

2023 IMPACT REPORT



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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

The City Bar Justice Center is proud to publish its annual Impact Report. I've actually been thinking about *this* report since last autumn, when a global philanthropy director inquiring about the Justice Center's work offered an observation and piece of advice that stuck with me: "So, your organization isn't just about legal work," she said, "it's really about community impact – it's about racial and social justice – from a legal lens. You should share that truth more boldly."

We took her advice to heart, and we're spreading that message so that as broad an audience as possible supports our mission and work. I'm proud to share in this report what my Justice Center colleagues and our *nearly 2,000* pro bono volunteers – together with hundreds of community partners and donors – achieved for New Yorkers in need in the past year across the Justice Center's twelve civil access to justice projects. While the statistics highlighted in this report are truly outstanding, what I hope you take away, are a mind's-eye image and heartfelt sense of the *difference* that high-quality, free legal help can make for those with complex legal and life problems but not enough money to hire an attorney to help solve them. Behind these numbers are neighbor New Yorkers – including immigrants, veterans, families and individuals residing in homeless shelters, seniors, small business owners, and so many others struggling with poverty and other related vulnerabilities – who have stories to tell, lives to better, and dreams to pursue.

Thank you for reading this snapshot of our work. Please share what we do with those you know, and please continue supporting us – in whatever way you can – as we make an impact in our community.

Sincerely yours,



Kurt M. Denk
Executive Director

Donate

to support our work



OUR MISSION

“Built for justice. Built for pro bono.”

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. 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 most comprehensive 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 25,000 New Yorkers in need each year.

FY 2022-23 IMPACT

Overview

25,200

people benefited from
free legal assistance

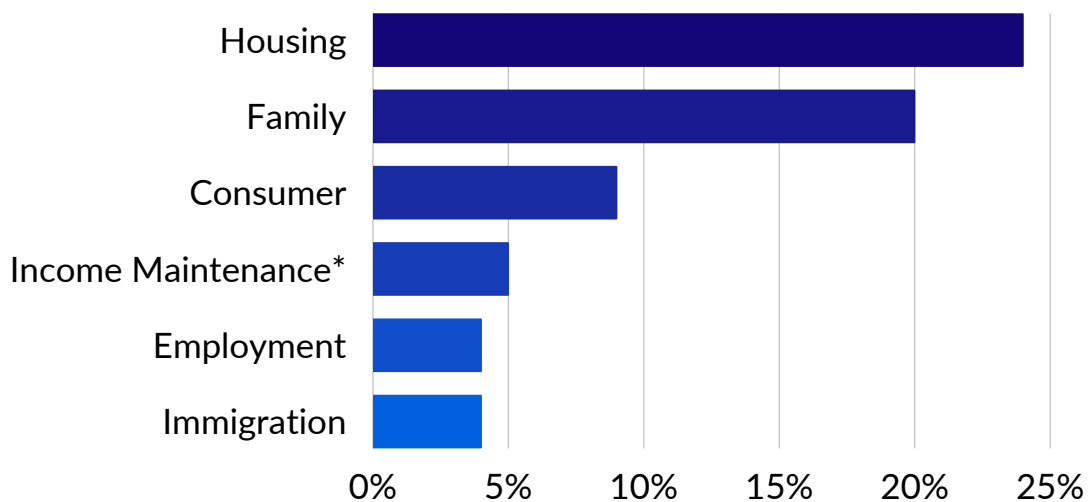
90,000

people reached through online
resources and information

8,800

people assisted through
community outreach

TOP SIX LEGAL AREAS MOST FREQUENTLY ADDRESSED (% OF ALL CASES)



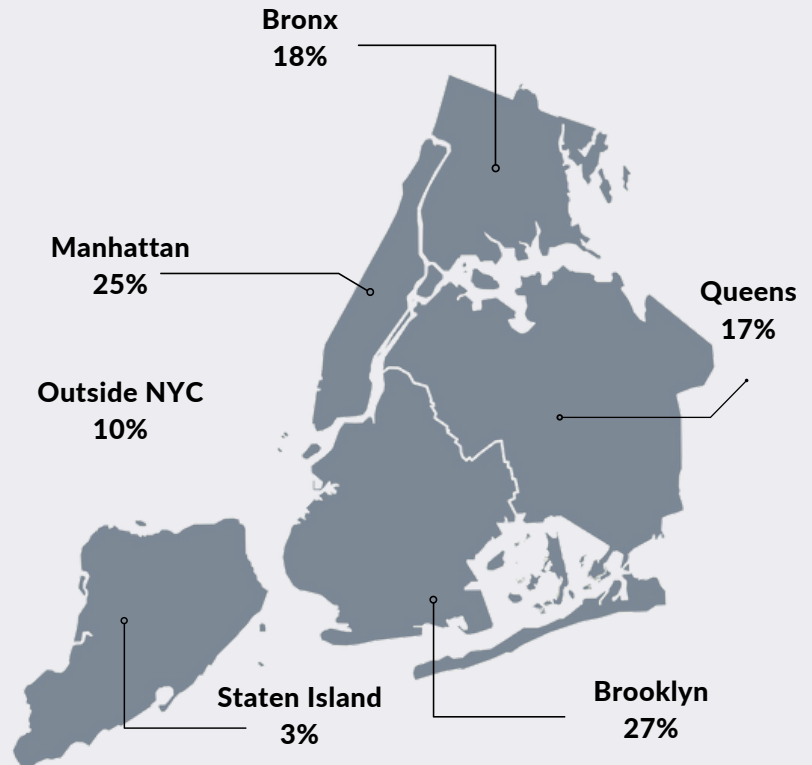
*Small business development, veteran benefits, and other public benefits**

