

RISEBORO COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

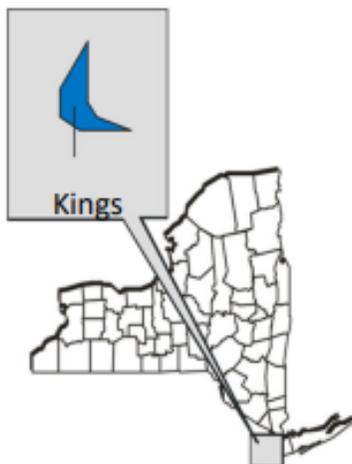
2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

As a legal services provider, RiseBoro Legal Empowerment and Assistance Program (LEAP) purpose is to fulfill its mission of providing holistic legal housing services, and community empowerment to vulnerable Brooklynites. The way we accomplish this is by helping tenants in the community to access justice with dignity, by empowering, emboldening, and educating them to know how and where to seek assistance, along with how to advocate for themselves.

Number of Households Served: Over the years, the funds that IOLA provides have offered significant financial support to the implementation of our comprehensive program. During the period of April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, LEAP logged and tracked 1316 cases representing approximately 2144 people. Our team of attorneys and paralegals, managed 485 Non-Payment cases, 276 Holdover cases, 3 Housing Part (HP) actions, 3 Illegal lockout cases, and 15 NYCHA cases. In addition, we provided 365 brief service legal advice cases. Our legal services navigators and community organizers assisted in representation on 169 cases, offering our clients a variety of services such as assistance with applying for SCRIE and DRIE benefits, rent and repair-related advocacy, and lease issues. Collectively we closed 889 cases, representing approximately 1,891 people.

Target Population: Leap serves the entire Brooklyn area, but tailors outreach to tenants residing in historically underserved and marginalized areas such as North and Central Brooklyn neighborhoods -Bushwick, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, and Crown Heights in particular. Though specific demographics vary across these neighborhoods, they are each majority communities of color and all consistently rank poorly in markers of social determinants of health including



Population Served: General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$4,216,511

Total IOLA Grant: \$75,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 31.5
- Paralegals: 9
- Lawyers: 18
- Other: 4.5

household poverty, unemployment, and education levels. At this time, LEAP's focus remains on individuals with incomes below 200% FPL but our goal is to regain the flexibility we had during the pandemic to assume cases above our income level requirement in order to preserve the long-standing character of the historic communities of color that we serve.

Direct Impact of LEAP Services: The indirect dollar benefits to tenants resulting from successful abatement negotiations in court and rent reductions ordered by Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) totaled \$56,138.80. In rent waivers, eliminated charges and rent payments via subsidies from referrals, tenants avoided liability for payment of a total of \$891,087.16. Additionally, we aided a senior citizen who lost her Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits many years ago, regaining her income back totaling \$960.00 a month.

Access to Justice: LEAP has a comprehensive community program designed to facilitate access to justice by providing educational services, tenant advocacy, landlord-tenant mediation services, brief advice, connections to supportive services, as well as direct legal representation to tenants facing harassment, displacement and/or eviction. Our organizing team works diligently to engage tenants by making direct phone calls, conducting meetings with tenants in person, focusing on forming tenants' associations, and working with tenants displaced by fires.

Improved Capacity: As a community organization, LEAP strives to meet the needs of its clients and the community as a whole. As a result of COVID-19, virtual services and our online presence were enhanced. Our website, social media presence, outreach material, and remote communications have all been improved. Significant improvements to our database, LegalServer, were made to better track quality assurance and manage cases efficiently. LEAP has continued to use many of the pandemic-era services, such as DocuSign and legal hotlines to make access to legal services more accessible to tenants.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case #1:

LEAP provided full representation to a client, who was referred via Universal Access (UA), in a Holdover proceeding case. Wherein a purported landlord was attempting to evict a tenant from an apartment she rented from him. While reviewing the referral and court documents the staff attorney noticed that the case was already in the pre-trial stage and the court was giving dates for the actual trial. LEAP rapidly began to work on this case as time was of the essence. LEAP's attorney reviewed the case file along with the documents filed on the Court's

Electronic Filing System (NYSCEF). The staff attorney observed that there were inaccuracies and misinformation stated by the landlord in the Petition. After further research on ACRIS, the attorney found that the landlord was in fact not the landlord of the building, but just a relative that had access to an apartment. Additionally, the staff attorney noted that the legal papers misstated the type of building the apartment was in and fraudulently stated that the apartment was open market when it was actually rent-stabilized. Based on those facts the staff attorney was able to file an Answer to have the case discontinued and the client remain in her apartment.

