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IOLA FUND

of the State of New York



Message from the Executive Director

Dear Grantees, Banking Partners, Stakeholders, and Friends of the IOLA Fund,

As we move through the fall season, I am reminded of the extraordinary work being done every day by civil legal services providers across New York. Whether helping a family remain safely housed, assisting a worker facing wage theft, securing critical public benefits, or supporting survivors of domestic violence, your work makes a meaningful difference in the lives of New Yorkers and strengthens communities throughout our state. Access to justice is more than a principle. It is a lifeline for people facing some of the most difficult moments in their lives.

This fall has provided several opportunities to engage with partners and advocate for the resources needed to sustain that work. In September, I had the privilege of testifying at the **Chief Judge's Hearing on Civil Legal Services** in Albany, organized by the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. IOLA's message was straightforward: civil legal services providers need reliable, flexible funding to meet growing demand, retain experienced staff, and continue delivering high-quality legal assistance to the communities they serve. Continued public investment remains essential to ensuring that legal help is available when New Yorkers need it most.

Our team also had the opportunity to connect with New York colleagues at the **NYSBA Partnership Conference** and partners across the nation at the **ABA and NAIP Forum on Building Access to Justice for All**. These conversations reaffirmed the strength of our community and the importance of learning from one another. Across the country and here in New York, organizations are facing many of the same challenges. Sharing ideas, strategies, and experiences helps all of us better serve our clients and strengthen the delivery of civil legal services.

In this issue, you'll find updates on the **Justice Infrastructure Project** and other initiatives designed to strengthen the capacity of legal services providers throughout New York State. These investments are about more than technology and systems. They are about helping organizations operate more effectively, supporting the people who do this work every day, and ensuring that communities can continue to access high-quality legal assistance for years to come.

We also recognize the invaluable contribution of our banking partners - 60 of whom recently received our annual **Community Reinvestment Act** credit letter, highlighting their tremendous contributions. We invite you to explore our FY2026 Annual Report to learn more about the impact we are making together.

As the year comes to a close, I want to thank each of you for your partnership, dedication, and commitment to advancing justice. The progress we make is only possible because of the collaboration among grantees, banking partners, bar associations, advocates, and supporters across New York State. I am grateful for all that you do and proud of what we continue to accomplish together.

On behalf of the entire IOLA team, I wish you and your families a peaceful holiday season and a healthy, happy New Year. We look forward to continuing this important work together in 2027.

Warm regards,

Christine M. Fecko, Esq.

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NEW YORK STATE BAR ASSOCIATION PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF IOLTA PROGRAMS (NAIP) CONFERENCE

WORKPLACE INNOVATION NOW (WIN) SUMMIT

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2026 FUNDING AWARDEES

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT ACT (CRA)

SAVE THE DATE: JANUARY 20, 2027 JIP CONVENING

Timely and Flexible Funding: IOLA's Testimony on Access to Justice

The Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals and the State of New York, Hon. Rowan D. Wilson, conducted a statewide public hearing on Thursday, September 24, 2026 to evaluate the continuing unmet civil legal services needs in New York and to assess the level of resources necessary to meet those needs. The Chief Judge will report to the Legislature, as requested in the Commission's June 2010 Joint Resolution, on the information obtained at the hearing and on the ongoing work of the New York State Permanent Commission on Access to Justice.

Christine M. Fecko, Esq., Executive Director of the IOLA Fund, testified at the Chief Judge's Hearing on Civil Legal Services in Albany. Her testimony highlighted IOLA's role in strengthening civil legal services so that low-income New Yorkers can obtain help with legal problems affecting housing, income, safety, healthcare, and family stability.

In FY26, IOLA provided $77.5 million to 87 nonprofit legal services providers. IOLA-funded programs served more than 645,000 New Yorkers and closed over 315,000 cases.

Fecko's remarks focused on two essential elements: the timeliness and flexibility of funding. Drawing on regional conversations with providers and grantees' annual reports, she described how delayed City and State contracts and reimbursements create cash-flow crises, sometimes forcing organizations to borrow money or draw down reserves to meet payroll. Providers also identified increased funding with cost-of-living adjustments as a pressing need, while twenty-one grantees reported negative impacts from federal grant instability and losses. Fecko emphasized that timely payments allow providers to devote scarce resources to client services rather than costly borrowing.

Her testimony also underscored the value of IOLA's general operating grants, which allow providers to respond to changing community needs while supporting essential expenses such as staffing, technology, training, and translation services. This flexibility helps organizations adapt their work to conditions on the ground rather than remain bound by outdated targets. Recognizing that IOLA's interest-generated revenue is inherently volatile, Fecko affirmed the importance of sustained investment through Judiciary Civil Legal Services (JCLS) funding as a reliable foundation for the sector. She called for timely funding, flexible support, and dependable public investment to ensure that New Yorkers can consistently access the legal help they need.

