



IMPACT REPORT

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22

42 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036
www.citybarjusticecenter.org

OUR MISSION

The City Bar Justice Center furthers access to justice by addressing unmet civil legal needs of New Yorkers struggling with poverty and other systemic socioeconomic barriers.



***Built for justice.
Built for pro bono.***

The City Bar Justice Center – the largest division of the New York City Bar Association’s charitable affiliate, the City Bar Fund – furthers access to justice by addressing unmet civil legal needs of New Yorkers struggling with poverty and other systemic socioeconomic barriers. The Justice Center mobilizes law firms, corporate legal departments, and other legal institutions to provide pro bono legal services; educates the public on pertinent legal issues; fosters strategic community relationships; and impacts public policy. The Justice Center’s dozen civil justice projects, including the largest civil legal hotline in New York, are led by a staff of dedicated attorneys and support professionals who provide high-quality civil legal services through brief advice and information, referrals, and both limited scope and extended representation that benefit more than 23,000 New Yorkers each year.

2021-22 HIGHLIGHTS

In 2021-22, the City Bar Justice Center continued to respond to emerging legal needs of New Yorkers who cannot afford private counsel.

While much of our pro bono programming remains remote, several Justice Center projects have resumed hybrid and in-person services to accommodate clients' and our pro bono partners' varying needs.

The following impact report highlights work accomplished in the past year through the Justice Center's twelve civil justice projects and an enthusiastic cohort of advocates – pro bono supporters, community partners, volunteers, and donors. In 2021-22, the Justice Center provided ongoing pandemic recovery relief as New Yorkers navigated the long-term effects of COVID-19, including immigrants, veterans, families and individuals residing in homeless shelters, seniors, small business owners, and others struggling with poverty and related vulnerabilities. Our nimble team addresses evolving unmet legal needs of clients, launching programs such as the Hurricane Ida Recovery Initiative and a public

benefits Recoupment Project, and collaborating on advocacy efforts such as the #Wifi4Homeless movement to close the digital divide for families residing in homeless shelters.

Earlier this year, the Justice Center implemented a significant reorganization to provide fresh, collaborative energy to core service delivery and operations functions with the promotion of seven colleagues: Akira Arroyo as Advisor for Strategic Initiatives; Cheryl Lopez as Director of Operations; Chris Damiano as Supervising Attorney for our Legal Hotline; Kyla James as Operations and Program Associate; Libby Vazquez as Director of Legal Services; Nancy Larcher as Senior Project Coordinator; and Ramona Morel as Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives. These changes position us for success in enhancing our capacity to deliver quality programs and services, while advancing equity and inclusion.

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ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

