Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

With the support of funding from the IOLA Fund of the State of New York, The Legal Aid Society (LAS) has continued to represent large numbers of individuals while working to achieve broader systemic changes for society as a whole. Our Civil Practice improves the lives of low-income New Yorkers by helping them obtain and maintain the basic necessities of life, delivering civil legal services through a network of neighborhood and courthouse-based offices (currently closed due to the pandemic) in all five boroughs. The Civil Practice is comprised of specialized units that assist clients with legal issues related to housing, foreclosure, and homelessness; income and economic security (including public assistance, unemployment insurance, and federal disability); health law; employment law and low-wage worker matters; tax law; consumer law; education law; community development opportunities; immigration; HIV/AIDS and chronic diseases; family law and domestic violence; elder law; and reentry and reintegration matters for clients returning to the community. Funding from IOLA supports all components of our practice, including direct individual legal assistance and representation; law reform litigation on behalf of groups of clients; policy advocacy; self-help community legal education and training, including Know Your Rights workshops; expert technical assistance to community groups and other providers; comprehensive continuing legal education (CLE); and pro bono initiatives with the private bar that further amplify our resources.

By leveraging our individual client representation into law reform litigation and advocacy, LAS is able to assist vast numbers of eligible clients while achieving systemic reforms that would not be possible solely through individual representation. In addition to supporting the core elements of our Civil Practice, IOLA funding during the period of April 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021 made the following accomplishments possible:

Direct legal assistance in a total of 20,302 closed individual client matters.

Through the successful resolution of these matters, LAS staff obtained “major benefits” for at least 45,277 low-income New Yorkers. Overall, during the reporting period, we worked on nearly 30,600 individual client matters, which benefited over 67,250 adults and their families.

Population Served: General Low Income

Population

Area Served: New York Metropolitan Area

Total Funding: $87,184,993

Total IOLA Grant: $5,250,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 566.10
- Lawyers: 344.10
- Paralegals: 160.00
- Others: 62.00
Our Community Development Project has assisted numerous business across the city during the pandemic and has dramatically increased its outreach and the number of businesses it has been able to assist - with the number of New Yorkers reached by our dedicated small business owner outreach increasing by over 770%. In one recent case, our staff assisted a small business owner, F with reviewing her lease and negotiating with her landlord after experiencing COVID-related business difficulties. F owns a consulting firm that lost business due to PAUSE stay-at-home orders and is herself a COVID-19 survivor. F's business operates in the Garment District and employed six people prior to the pandemic, now reduced to three. Our staff reviewed her lease and advised her on her rights and potential strategies for negotiating with her landlord. After our discussion, F was empowered to contact her landlord and succeeded in having two rent payments postponed to a later date, which gave her and her business much-needed breathing room. In addition, we also provided assistance with F’s application for a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan that kept her business afloat and ensured it remained a viable business during the pandemic. We provided advice and guidance to help F understand the provisions of PPP and how to maximize the loan forgiveness potential – ensuring that F received the maximum benefit from this program and supporting her business’s long-term future recovery.

After losing his job due to the pandemic, S was forced to enter the shelter system over the summer of 2020. S was originally placed in a single occupancy room while working with a housing specialist to identify permanent housing opportunities. However, in October, he was suddenly transferred to a shared, double-occupancy in a shelter in a different borough far from his employment and doctor appointments. S experiences a range of serious medical issues and was extremely fearful of sharing a living space with another unrelated individual given that he was at high-risk of health complications if he were to contract COVID-19. As a result, S felt he had no option and prepared to exit the shelter system to sleep on the street. Our staff immediately set to work and advocated with the Department of Homeless Services in the strongest terms to request a reasonable accommodation. As a result of our extensive advocacy, S is now safely housed in a single-occupancy room in shelter and we continue to provide support to him as he pursues permanent housing opportunities through the Special One-Time Assistance Program.
**Other Services**

**Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>396,897 people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>26,410 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>370,487 people</td>
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**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

In addition to direct legal assistance, LAS provides the following services benefiting low-income New Yorkers and their communities in all five boroughs of the city: self-help and Know Your Rights community education materials and presentations, training to partner organizations, volunteer attorneys, and legal advocates to provide them with the skills necessary to assist marginalized New Yorkers with their legal needs; and cooperative work with government to resolve systemic legal problems.