IMPACT

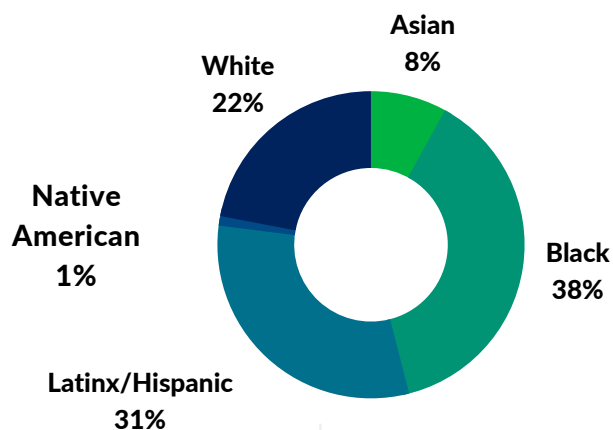
Who We Serve

RESIDENCE

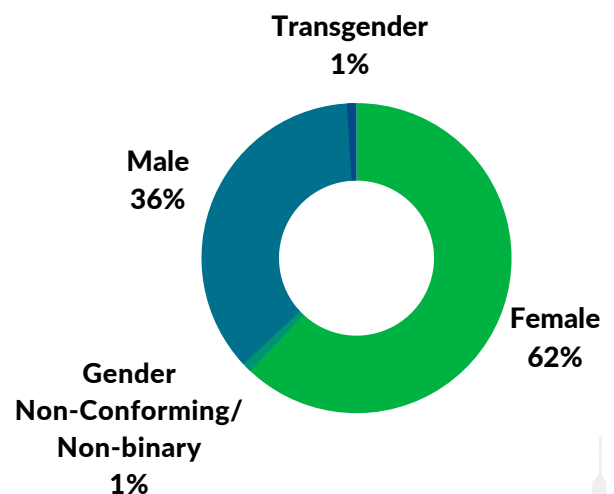
Justice Center clients who chose to self-report demographic information identified their place of residence, race, and sex/gender as follows:



RACE



SEX/GENDER



IMPACT

Unlocking Financial Benefits for Clients in FY 2022-23



\$23 MILLION

Clients benefited from almost \$23 million worth of legal services donated by pro bono partners



\$8.9 MILLION

Clients obtained over \$8.9 million in direct benefits, monetary awards, and settlements



\$2.1 MILLION

Clients divested nearly \$2.1 million in debt through bankruptcy and foreclosure prevention advocacy



\$136,000

Clients preserved nearly \$136,000 in other resources by avoiding recoupments, garnishments, and other levies, or securing filing fees

PRO BONO & COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Making Change One Pro Bono Hour at a Time

35,000

hours of service by
pro bono volunteers

1,800

volunteers provided pro
bono legal assistance

700

cases placed with pro
bono volunteers

Cannabis Equity for Emerging Small Business Entrepreneurs

The City Bar Justice Center's Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project launched an initiative in October 2022 to advise micro-entrepreneurs on New York's new cannabis licensing regulations and incentives to participate in this new industry on the part of individuals disproportionately impacted by cannabis prohibition laws. The Brooklyn Public Library's Business and Career Center and the New York City Bar Association's Drugs and the Law Committee were key partners in the initiative's in-person six-part Small Business Cannabis Presentation Series. Volunteer attorneys presented on the evolving nature of cannabis-related business regulations covering topics such as employment, entity formation, taxation, and funding. The series averaged 40+ attendees per presentation and garnered significant community interest and enthusiasm.