150,400

people reached
through online
resources and
information

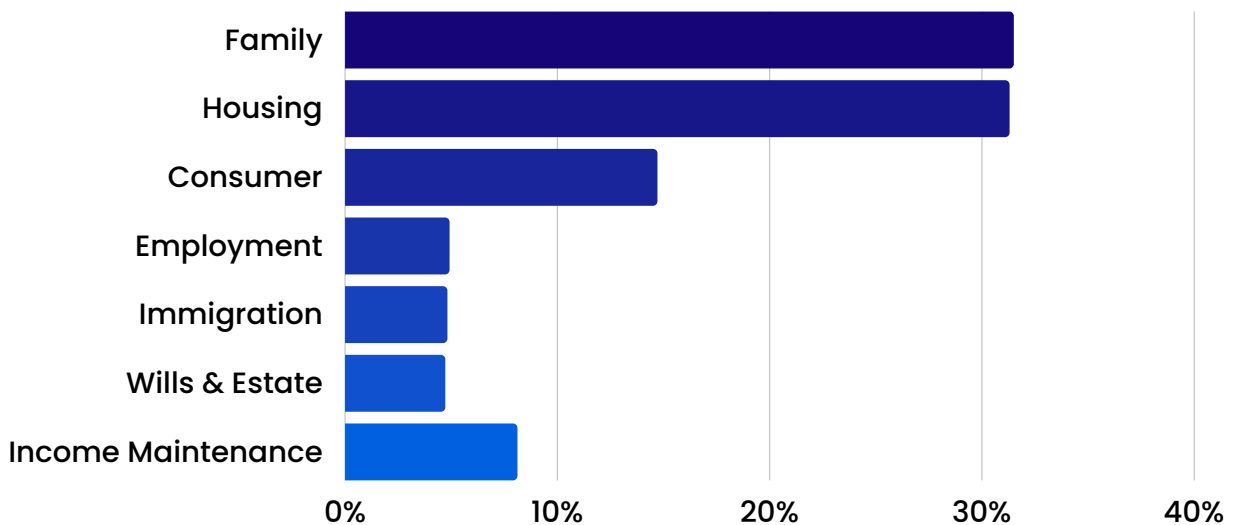
23,700

people benefited
from free legal
assistance

9,800

people assisted
through community
outreach

BREAKDOWN OF MOST FREQUENT LEGAL ISSUES ADDRESSED



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WHO WE SERVE

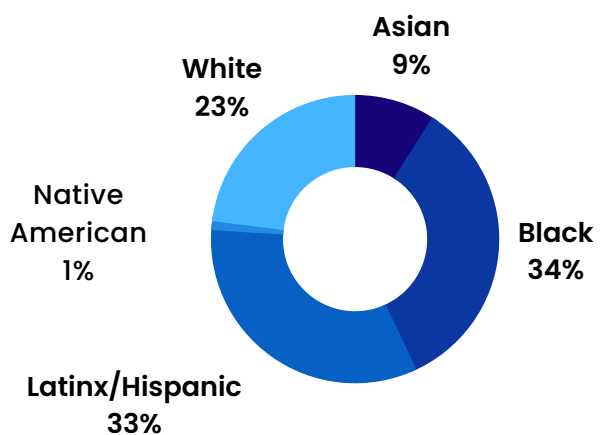
RESIDENCE

Justice Center clients who chose to self-report demographic information, identified their place of residence, race and sex/gender as the following:

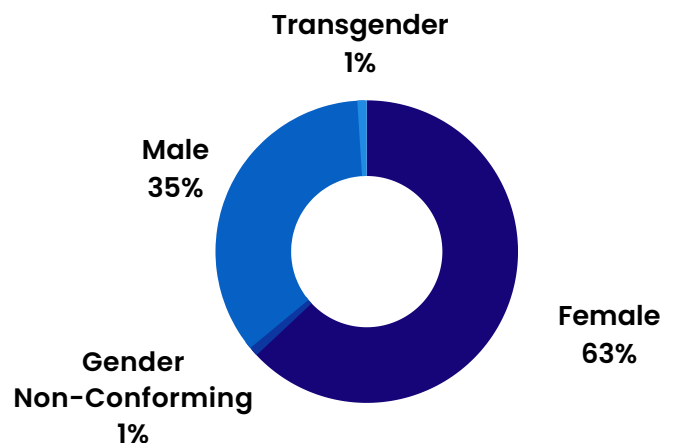
While 90% of Justice Center clients reside in the five boroughs, 10% of clients live outside of New York City.



RACE



GENDER/SEX



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FINANCIAL IMPACT

\$13 MILLION

Leveraged over \$13 million in pro bono legal services provided by partner law firms and corporate legal departments

\$6 MILLION

Helped clients obtain over \$6.1 million in benefits and monetary awards, including settlements

\$2 MILLION

Helped clients divest nearly \$2.1 million in debt through bankruptcy and foreclosure-prevention advocacy

\$80,000

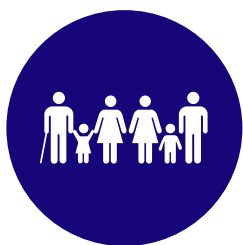
Preserved nearly \$80,000 in resources by avoiding recoupments, garnishments, and other levies, or securing filing fees for clients

PRO BONO INITIATIVES

The City Bar Justice Center mobilizes the legal profession to do pro bono work in response to New Yorkers' evolving unmet legal needs.



