

BRONX DEFENDERS

2022-2023

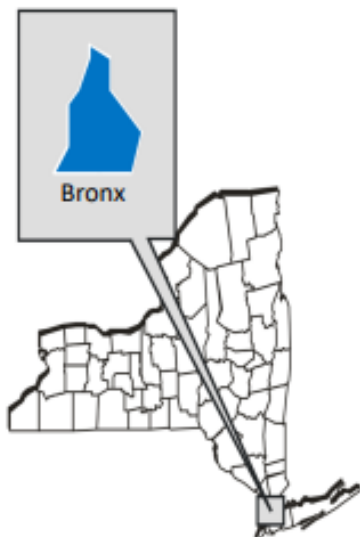


OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

During this reporting period, The Bronx Defenders' Civil Action Practice continued to provide comprehensive civil legal services and community education to marginalized, low-income individuals and families in Bronx County. This resulted in civil legal and other services benefiting at least 8008 people via 5055 closed cases.

Highlights of these cases include:

- **1147 families** encompassing more than **2822 family members** received services to access or keep emergency, ongoing or one-time public benefits, including **nutritional assistance, cash assistance, emergency rental assistance and supplement security income (SSI)** representing \$354,818 monthly ongoing benefits, \$4,257,816 in annualized ongoing benefits, and \$920,535 in retroactive benefits;
- **922 families**, encompassing **1969 family members**, remained in their homes, avoided eviction, or received services regarding their housing problems and representing a cost savings of at least \$77,800,000.00 to taxpayers for eviction prevention and diversion from the Shelter system (estimating \$36,000 in taxpayer costs per person).
- **724 non-citizen clients**, benefiting 845 family members received representation and services regarding their immigration needs.
- **320 clients** maintained their jobs and licenses or received advice or services regarding their employment matter;
- **1792 clients** received services for their consumer, seized property, reentry and other individual rights' needs.



Population Served:

General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$3,367,500

Total IOLA Grant: \$216,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- **Total Staff:** 44.5
- **Paralegals:** 11
- **Lawyers:** 28
- **Other:** 5.5

Hybrid approach to client services and continued investment in remote and technological access:

We continued to enhance the ability for our clients and community to access our virtual services, while expanding in person community and legal services. This includes expanding our benefits and community in person services as well as our access via hotlines to get advice, information and other services.

We continued to invest and improve our hybrid work community by investing in our Microsoft-based services, ability to communicate and crowdsource information and strategies via Microsoft teams and one note; expanding our in-office intranet to make access to client and organizational information and documents seamless, and by continuing to leverage ThoughtSpot, our data intelligence platform, for accessible data analysis to understand the breadth and depth of our work, ensure equitable workloads, create specialized dashboards to evaluate trends, patterns in practice and to ensure quality and timely case and client management. In addition to leveraging the above, we also trained our staff and made reports directly and transparently available to them.

Capacity Building to Deepen Impact of the Civil Action Practice (CAP):

We continued to create important roles and tools to enhance our capacity and services for clients and support for our staff in CAP.

This included the creation and hiring of:

- **Director of Right to Counsel Housing Team:** to lead our Right to Counsel work as well as to support community housing needs.
- **Civil Action Practice Administrator:** to provide administrative support to attorneys and advocates advocating cross-system.
- **Additional Benefits Advocates:** With additional funds from the City, yet to be contractually dispersed and received, we started to expand our Benefits team by hiring additional advocates to provide enhanced interdisciplinary benefits access to community, clients entrenched in criminal, family and immigration legal systems and to assist within the practice for more benefits and rental arrears support.

BxD Community Engagement:

BxD co-founded the Bronx Leadership & Organizing Center (BLOC) via the community organizing hub, a pioneering initiative to spur the development of new solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty, and to promote dynamic leaders who will aim to change the national conversation around social and economic mobility. Now in its third year, the HUB, facilitated by BxD and anchored by partner organizations East Side Settlement and New Settlement House, has recruited and trained its first class of

community organizers, who in turn will evaluate, deepen, adapt, and assist in delivering the curriculum to subsequent cohorts.

