneys and law school students who assist with drafting summaries of mediation sessions, separation agreements, and uncontested divorces. Six pro bono attorneys assisted the Project this year.



1,489 Attorneys volunteered 31,537 hours

147 Law Students volunteered 44,033 hours

50 Other Volunteers volunteered 8,277 hours

Each  icon is equal to 168.6 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.

The Elder Law Practice has been working on setting up regular Advance Planning Legal clinics in partnership with pro bono law firms and had three such clinics with Kramer Levin, Morgan Lewis, and Wilmer Hale in the past year.

The Public Housing Justice Project, a team within the Tenants' Rights Unit that provides holistic representation to NYC public housing tenants, trained pro bono attorneys on how to assist with pursuing Remaining Family member grievances (succession rights for public housing apartments) and repairs.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Collaboration with other legal services organizations, community groups, and social service providers is central to our service-delivery model. We maintain mutual referral relationships with many organizations and participate in community events, trainings, and workshops. We maintained many partnerships, which enabled the agency to carry out more programs that had a broader impact.

Tenants' Rights Unit, in partnership with the Red Hook Community Justice Center, has launched a regular HP Action Clinic to enable public housing tenants living in of the largest NYCHA developments to commence HP Actions against NYCHA to obtain repairs for serious habitability issues.

Our Immigrant Protection Unit has a number of collaborations for new and expanded projects, including: 1) UnLocal and Make the Road New York for the Rapid Response Collaborative; 2) Damiyan, Chinese American Planning Council, Minkwon and Red Canary Song for the Asian Immigrant Justice Project; 3) UnLocal, Catholic Migration Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Venezuela Immigrant Aid, MASA and African Communities Together for the Pro Se Plus Project and 4) the New York Immigration Coalition, Catholic Charities, Shorefront Y and Razom for the Ukrainian Legal Assistance Project.

Through its program for family caregivers, Project Assist, Legal Health started new partnerships with caregiver support facilities in NYC, including Heights and Hills, Sunnyside Community Services and JASA. Legal Health also has a new legal clinic in partnership with the Mount Sinai Dubin Breast Center at the Tisch Cancer Center to provide onsite free legal assistance to low-income patients and survivors and

telehealth to patients receiving treatment at other sites in the Mount Sinai Health System.

Our Consumer Protection Unit established a new collaboration with the Education Department Consumer Assistance Project (EDCAP) and all the network agencies involved in providing student loan services, including the City Bar Justice Center, Neighborhood Legal Services, United Way, Day Care Council of New York and Parachute.

Our Foreclosure Prevention Project joined a taskforce with other free legal services agencies representing homeowners at NYC Office of Trials and Hearings (OATH) Department of Buildings (DOB) hearings.

Our Domestic Violence Law Unit formalized a collaboration among Met Council, Jewish Board, Shalom Task Force, and Amudim to serve Orthodox Jewish survivors of domestic violence.

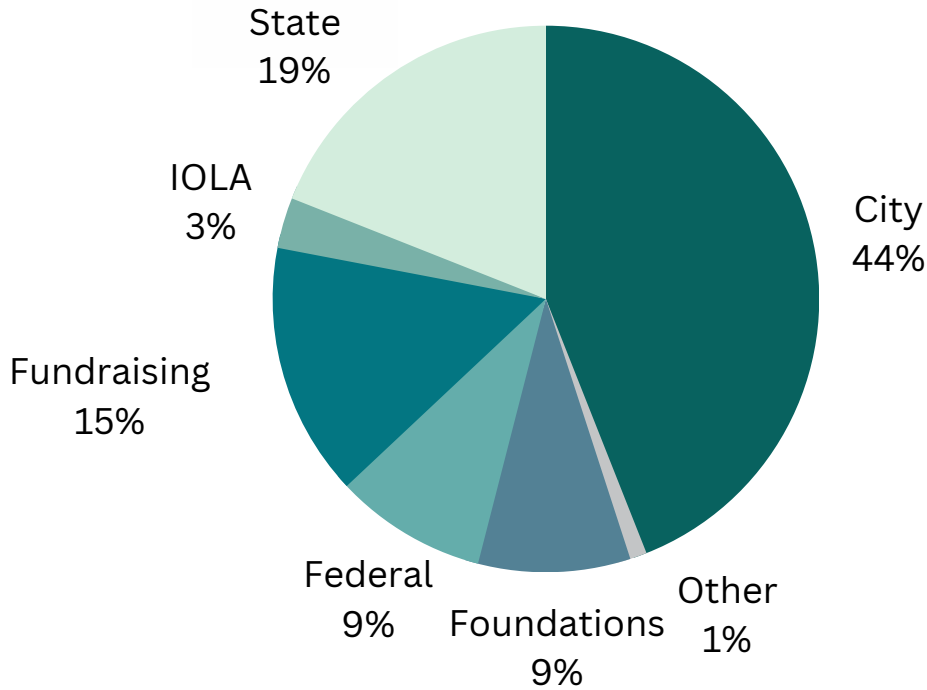
Our Mediation Project continues to be a part of the NYS Advisory Committee on ADR, which seeks to give recommendations to the Chief Judge of the Court of appeals on how to increase the use of ADR in the NYS court system.

Our Veterans' Practice commenced conducting onsite intakes at Borden Avenue Veterans Residence, a 243-bed short-term facility that provides housing, treatment, and employment services to homeless Veterans.

Our Public Benefits Unit and Evelyn Frank Legal Resources Program continue to participate in a Medicaid Advocacy Group with the Human Resources Administration, where staff meet to solve systemic problems, such as violations of the federal ban on discontinuing Medicaid during the pandemic and ensure consumer protections as this ban is lifted in 2023. EFLRP co-chairs the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability workgroup meeting and actively participates in regular meetings with the NYS Department of Health – one with the statewide Medicaid Matters NYC Coalition to voice problems with Medicaid home care services and another with legal providers to ensure the unwinding of special COVID protections will not disrupt access to health care in mid-2023. Both units are also part of the HIIICAP (Health Insurance Information, Counseling, and Assistance Program) Consortium, which provides expertise to county offices of the aging that counsel seniors on Medicare and Medicaid.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

New York Legal Assistance Group received
\$81,373,024
 in total funding this past year



Foundations	\$7,526,626
IOLA Grant	\$2,250,000
City and County Funding	\$35,741,510
Fundraising	\$12,287,026
State Funding	\$15,442,617
Federal Funding	\$7,126,419
Other	\$998,827
Total	\$81,373,024