Our team permanently adopted a hybrid schedule last autumn, and our programming continues to similarly evolve, with most of our services and resources now available both remotely and in person. In the past year, the Justice Center likewise created new pro bono initiatives and tailored existing programming to ensure clients received essential support amid pandemic recovery. Following are a few highlights:



New Initiative Serving Families in Homeless Shelters

A cohort of pro bono attorneys from O'Melveny & Myers and TransUnion as well as Federal Reserve Bank of New York lawyers volunteering in their individual capacity collaborated with our Legal Clinic for the Homeless to support the launch of a pro bono "Recoupment Project" to represent families residing in and those that have exited (or moved out of or left) homeless shelters to contest public benefits recoupment actions. Most cases were settled prior to a hearing, and in successful cases, clients recovered significant sums they could use for food, clothing, school supplies and other life essentials, or had thousands of dollars in pending recoupment actions deleted.

PRO BONO INITIATIVES



Equity-Focused Pandemic Recovery

The pandemic touched us all but weighed most heavily on those already deeply burdened by socioeconomic vulnerability. Through the Justice Center's COVID Recovery and Equity Initiative, a campaign that was supported by 22 law firms and corporate partners, our team built out its capacity to address the leading edge of post-pandemic pro bono needs, principally consumer debt relief, housing stability, and small business recovery. Initial COVID recovery efforts included providing legal assistance to pandemic-disrupted small businesses and advising consumer debtors, renters, and low-income homeowners in crisis. These efforts continue, while being adapted to emerging pandemic recovery needs – including by developing new consumer bankruptcy and financial literacy resources for individuals seeking a post-pandemic fresh start. This newest Consumer Bankruptcy Project effort is being made possible in part thanks to memorial gifts honoring the late John J. Jerome, a long-serving partner and founder of the financial restructuring practice at Milbank, later senior counsel at Sullivan & Cromwell, and a true dean of the bankruptcy bar.



Natural Disaster Response

After Hurricane Ida hit the NYC area in September 2021, the Justice Center launched the Hurricane Ida Recovery Initiative and recruited pro bono partners to provide free legal help to New Yorkers affected by the storm. The Justice Center responded to calls and online inquiries regarding available aid, provided advice and referrals, hosted an online informational webinar, and developed topical resources addressing NY renters' frequently asked questions, how to navigate insurance and FEMA claims, and tips for replacing important documents after a natural disaster. The Justice Center also participated in a fifteen-organization coalition formed by the American Bar Association's Disaster Legal Services Program and Young Lawyers Division to address the fallout of the hurricane and connect Disaster Legal Services Hotline callers and online applicants to legal service providers.

FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



Overview

The City Bar Justice Center's programmatic efforts to further advance diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) stem from several years of progress, and we are proud of the fact that our clients, who are overwhelmingly persons of color, are served by a team – including among senior leadership – three-quarters or more of whom also are persons of color, or otherwise belong to historically under-represented communities. Following are some highlights of the Justice Center's DEI efforts:

DEI and Racial Justice Trainings for Pro Bono Partners

Since 2019, the Justice Center has offered a successful CLE training for our law firm and corporate legal department pro bono partners, "Diversity, Inclusion, and Elimination of Bias: Practice Pointers for Pro Bono Advocacy." A 2020 winner of an ACLEA international award in the area of diversity, the program is now complemented by a next-level CLE, "Racial Equity, Lawyer Wellness, and Pro Bono." Additionally, individual Justice Center projects increasingly include DEI and cultural sensitivity components in pro bono trainings to facilitate client-centered services delivery, meeting the highest of ethical standards and DEI best practices.

FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Internal Developments and New Advisor for DEI Initiatives

In March 2021, the Justice Center formed a standing committee to help implement DEI ideas and best practices organization-wide, including by expanding staff training on issues of racial bias and sensitivity with clients and among colleagues.