Bronx Cannabis Hub: In 2022, BxD launched the Bronx Cannabis Hub, an urgent project that ensures that New York’s new cannabis laws live up to the promise of social equity by providing information, opportunities, and support to the communities that were most harmed by cannabis prohibition. To support impacted individuals and low-income communities, the Hub serves as a clearinghouse for information about the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (“MRTA”) and provide resources and support to community members interested in becoming part of the new legal cannabis economy by providing public education and training, free legal assistance and other resources for people with justice system involvement interested in applying for social equity cannabis licenses, and spaces for community conversations and organizing around community investment opportunities. This type of intervention is crucial given the current state of affairs: across the country, less than 2% of all cannabis enterprises are black owned. The Hub also acts as a pro bono legal clinic focused on assisting social equity applicants to complete licensing applications so that they are positioned for success. Participants are pro bono attorneys from partnering firms who have experience in transactional law to complete licensing applications. Over 50 individuals attended our initial screening event, aimed at helping potential applicants to determine eligibility for the justice impacted initial licenses. Many of these individuals are now being connected with our pro bono partners, who will assist them in completing their license applications, and more individuals are reaching out to the Hub every day.

BxD’s continued investment systemic transformation, policy & thought Leadership: Deeply rooted in our direct representation work, our systemic change efforts bring an interdisciplinary lens to tackling the entrenched patterns and policies that harm our community. We partner with clients and community members who are closest to the problem, recognizing that they are experts on the issues that affect them. We have access to qualitative and quantitative data that helps us identify systemic abuse and injustice across individual cases, and we have the legal expertise to understand how to craft solutions for maximum impact. Drawing on these resources, we employ a multi-pronged approach to systems change including 1. Policy Change, 2. Community Organizing and, 3. Impact Litigation. Collaborating with the policy, community organizing and impact teams, CAP was able to advocate for systems change through important policy efforts, coalition building and community education in the areas of housing justice and reentry. We have also been working in coalition with NYC providers, as well as organizers, elected officials and other interested allies to fight against this tsunami of evictions.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