Supporting Migrant Youth in New York City

Beginning in late summer 2022, the City Bar Justice Center's [Immigrant Justice Project](#) partnered with [Covenant House New York](#) to launch our [NYC Migrant Youth Initiative](#) to address the urgent legal needs of migrant youth arriving in New York City, largely from the U.S.-Mexico border. With expert staff from the Justice Center and Covenant House providing pro bono attorneys with tailored training and ongoing mentoring, the initiative encompasses a series of Know Your Rights, Immigration Relief Screening, and Freedom of Information Act clinics and presentations to provide individuals with a reliable baseline of information about options for securing immigration status as well as the means to secure identity and other essential documents. Drawing from these clinics, the initiative also identifies possible immigration remedies for youth and works to secure longer-term representation for those who can pursue some form of permanent status.

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Advocating for New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness

The City Bar Justice Center's [Legal Clinic for the Homeless](#) (LCH) provides advice and representation to residents of homeless shelters on public benefits issues and other legal challenges, and also engages in broad-based advocacy around other challenges facing New Yorkers struggling with poverty – such as LCH's [advocacy to bridge the digital divide](#). In recent months, LCH conducted outreach to inform and better prepare clients for the end of pandemic-related SNAP benefits (Emergency Allotments), including information about the resulting decrease in amounts and the availability of “budget check” services through the project. LCH also provided advice and counsel to families who believed they were not receiving the correct amount of SNAP benefits, and successfully advocated for increases where warranted.

Meanwhile, LCH continues to closely collaborate with the New York City Bar Association's policy department on efforts to support New Yorkers experiencing homelessness and others facing poverty, and LCH Director Lisa Pearlstein recently delivered [written and oral testimony](#) to State legislators regarding bills aimed at increasing Cash Assistance benefits.

ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE

Preserving Homeownership Diversity in New York City

Our Homeowner Stability Project (HSP) continues to lead in efforts to identify and fight against predatory partition actions that threaten the diversity of homeownership in New York City, particularly in longstanding communities of color. Predatory partition occurs when an outside investor acquires a fractional interest in a family-owned property at a deep discount – usually a property held intergenerationally but without a clear chain of title. The investor then seeks a judicial “partition” of the property to liquidate their appreciated equity interest, the result being that family members who actually live in the home but who are unable to purchase all the interests back, typically are forced out and lose their own equity following a non-market judicial sale.

HSP’s partition defense advocacy is especially crucial post-pandemic, as private investors make inroads in communities at risk of gentrification and as housing affordability and homelessness remain at crisis levels. Among other things, HSP’s homeowner stability and anti-predatory partition work involves tracking legal trends, identifying repeat offenders and, often, working with law enforcement to combat deed theft and other scams. In addition, the project focuses resources on providing support and direct client services to homeowners at risk of losing significant intergenerational wealth who have historically been denied full and equal access to homeownership and lending due to explicitly discriminatory laws as well as systemic racism and socioeconomic barriers.

HSP's continued litigation and work in this legal area serves as a strong line of defense for clients at risk of losing their homes – and the economic stability they can bring – due to predatory scammers, including via:

Advocacy

Our HSP team serves as subject matter experts on the topic, helping raise awareness and advocating for homeowners at risk. In addition to providing direct client services and collaborating with other community advocates, the project supports political efforts to combat deed theft and amplifies the voices of families exploited.



Advancing Legal Education

HSP provides education and best practices trainings for legal services providers, community organizations and the public on topics such as “Tangled Title Issues,” “Property Fraud,” and “Using Alternative Dispute Resolution to Address Racial, Ethnic and Socio-Economic Disparities in Heirs’ Property Ownership.”



Policy and Law Reform

HSP Director Scott Kohanowski co-authored a modification of the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (NY-RPAPL 993) to mandate settlement conferences for partition actions.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE



Providing an Economic Fresh Start for Borrowers with Student Loans

The Justice Center's Consumer Bankruptcy Project (CBP) provides bankruptcy assistance to New York City residents burdened with credit card, medical, and other consumer debt. While its primary function is to provide bankruptcy assistance, the project has increased its capacity to address the growing student loan debt problem. In partnership with the Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program (EDCAP), the project assists borrowers with federal and private student loans through two main forms of advocacy:

Individual Counseling: CBP advises student loan borrowers on repayment and forgiveness options, identifies clients with student loans who might be eligible for bankruptcy discharge – a complicated process to achieve – and places these matters with law firms for pro bono

representation. This advocacy is also crucial because bankruptcy discharge is often the only option for those with private student loans, which do not have forgiveness programs.

Community Education: CBP offers a series of free webinars and short guides, both in English and Spanish, which provide relief options and tips for managing the loans, with many of the webinars tailored specifically for veterans, borrowers with Parent Plus loans, and individuals working in public service.

Since launching its student loan debt relief initiative, over 184 student loan borrowers have benefited from CBP's services. CBP will continue to provide students with the information and resources they need to manage their debt effectively, empower student loan borrowers to take control of their finances, make informed decisions about their loan repayment options and, where possible, utilize bankruptcy as a form of relief.



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to support our work



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