**Other Legal Related Services: Examples**

Community Education and Training: Each Civil Practice unit offers trainings to low-income New Yorkers and community advocates, which are aimed at increasing broader capacity across the nonprofit sector and improving outcomes for individuals experiencing civil legal issues. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we rapidly expanded our use of virtual outreach to ensure we were able to expand our reach across all of New York’s communities during the current crisis. Our Community Development team has continued to take a lead in supporting New York’s small businesses during the pandemic and held a total of 61 events attended by nearly 6,000 New Yorkers during this period. These included a series of community events held in collaboration with NYC Business Solutions Centers and a webinar presented in Spanish regarding navigating commercial leasing issues during the pandemic - organized in collaboration with the Consulates of Mexico, Ecuador, Columbia, Peru, and Latinx immigrant leaders. In response to the growing crisis in need for assistance with consumer legal issues during the pandemic as consumer debt collection proceedings return to pre-pandemic levels, our Consumer Law Project attorneys conducted virtual trainings for both community members and advocates that reached nearly 1,000 New Yorkers across the city. LAS is also a resource for attorneys and advocates across New York and holds several events where we present on recent changes to the legal system and wider landscape. As one example of this, our Immigration Law Unit conducted more than 20 trainings attended by nearly 2,300 people providing information for advocates and staff of community partners regarding immigration law.
Cooperative work with the Government: Providing direct legal services is only one component of our strategy to effectively advocate for marginalized New Yorkers and we work in tandem with government to effect systemic changes. During the reporting period, we have continued our advocacy efforts to center the needs of New York’s vulnerable communities in governmental responses to the pandemic and ensure that they can access the support and services they require. In June 2020, our legislative advocacy helped secure passage of the Tenant Safe Harbor Act, legislation that limited a landlord’s ability to secure a possessory judgment against a tenant unable to pay rent due to COVID-19 related income losses, protecting all eligible households - including immigrant families - from eviction. More recently, as a result of our advocacy, at the end of December 2020 Governor Cuomo signed the COVID-19 Emergency Eviction and Foreclosure Prevention Act into law – extending a moratorium on residential eviction until May 1, 2021 for tenants who experienced COVID-related difficulties and halting foreclosure proceedings for homeowners and small landlords. Our Government Benefits and Low Income Taxpayer Clinic successfully advocated for changes to the federal government’s process for distributing Economic Impact Payments (EIPs) to expand the groups of people across the country to whom these payments are automatically issued - including veterans and recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Further, our Government Benefits team has worked closely with NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) to monitor the introduction of a new web portal for benefit applications following the closure of in-person services by HRA to ensure New Yorkers continue to receive the benefits to which they are entitled.

Constituent Services: LAS is frequently called upon by city, state, and federal elected officials to assist their constituents. In addition to these requests, LAS also collaborates with elected officials on special initiatives or training events – enabling LAS to expand its reach into the community and engage effectively with clients. Staff across the Practice also work closely with elected officials to provide technical assistance, accept referrals, and collaborate on efforts to effect systemic change.
Impact Cases

Ensuring Adequate Shelter for Homeless New Yorkers During the COVID-19 Pandemic - In October 2020, LAS together with Jenner & Block LLP filed Fisher et al v. The City of New York et al to challenge the City’s failing to take appropriate action to temporarily provide safe shelter for single adults free of significant health risks from aerosol transmission of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Many New Yorkers forced to share accommodation or bathrooms have serious health conditions that place them at increased risk of experiencing health complications. Our lawsuit seeks to require that the City offer a single-occupancy hotel room to each adult homeless New Yorker for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to other forms of relief. In response to our litigation, the city has agreed to protocols to determine when a homeless person is entitled to a single room.