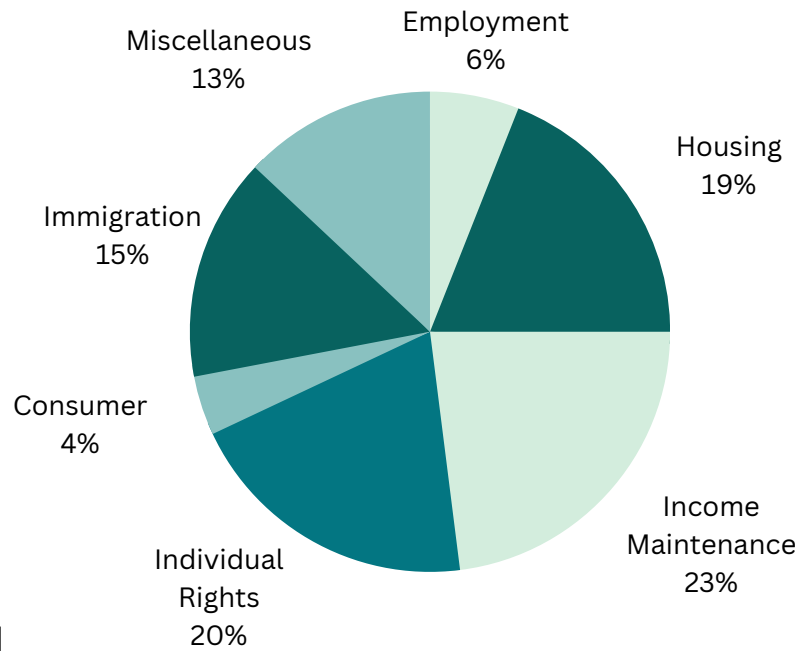
Case #1

Jackson lived with his maternal grandparents all his life as they were his primary caretakers; this was because his mother moved out of state to seek medical assistance for her excessive substance use. When both Jackson’s grandmother and grandfather passed away, Jackson faced eviction from the rent stabilized apartment he lived in most of his life; the landlord alleged that Jackson was a squatter in the apartment and had no legal rights to succession. As a disabled individual with learning and mental health impairments and concerns, Jackson received Supplemental Security Income (SSI). During this time, Jackson was targeted by his landlord and the police were called, leading to Jackson’s arrest and prosecution. At the same time, Jackson's landlord refused to work with him to grant him succession rights and also stopped complying Jackson’s right to repair and a habitable, safe apartment.

Jackson was referred to our civil team and accessed a civil attorney, a benefits advocate and social worker. They developed a cross role strategy in collaboration with the criminal defense team and advocated in front of different judges over the course of 4 years. Ultimately, the team was able to advocate for Jackson’s right to succession with a lease under his name, secure repairs through several HP actions against the landlord and secure additional financial (support for \$20,000 in rental arrears) and mental health resources (including Adult Protective Services support). Jackson continues to live in his apartment.

Case #2

Manuela was referred by our family defense practice after being denied access to a family shelter repeatedly and experiencing sad indifference displayed by an



Cases by Legal Problem Area

overburdened agency as well as bias, harassment and discriminatory treatment from a particularly egregious shelter worker. Our civil legal advocate, social work director and legal director worked together to advocate for Manuela and her baby, including representing her at two administrative proceedings to challenge the Shelter system's pretextual denials of access, strategizing an appeal and even escalating the matter to higher level DHS figures. Their joint and collaborative advocacy resulted in getting shelter access as well as reasonable accommodation for Manuela and her child.

8,008
people
benefitted from
4,939
legal cases
closed

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

As a result of the pandemic, we had to invest in a variety of educational services to help community members and clients understand what their rights are and what services are available to them in an empowering way. Our community education and outreach aim to help community members understand their rights, the available resources, and which types of problems might benefit from legal services as well as to identify additional resources that are available. Through active outreach and education, we equip community members with knowledge that can help them avoid legal issues altogether and assist them in understanding what type of help to seek when legal issues arise.

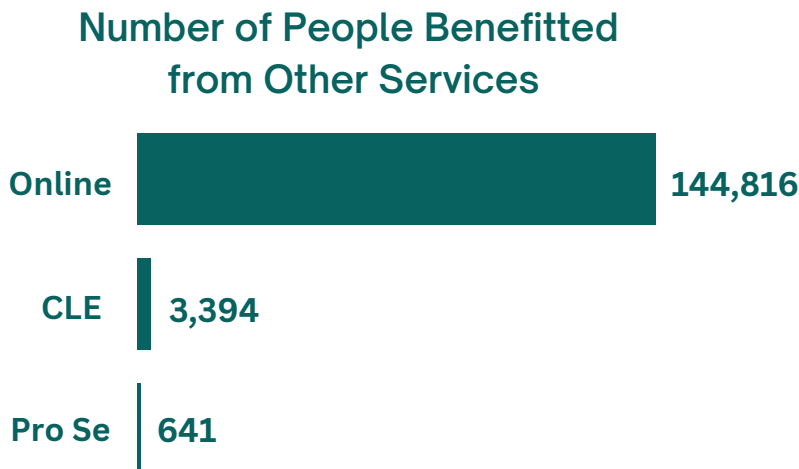
This has been especially true even as we navigate pandemic recovery. We provide community legal education through direct in person and virtual workshops, outreach at our community events, and printed or online materials and email newsletters that help people navigate the legal system more effectively. This education and outreach draws upon what we learn from clients, highlighting areas where we see common civil legal needs, such as access to emergency benefits, employment and housing issues. At its most effective, equipped with this information, community members can often avoid legal issues altogether. When a legal issue does arise, they are better equipped to navigate it and to seek out advocacy where needed.