To access the full testimony of the Permanent Commission Public Hearing, visit: https://www.nycourts.gov/ctapps/civil.html

IOLA Attends the New York State Bar Association Partnership Conference



Pictured above: NYSBA President Taa Grays

The New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) hosted the 2026 Legal Assistance Partnership Conference, co-sponsored by its Committee on Legal Aid and Department of Public Interest. This year's theme, "Strength and Resilience: Advancing Justice in Challenging Times," offered 25 MCLE-accredited programs addressing critical areas of law affecting low-income and vulnerable populations. IOLA's General Counsel, Licha M. Nyiendo, Esq., was on the Conference's Planning Committee and served as a panelist at the pre-conference Continuing Legal Education program on Housing Evidence.

In addition to Nyiendo, the IOLA team that attended this year's conference included Executive Director Christine M. Fecko, Esq.; Deputy Director of Programs Danny Fisher; and Government Affairs Coordinator Maylene Thurton. The team connected with many IOLA grantees, exchanged perspectives, and strengthened relationships across New York's civil legal services community. The conference provided opportunities for education, collaboration, and networking among legal practitioners, public interest lawyers, and pro bono providers.

NYSBA President Taa Grays Addresses Access to Justice and IOLA Funding

NYSBA President Taa Grays is the tenth woman and the first Black woman to hold the office in the association's 150-year history. Her priorities include implementing the association's strategic plan and addressing legal deserts across New York through the Rural Ready initiative.

Drawing on the words of poet Maya Angelou, Grays encouraged attendees to practice strength lined with tenderness.

"It takes strength to stand up for your client who was detained by ICE inside the courthouse when you arrived for a scheduled hearing. And tenderness to console a child or spouse separated from their loved one," she said. "You will face adversity but don't allow it to harden you."

Grays recognized public interest lawyers as warriors protecting and supporting the rule of law, a central element of NYSBA's mission. "The rule of law itself has become a debatable point, and you are on the front lines of this challenging time," she said.

She also reaffirmed NYSBA's commitment to protecting IOLA funding for civil legal services. Funded by interest earned on lawyers' trust and escrow accounts—not taxpayer dollars—IOLA supports organizations providing civil legal representation to low-income New Yorkers. Grays reinforced the importance of protecting dedicated civil legal services funding and supporting the advocates who help New Yorkers navigate some of life's most difficult challenges.

IOLA Attends the New York State Bar Association Partnership Conference cont'd

"IOLA is sacred, and we will keep it out of the budget. Lawyers made the decision to take money from our accounts for this purpose. This is how the law was written – read the law!" Grays declared, drawing loud applause.

To read the full NYSBA article by Jennifer Andrus, visit Redefining Success in a Challenging Legal Environment.

Judge Richardson Highlights the Power of Partnership in Advancing Justice

At the Denison Ray Civil Awards and Phil Dailey Award Dinner, Honorable Edwina G. Richardson, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the Office for Justice Initiatives, highlighted the essential role of civil legal services in expanding access to justice across New York. She emphasized the importance of partnership among the courts, legal services providers, bar associations, and community organizations in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, and recognized the dedication of advocates whose work helps individuals and families achieve stability, security, and opportunity.

Recognizing Excellence in Civil Legal Services

The Denison Ray Civil Awards and Phil Dailey Award are presented biannually by the New York State Bar Association (NYSBA) Committee on Legal Aid during the NYSBA Partnership Conference to honor contributions to civil legal services for low-income clients.

The conference featured the Denison Ray Civil Awards and Phil Dailey Award Ceremony, recognizing individuals and organizations for their contributions to civil legal services and access to justice throughout New York State.

The IOLA Fund congratulates the 2026 award recipients:

Denison Ray Civil Awards
Crystal A. Giron, Esq.
Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS), Civil Legal Services Staff Attorney Award
Sara McDowell, Esq.
Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York, Civil Legal Services Staff Attorney Award
Ndukwe Agwu, Esq.
Build Up Justice NYC, Pro Bono Program Director Award
Karin Anderson Ponzer, Esq., Ph.D.
Neighbors Link Community Law Practice, Legal Services Director Award
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI)
Nonprofit Organization Award

Phil Dailey Award
Darlene M. Westphal
Neighborhood Legal Services

The awards recognize the dedication of attorneys, nonprofit organizations, and legal services professionals whose work supports low-income and underserved communities.

National Association of IOLTA Programs (NAIP) Conference



IOLA's General Counsel Participates in the 2026 Joint IOLTA/ABA Conference

Licha Nyiendo, Esq., IOLA Fund General Counsel, participated in two panel discussions at the 2026 Joint IOLTA/ABA Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. On October 7, she joined the plenary panel, "The Data Gap Problem," followed by "Latest Developments in CRA: State-Level Laws and Current Federal Enforcement" on October 8.

Attendees at the conference consisted of IOLA programs across the United States. In the first session, Nyiendo spoke to the conference attendees about the IOLA Fund's compliance audit of participating banks, which has led to an increase of revenue remittances from our banking partners. In the second session, Nyiendo provided an overview of state-specific Community Reinvestment Act statutes, including that of New York, and advised of the IOLA Fund's new CRA credit-letter opportunity available to our participating banks who have committed to paying a rate in the highest tier and waiving all maintenance fees.