Case #2:

LEAP provided full representation to a client, who was referred via Universal Access (UA), in a nonpayment proceeding case. This nonpayment case had a 2020 index number but we didn't receive the referral for legal representation until the end of 2021. By the time we resolved the case in February 2023, the client owed more than \$40,000.00 with no source of rental assistance as the client did not have the ability to pay ongoing rent because of insufficient income. As the case was a 2020 index number, the case would have likely moved forward with trial risking imminent eviction. When a LEAP staff attorney was assigned to the case in December 2022, they immediately realized there was a big defect in this case as Petitioner is an LLC and not supposed to commence any action or proceeding if not published with the NY Department of State in compliance with the law. The attorney made a motion to dismiss the case and was able to convince the landlord's attorney to voluntarily discontinue the case as the landlord was not able to find proof of publication with the Department of State as required by law. Our actions prevented both the client's eviction and a money judgment against the client.

1,891
people
benefitted from
889
housing
legal cases closed

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

Community Engagement: Our Community Organizers spearhead LEAP’s community engagement component of our program which uniquely and strategically work with the LEAP’s Attorneys, Legal Services Navigators, Paralegals, Government entities, and other organizations to protect tenants. Community organizers frequently file complaints and/or administrative proceedings with NYC Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) and participate in coalitions such as the North Brooklyn Anti-Displacement Housing Task Force (the “Task Force”). Our organizers assist tenants in affirmatively restoring essential services neglected by the property owner and bringing rent reduction complaints when a tenant’s apartment is uninhabitable. They also respond to burnout buildings, illegal lockouts, tenant complaints of lack of heat, and other lifesaving essential services. During this contract period, our supporting staff regained access to 4 buildings that were affected by a fire and approximately 53 people benefited from our service.

Tenant Advocacy: Our Legal Services Navigators provide clients with access to additional resources and services in advocacy to design and maintain a household's ability to pay rent and reach long-term goals. The legal services navigators are often our first line of defense for clients who need assistance with obtaining a lease due to an owner's failure to offer a lease renewal and/or failure to furnish a copy of a signed lease; harassment; Petition for Administrative Review (PAR) if needed, and more. Additionally, they assist in filing an application for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) or One-Shot-Deal electronically through Human Resource Administration (HRA) to ensure the tenant applied for rental assistance before their next court date. The legal services navigators further assist our elderly and disabled community residents if eligible, in applying and renewing applications by the Department of Finance, Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), and Disability



Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). Lastly, our legal services navigators provide out-of-court mediation/negotiation in landlord-tenant matters, working to enforce tenants' rights and warranty of habitability issues, often without the need for litigation. During this contract period, our legal services navigators managed 80 renewals for SCRIE and DRIE. They received approvals on 55 SCRIE/DRIE applications. Collectively, tenants saved a total of \$8,383.94 per month.

OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

We took great measures to pivot our in-person services to virtual and enhance our online presence since the pandemic. With LegalServer, LEAP identifies several areas in which our client database software could be used to better ensure quality assurance, case management, and tracking of current and/or relevant housing trends. We also used the database to be proactive during a time of upheaval and monitor emerging community needs. LEAP implemented the DocuSign digital system for clients to read and sign documents needed for securing representation, effectively minimizing unnecessary exposure to COVID and meeting clients where they were. In response to a hotline system requirement for providers, LEAP immediately supplied and staffed three hotlines to connect tenants to services. All LEAP attorneys are able to access an online legal research service for lawyers and legal professionals. Lastly, LEAP provided staff with updated laptops to allow for more remote access to client records and travel to client locations to conduct site visits. All staff continues to have the means to communicate with clients and other RiseBoro program staff, whether on-site or working remotely. Our office locations are equipped with desktops, laptops, printers, and high-speed internet, as well as full access to Microsoft Office Suite. As the pandemic waned and in-person work resumed, LEAP has continued to utilize much of these pandemic-era services, in an effort to enhance our accessibility for clients. Riseboro's far reach and institutional efficiency ensure that LEAP is poised to continue deploying a dynamic, multifaceted, and community-based approach to anti-homelessness and eviction prevention.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