Our services include support for pro se representation where we are unable to take on a client’s case. In particular, we provide resources for pro se representation to “walk-in” clients via our community intake team and hotline and disseminate pro se information and materials through outreach and clinics. While working remotely, we are providing these materials online. We have developed a robust internal resource bank for sharing information, helping all advocates connect quickly with the answers and documents they need to support their clients.

Beyond providing community members with legal information, we engage them in community organizing and provide the tools and resources they need to build collective power for change. Over the past few years, we’ve built upon our existing connections with the Bronx community and our longstanding commitment to learn from our clients to build a new approach to community organizing and development of our community engagement. Recognizing that those closest to legal systems are best positioned both to identify problems and to spearhead solutions, we have begun to organize former clients, their families and community members to mobilize for change. Our Director of Community Organizing and Director of Community Engagement are experienced organizers from the Bronx who have experienced legal systems firsthand, and they use their perspectives and expertise to build community power among Bronx residents.

By embedding community organizing and engagement within our office, we combine the power of grassroots organizing with the expertise of our advocates and a range of strategies for change. As community members identify problems and potential solutions, our team is ready to implement those solutions through strategic communications, impact litigation, and legislative advocacy. We reach hundreds of community members each year through advocacy, clinics, and legal education events.

148,851
people benefitted
from Services
Other Than Direct
Legal Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

During this reporting period, our continuing improvement to technology has allowed our staff to expand their remote workforce capabilities. This technology includes providing more staff access to organizational laptops, transition to and access to Microsoft 365, access to the Cortel 3CX Phone system, use of Adobe Acrobat, use of communication services and forms for anonymous feedback, improving access to SharePoint resources, and transition of our housing hotline to zoom from google voice. Additionally, the expansion of our internal practice intranet has dramatically improved our ability to share resources and provide training to staff members while working remotely.

CAP has collaborated with our Data team to make marked improvements to our services. At the outset, we are committed to thinking holistically and strategically about how we use data. Decisions about our growth and staffing are deeply informed by data, from administrative data on the number of filings in court to our own analysis of staff caseload based on intake schedules. Additionally, as we have expanded our work, we have been thoughtful about where to allocate resources and what additional advocacy we should be providing to those in need. For example, our initial pilot work representing parents led to our office being the first institutional provider of parental defense in Family Court. The same is true in our expansion into immigration and housing work where we have been part of collaborative and city-wide initiatives that now provide deportation defense to nearly all New Yorkers as well as a right to a civil attorney to advocate for tenants facing eviction. In our strategic process of deciding to enter each of these new spaces, we have looked to data to help us understand where clients need us most.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

The Bronx Defenders provides substantive ongoing training to all staff. In CAP, we focused on improving and enhancing our current onboarding & training curriculum, creating This year, under the leadership of our CAP Training Director, we created a robust civil onboarding & training curriculum for our new staff, that built upon the curriculum we created last year focusing on the core substantive areas and skills, especially given our virtual services.

All new attorneys and advocates receive extensive training as part of our “training team” model. This begins with an intensive multi-week orientation and training

program which includes both classroom and virtual lectures focused on substantive knowledge and skills development. Whether new to the practice or beginning with years of experience, one on one training is customized to the staff member's experience level. In addition to these trainings, new staff are paired with current staff and mentors to shadow cases and other client work. Staff then begin to work on cases under the careful supervision of their supervisors. All supervisors are required to attend trainings provided by the Management Center, focused on effective supervision as well as in house trainings on race, equity, and inclusion as facilitated and created by our department of People, Equity and Institutional Transformation (PEIT).

In addition to training for our new staff, our Training Director expanded our CAP Training Lab to support our staff's ongoing learning and training and to create support for professional development. We also avail ourselves of external trainings through Leap, the City Bar, PLI, and other resources: every week CAP staff receive a "CAP Classroom" email listing relevant external and internal trainings. Our professional development fund covers costs for external trainings and City Bar memberships.