Nyiendo's participation reflects IOLA's continued engagement in national conversations on access to justice, data challenges, and the Community Reinvestment Act, as well as IOLA's commitment to strengthening the civil legal services community.

Workplace Innovation Now (WIN) Summit

Scale Justice Receives $5 Million WIN Challenge Award

The IOLA Fund congratulates Scale Justice (formerly Pro Bono Net) on receiving a $5 million Workplace Innovation Now (WIN) Challenge Award.

Scale Justice was among 18 organizations recognized at the inaugural WIN Summit, held on October 22, 2026, in New York City.

The Summit, which was attended by Deputy Director of Programs Danny Fisher, brought together more than 300 leaders from business, academia, philanthropy, and the social sector to explore how women can succeed in a workplace increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence (AI).



photo (L to R): Jill Maxwell, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), Liz Keith, Scale Justice, Rodrigo Camarena, Scale Justice, Zach Zarnow, Scale Justice, Danny Fisher, IOLA

Scale Justice received the award for its Reclamo AI initiative, a multilingual tool designed to help women and low-wage workers in New York State understand their workplace rights, document labor violations, and recover unpaid wages.

Congratulations to the Strengthening the NYS Legal Ecosystem Grant Recipients!

The IOLA Fund congratulates the grantees awarded funding through its Strengthening the NYS Legal Ecosystem initiative. The IOLA Fund awarded a total of $2.5 million to support collaboration, innovation, and capacity-building among civil legal services organizations throughout NYS. The grant period runs from November 1, 2026, to March 31, 2028.

Organization	Amount
Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York	$125,000
Center for Community Alternatives Inc.	$125,000
Chinese-American Planning Council Inc.	$150,000
Co-Counsel NYC Inc.	$100,000
Enlace Services Inc.	$95,000
Family Justice Law Center	$95,000
Fund for the City of New York, sponsoring ICARE	$95,000
Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale	$100,000
Human Rights First	$125,000
International Institute of Buffalo Inc.	$175,000
International Rescue Committee Inc.	$100,000
Jericho Road Ministries Inc.	$125,000
Justice Innovation Inc., operating Legal Hand-NYC	$100,000
New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti Violence Project	$95,000
OLA of Eastern Long Island Inc.	$200,000
Prisoners' Legal Services of New York	$100,000
Retreat Inc.	$175,000
SEPA Mujer Inc.	$95,000
Shalom Task Force	$200,000
Sisters of St. Joseph Brentwood NY	$125,000

IOLA Thanks Its 2026 CRA Bank Partners

In October, the IOLA Fund sent out its annual Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) credit letter to 60 qualifying banking partners. Our CRA credit letter highlighted each bank's monetary contribution to the IOLA program, and provided data regarding the strong impact they each have in supporting free civil legal services that change lives among New Yorkers. The IOLA Fund would like to thank the following banks for their contribution to the IOLA program and encourage other banks to reach out to us to learn how they might qualify going forward.

42 North Private Bank
Alpine Capital Bank
Amalgamated Bank
American Community Bank
AmeriCU Credit Union
AXOS Bank
Bank Hapoalim B.M.
Bank of America, N.A.
Bank of Hope
The Bank of Princeton
Bank United, N.A.
Beacon Bank & Trust
BMO Bank
Broadview Federal Credit Union
Canandaigua National Bank and Trust Company
Chemung Canal Trust Company
Citizens Bank, N.A.
City National Bank
Columbia Bank
Cross County Savings Bank
DR Bank
East West Bank
Empower Federal Credit Union
First Citizens Community Bank
First Horizon Bank
Genesee Co-op Federal Credit Union
Industrial Bank
Interaudi Bank
International Finance Bank
Kearny Bank
The Lyons National Bank
M&T Bank
Metro City Bank
Metropolitan Commercial Bank
MidFirst Bank
Modern Bank
National Cooperative Bank, N.A.
NBT Bank N.A.
New Millennium Bank
NewBank
NexTier Bank, N.A.
NorthEast Community Bank
Northwest Bank
The National Bank of Coxsackie
Pathfinder Bank
Pioneer Bank, N.A.
Popular Bank
Provident Bank
Rondout Savings Bank
Royal Business Bank
Safra National Bank of New York
Santander Bank, N.A.
Savannah Bank N.A.
Spring Bank
St. Lawrence Federal Credit Union
Ulster Savings Bank
Valley National Bank
Wallkill Valley Federal Savings & Loan
Wells Fargo Bank, N.A.
Woori America Bank

SAVE THE DATE



IOLA staff and grantees are gathering on January 20, 2027 for Justice Infrastructure Project updates, partner presentations, and collaborative discussion. Each grantee is guaranteed one participant.

Details coming soon.

Leadership & Staff

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