LEAP offers numerous training and professional development programs to not only invest in its staff but equip them for success within a field that can often be prone to burnout. The supervisory staff provides a variety of resources, inter-office, and intra-office training; attorney and non-attorney collaboration opportunities; access to workshops and lectures by housing agencies and other community and legal service groups; continuing education and legal education opportunities; skill-specific training;

and online video presentations and webinars. An individualized training schedule is developed by senior program staff based on the employee's programmatic area. Each new team member is assigned to shadow senior staff, meet regularly with their direct supervisor, and is encouraged to identify and participate in continuing education webinars, seminars, and networking opportunities. All attorneys must attend a week-long intensive trial advocacy training course, offered by Brooklyn Defenders or other similar organizations. Practicing Law Institute (PLI), Ted-Talks, and other informational webinars and video courses are assigned to attorneys during their initial onboarding with updated written materials and continuing CLE's. Attorneys have bi-weekly strategy meetings and are required to co-chair cases that result in trials. The attorneys must commit to continuous learning and skill development to remain in compliance with the NYS Bar Association. Supervising Attorneys take additional management courses as well as advanced legal education courses in order to develop skills to effectively manage and train junior attorneys and non-legal staff. LEAP's non-legal staff includes Paralegals, Community Organizers, Legal Services Navigators, and Administrators. All support staff are provided with access to professional development seminars, workshops, webinars, and participate in monthly staff meetings. In service of fostering a more equitable organization, the Racial Equity Manager, in partnership with Be Inspired, offered mandatory, agency-wide training on racial equity. These included Dismantling Anti-Blackness and Colorism and Understanding Racial Inequity. Continuing Education training through the Housing Listservs for staff seeking to obtain information on new programs, initiatives, and regulations; LinkedIn Learning; Non-Coercive Approaches to Conflict Management, facilitated by the Center for Urban Community Services; Mental Health First Aid training; and CPR/First Aid training.

IMPACT CASES

LEAP attorneys and Community Organizers have been diligently working with families from three (3) fire buildings. These three (3) buildings have been represented for more than 3 years ensuring that tenants would be restored to possession, paying the same rent they were paying before the fire with no increase, and monitoring repairs after tenants were restored. The total number of people who benefited from our services was 49.

237 Stanhope Street: The families of a 6-unit building were the victims of a fire that left them homeless after a full vacate order was placed. The LEAP Organizers assisted the tenants in supporting them, reaching out to the proper agencies (HCR,

Red Cross, etc.) for services available, and assisting them in establishing a Tenant's Association. While there were many challenges that the tenants had to face when returning to their homes, the tenants were still faced with changes that had a very strong impact on their families and their everyday lives. LEAP staff teamed up to determine to obtain due recourse for the tenants and although the changes in the law for railroad apartments would forbid them to go back to the lives they once had before the landlord changed

their two-bedroom apartments to one-bedroom apartments. Repairs that the landlord refused to provide such as cabinets in the kitchen, countertops to prepare food, medicine cabinets in their bathrooms, and all the amenities that the tenants had before the fire they were now being denied. The Organizers supported the tenants in their decision to continue to fight or come to an agreement if the owner was willing to negotiate. The staff attorney submitted a stipulation of settlement with the following negotiated and agreed-on terms, each unit will receive a 3-year rent freeze, an abatement of 35% and all HPD violations repairs will be completed. The families are now settling into their new environment and are pleased to have the repairs that they requested completed.

15 Locust Street: After years of work in obtaining substantial repairs for all six (6) units it was saddening to learn of an electrical fire in a second-floor kitchen that caused the city to issue a full vacate order for the entire building. Six households were displaced from their long-time homes. The LEAP Organizers completed new intakes for all tenants and immediately submitted rent reduction applications to the New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), resulting in a Rent Reduction Order of \$1.00 for each unit. On-site at the building, as the tenants removed their possessions, LEAP observed the delight of the property owner and management in this unfortunate circumstance. All too often, property owners will use a vacate order to drag out the process of permit applications, inspections, and the completion of repairs, with the goal of tiring out rent-regulated tenants into moving on and forfeiting their units. LEAP was up to the challenge of assisting the tenants in forming an association and maintaining resilience throughout the process even with the owner applying to have rent restored while the apartments were not ready to move in. The Organizers stayed focused and submitted a reply that awarded the tenants rent to be restored after repairs were fully completed and habitable. The LEAP attorneys filed a Housing Part Action in Housing Court to monitor the timely correction of the city's class C (immediately hazardous) violations for fire damage throughout the building. Despite many delays and attempts by the property owner to disenfranchise the tenants and

49
beneficiaries
were affected by
3
Impact Cases

their families, LEAP ensured the tenants' return to fully habitable units with brand-new kitchens, bathrooms, cabinets, fixtures, and appliances, as well as plaster and paint throughout the apartment. However, the owner was still using manipulative tactics, by providing the tenants with refrigerators for single-family households instead of family-size households. The Organizers always educate the tenants on their rights and this allowed the tenants to stand together and demanded that they receive refrigerators for families as they had prior to the fire. The tenants were also awarded through a court stipulation 6 months abatement and after the 6 months tenants will resume paying their affordable monthly legal regulated rent. Leap Organizers continue to advocate for the tenants by negotiating lease renewals with the correct increases, ensuring that security payments are properly reported on the lease, and assisting with other outstanding repairs.