Beyond these practice-specific trainings, staff often attend voluntary trainings offered by colleagues in other practice areas in order to further develop their interdisciplinary skills. Internal trainings include anti-oppression trainings led or coordinated by our PEIT team and trainings led by Dr. Maya Prabhu on mental health issues. Staff frequently attend trainings outside of BxD, supported by \$1500 of annual professional development funds offered to each staff member.

When New York went on pause and we transitioned into remote working, we created a CAP virtual training and learning lab, where the practice held weekly trainings and roundtables on the most pressing issues of practice including litigating illegal lockout actions, understanding pandemic and other income benefits, understanding the NYS Budget and opportunities to advocate for policy reform, integrating social work into civil practice and how to work remotely and provide client-centered services, among other topics. Our virtual training lab continues to operate even though we have resumed in-person work. Additionally, we increased our investment in technological access to tools and information by developing an internal practice specific intranet with the latest online trainings, collaborative documents that track law changes and updates.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Leveraging our partnerships with law firms on innovative and high-impact cases, our full-time Director of Pro Bono, a former CAP attorney, continues to help firms develop their in-house expertise in various aspects of social justice-related legal work (such as housing, immigration, benefits, and civil forfeiture) by providing similar sets of cases to each firm. With a reputation for matching high-quality attorneys with cases in which they can make a real difference for the clients and community we serve; we have partnered with 147 pro bono attorneys on over 88 civil case matters in the reporting period dedicating over 655 pro bono hours. To build on this success, we have created pro bono projects that offer our partners an opportunity to focus on specific types of cases, such as police misconduct or removal defense. The process of placing cases and planning these projects helps us turn our partners' existing skills and interests into meaningful outcomes for our clients.

We continued our partnership with Attorneys from Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP and Affiliates (Skadden) work alongside advocates from The Bronx Defenders to conduct intakes of clients who have been mistreated by the police. Prior to the onset of Covid, Skadden lawyers perform these intakes at Bronx Defenders' monthly clinics and meet with clients outside of those clinics as the need arises. We worked with attorneys, paralegals and other staff from Skadden through this



147 Attorneys volunteered 655 hours

13 Law Students volunteered 450 hours

20 Other Volunteers volunteered 300 hours

Each  icon is equal to 18 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

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

partnership during this reporting period, with many attending multiple clinics and deepening their expertise in the Notice of Claim process. This year, we continued our virtual partnership. As police violence continues in the Bronx and other communities in the city and throughout the country, we engaged in additional outreach to connect community members with this virtual clinical partnership, including sharing information about the Notice of Claim process on social media. This partnership expanded to include a corporate partner assisting with Notices of Claim. It will continue to expand this summer, as we will be surveying individuals affected by police violence.

In addition to pro bono volunteers from law firms, we host interns throughout the year: we have a robust summer intern program and also work with interns during the year. In addition, we work with volunteers through our Holistic Defense Externship, a year-long seminar and externship for Columbia Law students who learn about our approach and work with staff attorneys to represent and support clients through our holistic model. This includes significant engagement with civil legal services and an in-depth exploration of how civil legal needs relate to the criminal, family and immigration legal systems.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

To support clients in navigating the complex challenges they face, we collaborate with a wide range of partner organizations. We refer clients to community-based organizations that can provide services beyond what we offer, from food pantries to inpatient substance abuse treatment centers. As subject matter experts in a range of complex and intersecting issues, we provide crucial information to fellow advocates and directly to the community - as when we partner with tenant groups, schools, and faith communities to provide trainings on navigating police interactions or understanding immigration law. Our partners also frequently refer clients to us, deepening the connections we have with other community-based organizations. And we collaborate with these partners to look beyond individual clients and pursue larger systemic change on issues such as bail reform and equity in the child welfare system.