Preventing Damaging Changes to Public Charge Regulations – During the reporting period there were many developments in our suit, Make the Road New York v. Cuccinelli, 19 Civ. 7993 (S.D.N.Y.), originally filed in August 2019 to block damaging changes to public charge regulations that threatened to prevent noncitizens from becoming permanent residents and accessing vital benefit programs. In July 2020 – having joined New York State Attorney James in a companion case seeking the enjoinment of the rule during the pandemic – we obtained nationwide injunctions against the Department of Homeland Security and Department of State’s public charge rules. In March 2021, the Biden administration withdrew the government’s appeal in the U.S. Supreme Court meaning that the Trump-era public charge rule has finally been vacated nationwide. As a result, noncitizen individuals will once again be able to access vital public assistance and social safety net programs that play a key role in maintaining wellbeing and supporting individuals as they transition out of poverty.

Defending Hard-Won Tenant Protections and Rent Regulation Reforms – We continue to be vigilant against attempts to weaken tenant protections for vulnerable New Yorkers and recently intervened on behalf of community and tenant advocacy groups in five separate challenges by landlords groups to reforms of New York’s rent regulation system introduced by the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act in 2019. During the reporting period, we were successful in having our motions to dismiss the landlords’ cases granted in these cases and continue to guard against changes that threaten to dismantle New York’s long-standing system that provides among the strongest tenant protections in the nation and prevents low-income tenants from being at the mercy of landlords and rising rents. In New York City alone, 2.5 million people occupy rent-regulated apartments that provide vital relief from the city’s continued affordable housing crisis. Our efforts in these cases will ensure that vulnerable tenants continue to be protected – of particular importance during the current public health crisis.
Trainings

During the reporting period, LAS conducted numerous trainings, including community education and training presentations for clients, community-based organizations, partner agencies, advocates, and constituent services staff attended by 73,970 people, including legal advocates, volunteer and pro bono attorneys, and law students. LAS operates a robust training and professional development program aimed at developing the advocacy skills of our paralegals, attorneys, and supervisors. Staff have the opportunity to learn best practice tips from seasoned advocates in the areas of client interviewing, legal research, motion writing, negotiations, trial advocacy, vicarious/secondary trauma, and self-care. Our Immigration and Housing practice areas have additional targeted content-specific training programs that run for several weeks and build on introductory material as the programs progress. Supervisors are offered opportunities to convene and share ideas with other leaders with training modules focusing on the importance of effective delegation, constructive feedback, teambuilding, leadership, and professional development plans. Additionally, LAS offers a range of trainings to encourage diversity and focus on issues such as Anti-Bias and Anti-Racism training together with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) cultural humility. Moreover, staff and supervisors attend anti-bias and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) trainings. Preparing staff to interrupt bias in both the workplace and in the courts is central to our mission, and our staff are provided with the skills needed to challenge issues effectively while also providing culturally competent services for clients. We have continued to provide a dedicated program of trainings to support our staff with the rapid transition to remote working and court proceedings. This includes a new range of trainings focusing on videoconferencing technology/software together with skills to navigate virtual trials and remote proceedings. Additionally, staff across the Practice have led a series of rotating virtual presentations to share key information regarding developments in different practice areas during the pandemic.

Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to accelerate our efforts to utilize technology as we explore new models and changes to how we provide services to our client communities with the aim of finding efficiencies and different ways of reaching New Yorkers dislocated from existing services. Pandemic related expansions of our virtual services have further focused these efforts as we work towards creating new access points for our services that enable clients to access our services centrally. We have continued to invest in technology to support our virtual work operations and providing services to our clients remotely – in particular, ensuring that we are able to assist clients in accessing virtual proceedings as court operations begin increasingly to proceed remotely. Further, we have utilized technology to lead an unprecedented expansion of our virtual outreach efforts while also continuing to develop new, dedicated client-facing content for our website including further building out our dedicated COVID-19 information hub. We have continued to use social media and other tools to reach New Yorkers unaware of our services and disseminate information regarding their rights and pandemic relief programs. This has also included developing a new series of videos hosted on YouTube regarding housing-related legal proceedings and informing New Yorkers about their legal options and ways to seek assistance.
**Significant Collaborations**