193 Wyckoff Avenue: LEAP continues to work closely with four (4) households (11 individuals) displaced from their long-time homes when the city issued a full vacate order after a fire. LEAP Organizers went straight to the building as the fire was extinguishing. LEAP connected with the tenants and educated them on their rights, and all agreed to meet as soon as possible as a group. LEAP hosted the meeting within a week and learned all four households would need strong advocacy to enforce their right to return after repairs and at the same amount of rent. LEAP completed full intakes and promptly filed Rent Reduction Applications with DHCR. The tenants soon received an Order reducing their monthly rent to \$1.00 as of the date of the fire. Whether the fire was accidental or due to negligence, it is not uncommon for a property owner to use the unfortunate situation to their advantage. The owner began reaching out to the tenants to offer small amounts of money to give up their homes. The offer was around \$25,000, not nearly enough to compensate anyone for losing the long-term affordability of a rent-regulated apartment. The tenants decided together to reject these offers, and LEAP informed the owner there was no deal. The owner had already begun applying for permits to gut-renovate the building. Since LEAP is in the regular practice of checking the city information systems for new filings, they saw right away that the applications proposed complete reconfigurations and a reduction in the number of bedrooms from two to one. The Organizers referred the case to the LEAP attorneys, who expediently filed a motion in Supreme Court, where LEAP prevailed to block these disingenuous permit applications. Immediately following success in Supreme Court, LEAP filed a Housing Part (HP) Action in Housing Court to hold the property owner accountable to timelines for repairing all fire damage to lift the vacate order. In the HP Action, the

All Impact Cases

**Fire building
237 Stanhope Street,
6 units**

**Fire building 15 Locust
Street, 5 units**

**Fire building 193 Wyckoff
Avenue, 4 units**

owner claimed they could not make the repairs due to “economic infeasibility,” meaning the cost of repairs would exceed the property’s value. Our quick-thinking LEAP attorneys found the property listed for sale online for \$1.5M, an amount far above the cost of repairs. Our attorney prepared and filed a subpoena to bring the realtor to court and produce all documents regarding the listing price and contracts with ownership for sale. The landlord’s attorney fought against our subpoena, but the Judge ruled in our favor to proceed.

Around the same time, a well-known prospective buyer in the neighborhood reached out to LEAP Organizers with buyout offers for the tenants. He offered \$100,000 for each tenant to give up their apartment. LEAP is not in the business of facilitating buyouts but is obligated to convey any offers. A LEAP Organizer called a tenant association meeting in which the tenants again decided together to reject the offer. Through LEAP’s counseling and education, the tenants knew that stable, long-term affordable housing is far more valuable than a lump sum of money in New York City. On the last housing court date, LEAP examined the landlord’s realtor and rested our case to prove that the landlord is in criminal and civil contempt for not complying with the court’s order requiring the repairs to be done. A settlement conference will be scheduled, and if there is no agreement the case will proceed to Trial. With court dates pending, the tenants continue paying \$1.00 a month until they return to their homes.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

2 Law Students volunteered 50 hours

LEAP has made active efforts to recruit, train, and onboard pro bono attorneys and law student interns in the past. As a member of the NYS Attorney Emeritus Program, we intend to continue to do so in the future. We were fortunate to have two law school interns this past summer assisting with legal research and case preparation, and drafting of legal documents. LEAP continues the summer internship program, wherein we look to recruit law students for an 8–10-week period every summer. Interns earn weekly stipends for their participation in the program. Interns are assigned to experienced attorneys to observe in housing court appearances and client meetings. Legal interns also assist with drafting/preparing briefs and other legal memos. As we enter our third year in the summer internship program, our hope is that when these law students graduate, they will consider LEAP or some other non-profit organization to start their careers and thus assist in our efforts to continue to hire and groom talented motivated attorneys.