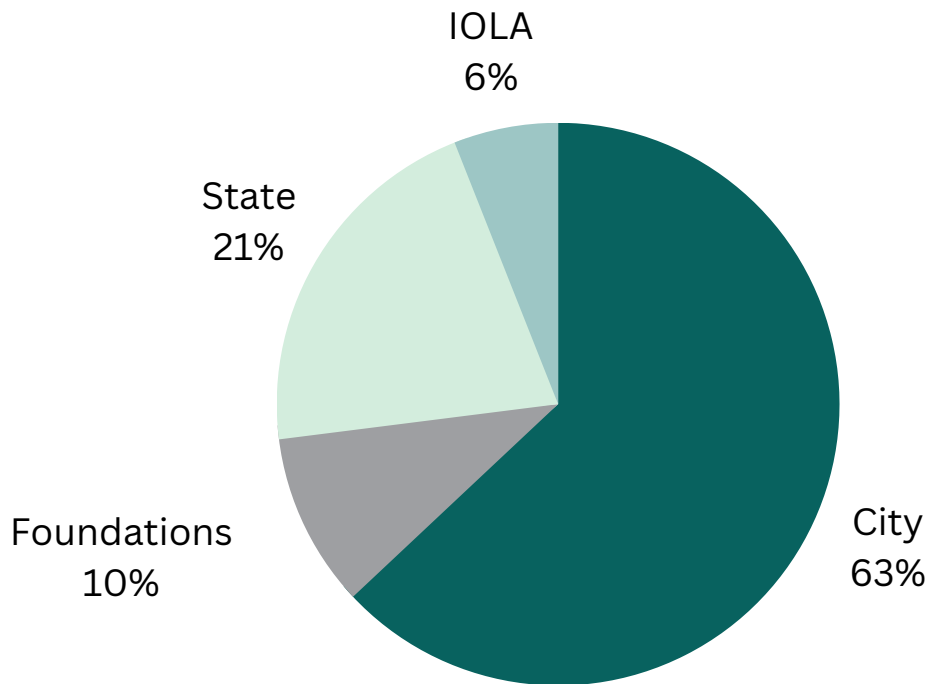
Over the past year, we have continued to strengthen existing partnerships and develop new ones. As a member of Leap, we are committed to collaborative work and diversity as well as innovation in organizational models, delivery systems, and methodology, and we recognize the need to maintain community-based service delivery. With Leap, we work closely with the Legal Aid Society, LSNYC, NYLAG to

share information and collaborate regarding City and Statewide advocacy. We are members of the New York State Legal Services Coalition and work with other organizations on statewide advocacy. We continued to work closely with the Coalition of Reentry Advocates (CORA) to participate in statewide policy advocacy efforts around reentry and a co-chairs of the coalition. We co-founded Bronx Solidarity! a coalition of over 12 tenant legal services organizations in the Bronx and tackled racism and incivility head on in Bronx Housing Court and also participate in the NYC All County tenant coalition as well as meet regularly with Bronx tenant providers. We also co-organized a city-wide coalition of advocates who practice at the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings (OATH) and host the listserv for advocates, mostly focused on strategies around defending TLC Licensed Drivers, co-organized a coalition of city-wide advocates related to supportive housing and strategies to support tenants who have mental health impairments living in supportive housing settings (“SHOUT”) and have organized city-wide advocates who do civil forfeiture work. We are members of the Right to Counsel Coalition, supporters of Housing Justice for all and members of the Fair Chance for Housing coalition to both share strategies, share resources and to fight for broader policy and other change on behalf of our clients.

We create, organize and participate in these partnerships and coalitions to learn from our peers, to cross refer issues, to build opportunities for collective advocacy and to avoid duplication of efforts.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Bronx Defenders received
\$3,367,500
 in total funding this past year



IOLA Grant	\$216,000
City and County Funding	\$2,107,000
Foundations	\$352,500
State Funding	\$692,000
Total	\$3,367,500