To enhance the delivery of civil legal services, LAS has forged close working relationships with over 80 partners, including CBOs, social service agencies, government officials and agencies, and law schools. Community-based and other organizations: Through partnerships with CBOs, coalitions, and other organizations, LAS is able to provide comprehensive support to individual clients as well as advocate for change at a societal level. For example, over the last year our Homeless Rights Project participated in a working group on pandemic response for vulnerable populations with more than ten other NYC-based nonprofits and homeless advocacy groups. Staff also collaborated with partners to distribute various client-facing and Know Your Rights guides and materials to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Similarly, our Housing Justice – Group Advocacy Project recently partnered with Partnership for the Homeless, a nonprofit supporting New Yorkers at risk of homelessness, to distribute $16,000 in rental arrears grants to LAS clients who faced being made homeless after falling behind in rent. Further, our Consumer team has also worked closely with a broad coalition of economic justice CBOs and local groups to amend Section 349 of General Business Law to protect vulnerable consumers from unfair business practices that are beyond the scope of current law and increasing in prevalence during the pandemic. Private Bar and Attorneys: Leveraging private bar support enables LAS to expand the assistance it is able to provide its clients. Our Health Law Unit has developed relationships with law firms including Friedman Kaplan Seiler & Adelman LLP and Ropes & Gray LLP to expand representation of New Yorkers facing flawed Medicaid overpayment investigations and lawsuits – process that often leave vulnerable New Yorkers facing unaffordable settlements or crushing debt. Law Schools: LAS works with and accepts volunteers from law schools, including Baylor University Law School, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law Brandeis School of Law, Brooklyn Law School, CUNY School of Law, Columbia University Law School, Cornell Law School, Fordham Law School, Georgetown Law School, Hofstra Law School, Howard University Law School, NYU School of Law, University of Michigan Law School, New York Law School, Pace Law School, Rutgers Law School, Touro Law Center, Seton Hall Law School, Syracuse University College of Law, Vanderbilt Law School, Wake Forest Law School, St. John’s University School of Law, and Yale Law School. As one example, our Housing team in Queens has led a pilot project with Columbia University Law School’s Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic to develop “Justice Tablets” for distribution to clients involved in remote proceedings who do not have access to computer devices. These tablet computers are pre-loaded with cellular data access and software pre-installed that allow clients to both communicate and share documents with LAS staff and take part in remote proceedings – with the goal of assisting clients in preparing for their cases and participating fully.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

In contrast to the traditional “referral panel” model, LAS integrates volunteers into our delivery of civil legal services. Volunteers serve “of counsel” to LAS, which remains the attorney of record. LAS screens matters, conducts CLE trainings, and mentors each case. Through internships, clinics, and helpline opportunities, LAS has increased its ability to use volunteers. Many firms also act as co-counsel on affirmative litigation matters. Two achievements are highlighted below:

Ensuring Adequate Access to Internet for Children Remote Learning in Shelters - At the end of November 2020, LAS with Milbank LLP filed a lawsuit on behalf of Coalition for the Homeless and certain individual shelter residents and their children against the City for failing to provide approximately 11,000 students residing in City shelters with access to reliable internet service — thus often leaving them unable to access school during the pandemic. While the Department of Education provided cellular-data enabled devices to students, many shelters are located in areas without reliable cellular data services. Shortly after the end of the reporting period, we secured a settlement that requires the City to substantially complete installation of wireless internet by August 31, 2021 and institute a range of interim measures and support to ensure children housed in shelters have adequate remote educational access.

Pro Bono Statistics

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<th></th>
<th>Attorneys</th>
<th>1,475 Volunteers</th>
<th>47,169 Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law Students:</td>
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<td>125 Volunteers</td>
<td>30,751 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
<td>439 Volunteers</td>
<td>3,405 Hours</td>
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</tbody>
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Sources Of Funding

- IOLA Grant: $5,250,000
- Foundations: $1,888,655
- Fundraising: $4,422,520
- State Funding: $10,659,844
- Other: $64,963,974
- Total: $87,184,993