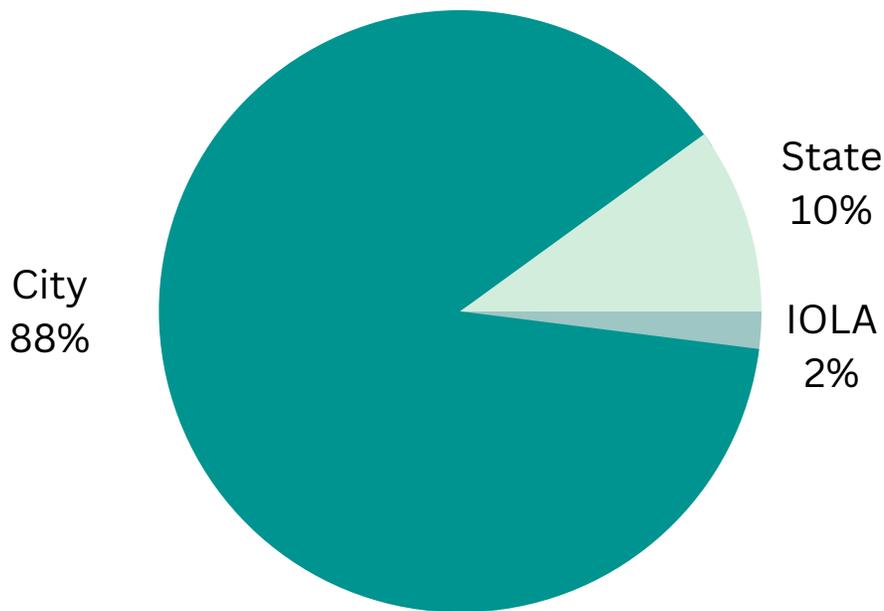
SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

LEAP is grounded in the philosophy that collaboration with community partners bolsters overall capacity for servicing low-income Brooklyn residents. One of the most significant collaborations this year is one between LEAP and Make the Road New York (MTR), a local community-based organization and legal services provider. A fully-occupied six-unit building suffered a major fire, resulting in a full vacate order by the city. Six households of long-time tenants suddenly found themselves homeless. LEAP assured the tenants they would have the right to return to their apartments at the same regulated rent. We would need to partner up within the community to get legal representation for the group. Thankfully, local community-based organization and legal services provider Make the Road New York (MTR) was ready, willing, and able to collaborate. LEAP and MTR established an email chain to plan tenant association meetings, share case information, and strategize future court dates. Together we learned that the owner of this building has a long history of harassing the tenants. As a group, we decided to include harassment claims in a Housing Part (HP) Action for repairs in the housing court. MTR immediately got to work drafting the Order to Show Cause. Around the same time, all of LEAP's rent reduction filings were granted by Housing and Community Renewal (HCR). Soon after, the tenants, LEAP Organizers, and MTR attorney appeared for the first court date. The Judge issued an Order for the landlord to repair all fire damage within thirty days and issued city fines of \$2,000 per apartment (\$10,000 total) for harassment, as well as \$1,000 to each tenant (\$5,000 total) on the initial harassment claim. Too often owners of rent-stabilized buildings will intentionally delay repairs to exhaust the tenants, hoping they will move on and give up their tenancy. This is where the collaboration of tenant organizing and legal representation becomes crucial. By coming together to help the tenants form an association and file a group action in court, we are able to leverage more resources, garner resiliency within the group, and strategize their quickest way back home. For years, LEAP has pursued to meet with other Right to Counsel legal providers to work on common themes and areas of interest in our ongoing march to assist clients who need our services. LEAP has maintained to be an active member of the Brooklyn Tenant Lawyers Network (BTLN) for many years. BTLN, whose mission is to strengthen the voice and influence of the tenant-side bar and foster the effective provision of high-quality legal representation to tenants in Brooklyn, actively works to provide a forum for tenant-side attorneys to discuss and develop strategies for improving the administration of justice in the Brooklyn Housing Court. Aside from working with the entities mentioned above, LEAP maintains a good relationship with the Human Resources Administration (HRA/DSS) and the Adult Protective Services Program (APS) to effectively implement an individualized approach to resolving client

issues. We have also established networks with various organizations including CAMBA, Coalition for the Homeless, Catholic Charities, the Community Service Society, Federation of Protestant Welfare Associations (FPWA), and Brooklyn Housing and Family Services.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

RiseBoro Community Partnership received **\$4,216,511** in total funding this past year



City and County Funding	\$3,731,024
State Funding	\$410,487
IOLA Grant	\$75,000
Total	\$4,216,511