In February 2022, the Justice Center promoted Ramona Morel, Director of the Consumer Bankruptcy Project, to take on additional responsibilities as Advisor for DEI Initiatives to further promote and sustain organizational change. Outcomes of our internal DEI work include staff trainings and workshops on trauma-informed lawyering, ethical client storytelling, embracing accessible language, crisis de-escalation techniques, and working with individuals with invisible disabilities. Further, our staff meetings include a new DEI “Word of the Day” segment to explore the power and impact language has on our commitment to delivering client-centered legal services so that we and our pro bono partners remain increasingly mindful and respectful of the identities and lived experiences of the people we serve.

The Justice Center, with the support of our DEI Committee, Advisor for DEI Initiatives, and Director of Pro Bono Initiatives, will continue to advance efforts in conjunction with our pro bono partners that realize and promote justice and the well-being of people facing systemic legal and socioeconomic barriers.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Advocating for New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness

The City Bar Justice Center continues building on efforts first articulated in a May 2020 report by our Legal Clinic for the Homeless documenting the impact of New York City's stark digital divide on families in homeless shelters. The findings of the report, and the subsequent #Wifi4Homeless campaign led in collaboration with the New York City Bar Association, helped fuel a movement to ensure reliable internet access for shelter residents. In 2021, through community outreach and advocacy efforts, and a lawsuit led by the Legal Aid Society against the City on the issue, 244 City shelters housing school-aged children were equipped with Wi-Fi. This victory helped ensure that children experiencing homelessness would be able to participate in remote learning.

While efforts continue at the local level, the #Wifi4Homeless movement has intensified in the past year and captured the attention of key stakeholders advocating for statewide legislation. The City Bar continues expanding the tent of organizations involved in this effort and has urged the Governor and Legislators to address the issue at the state level. Significant steps to address the digital divide were taken in the 2022 New York State budget with the inclusion of the "Working to Implement Reliable and Equitable Deployment of Broadband Act (WIRED Broadband Act)" and funding for "ConnectALL" – policies and programs that would expand broadband access and affordability statewide.



COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Advocating for New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness

While the City Bar works with policymakers to ensure temporary housing facilities are included in new funding streams, the Justice Center continues education and outreach efforts to message on the importance of providing equal access to essential technology and reliable Wi-Fi for shelter residents.

In collaboration with community and pro bono partners, our Legal Clinic for the Homeless also brings needed legal services and information to families and individuals residing in shelters, including efforts in the past year such as:



Offering a webinar on
Cash Assistance benefit
program eligibility

Providing materials and
referrals on tax filing with
NYC Free Tax Prep so that
New Yorkers experiencing
homelessness could access
the federal Child Tax Credit



Conducting direct outreach
to families that would benefit
from the NYS Diaper Bank

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Protecting New Yorkers, Preserving Homes

The Justice Center's Homeowner Stability Project (HSP) provides critical representation and advocacy to New York City homeowners of low to moderate income threatened with the loss of their 1-4 family homes, coops and condos, including through mortgage foreclosure, payment arrears, estate title transfer issues, and deed theft scams and other predatory practices. In collaboration with the Center for New York City Neighborhoods (CNYCN) and other housing counseling and legal services providers, HSP conducted two extensive outreach campaigns this past year, including via door-knocking, to over 100 homeowners across Brooklyn and the Bronx affected by the New York City Tax Lien Sale. Where possible, HSP spoke with the homeowner, conducted a brief intake, and provided information on how to remove a property from the lien sale list.

Separately, HSP provided legal assistance to a group of Bronx homeowners dealing with a Department of Buildings (DOB) dispute and demand to repair a failing retaining wall along their properties. If the DOB completes the estimated \$750,000-\$1,500,000 remediation work, it will result in significant liens on the individual homes and potential loss if the City eventually forecloses on those liens. Through HSP's advocacy – in collaboration with CNYCN, a volunteer architect, and other community organizations – the Bronx homeowners obtained an initial grant of \$10,000 for a geotechnical engineering firm to assess the scope of the project and create a remediation plan. The firm has concluded its services and the homeowners and advocates are now seeking additional funding to begin work on the project.

HSP will continue providing services and advocacy intended to preserve intergenerational home equity (itself a poverty prevention tool) and New York's racial and socioeconomic diversity.



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