Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) continues its strong advocacy on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers to address their critical civil legal needs. During the reporting period, we served 21,255 people citywide and closed 8,750 cases. Our primary target population included people who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and the working poor, all of whom are predominantly racial and ethnic minorities. As a result of our legal representation and advocacy, we secured more than $1,435,000 in financial benefits for our clients.

The following is summary of our program’s major achievements across our four main legal practice areas: Housing; Economic Justice; Disability and Aging Rights; and Children’s Rights. Our Housing work focused on preventing homelessness by defending tenants against eviction and homeowners against foreclosure, protecting tenants’ rights, improving living conditions for tenants, and fighting harassment and discrimination to keep people in their homes. During this reporting period, we provided robust full legal representation in court or administrative proceedings to more than 1,800 NYC tenants, and provided advice, counsel, or advocacy services to another 3,400 NYC tenants. Although there has been an eviction moratorium in place for the duration of the reporting period, proceedings to enforce tenants’ rights – primarily illegal lockout and repair cases – were allowed to proceed. During the reporting period, we handled hundreds of referrals for these types of rights-enforcement cases from NYC Human Resources Administration, the court directly, elected officials and other organizations. Our Economic Justice work focused on ensuring that New Yorkers maintained financial independence and preserved economic stability by combatting predatory products and unfair practices, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. During this reporting period, we ramped up our assistance to workers impacted by the pandemic facing challenges obtaining unemployment insurance and started a clinic to help New Yorkers file for and obtain their federal economic stimulus payments.

Our Disability and Aging Rights work focused on assisting older people and people with disabilities with housing, government benefits and other legal issues. During this reporting period, we advocated with the New York State Department of Health (DOH) to strengthen its COVID-19 response in adult homes and nursing homes, collecting directly from resident leaders information about resident deaths that the DOH refused to acknowledge, and helping residents access their economic impact payments when those funds were being stolen or improperly restricted by facilities. Finally, our Children’s Rights work focused on addressing the legal needs of kinship families taking care of children whose parents cannot and representing low-income students with disabilities to obtain educational supports. During this reporting period, we assisted kinship caregivers achieve legal permanency despite current COVID-19 family court restrictions, enabling relatives to enroll children in school and secure essential medical treatment for children whose parents died during the pandemic. And we were successful in all 19 of the educational due process complaints that went to hearing, obtaining private school tuition, independent evaluations, and compensatory services including tutoring, occupational therapy, and assistive technology devices for students with special needs.

Population Served: Low Income and Vulnerable New Yorkers
Area Served: New York City Metropolitan Area
Total Funding: $16,748,891
Total IOLA Grant: $600,000
Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 128.00
- Lawyers: 100.00
- Paralegals: 15.00
- Others: 13.00
Examples

Ms. N. contacted MFJ for help after a new landlord who purchased the building she lives in with her two children began harassing her. MFJ brought an emergency Housing Part (HP) proceeding to stop the harassment. After careful preparation to help Ms. N. provide clear yet emotional and difficult testimony at a hearing on the matter, it was established that Ms. N. faced harassment from her landlord when he: (1) sent her threatening text messages, (2) assaulted her, (3) turned the heat on in the middle of the summer, and (4) turned off her hot water for hours, requiring police intervention. Because of this behavior, MFJ was able to obtain an order directing the landlord to pay damages to Ms. N. and civil penalties to the city.

Mr. H. feared returning to El Salvador because he is a gay man from a country with a long history of harassment and violence against the LGBTQ community. Mr. H. was six years past the asylum filing deadline and would need a recent “change in circumstances" to be eligible. His attorney learned that Mr. H. had been diagnosed with HIV four months earlier, a death sentence in El Salvador due to the lack of treatment and anti-retroviral medications and refusal by many medical professionals to treat members of the LGBTQ community. Knowing that filing more than six months after such a change in personal circumstances opened the door for immigration officials to argue the delay lessens the urgency of the fear, Mr. H.’s attorney quickly prepared and submitted the application, obtaining medical documentation within weeks. After his initial interview was canceled because of the pandemic, Mr. H. finally had the opportunity to interview in June 2020 and he was granted asylum.
Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,192 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>4,122 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>1,200 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>1,870 people</td>
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Other Legal Related Services: Overview

Trainings: Community-based legal education is an integral component of all of MFJ's practice areas. During the reporting period, our attorneys and paralegals conducted virtual trainings and townhalls attended by more than 14,000 people. Workshops and other trainings were held for community organizations, elected officials and their constituents, and others on topics including housing, immigration matters, government benefits, mental health, kinship caregiving, and special education.

Online Resources: We provide free fact sheets and self-help guides in multiple languages on our website. Target populations include tenants, consumers, Medicare and Medicaid recipients, nursing and adults home residents, immigrants, seniors, and people with disabilities. During the reporting period, more than 4,700 fact sheets and guides were downloaded from our website.

Referral Service: During the reporting period, MFJ made more than 900 referrals to other organizations on matters that fall outside of our four program areas or were not legal matters.

Other Legal Related Services: Examples

Example of Training: In June 2020, staff from our Immigration Law Project, Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, and Government Benefits Project participated in a Virtual Town Hall forum with Bronx Assembly Member Catalina Cruz’s office. Staff discussed matters related to access to healthcare, public benefits, federal economic impact payments, unemployment benefits, and how these issues are impacted by immigration status, to more than 40 constituents.

Example of Online Resources: Throughout the pandemic, we created more than a dozen fact sheets covering issues related to COVID-19 which are available on our website. Topics include the economic impact payments for the general population and several targeted groups such as nursing home residents and homeless individuals, other available cash assistance and public benefits, child support services, student loans, tenants’ rights, unemployment insurance, and homeowners struggling to pay their mortgages.
Other Services

Significant Collaborations

Office of State Senator Gustavo Rivera: MFJ has built a robust relationship with Senator Rivera’s office, which covers the 33rd Senate District in the Bronx. During the reporting period, we handled more than 1,100 cases in his district and hosted multiple virtual events on tenants’ rights and unemployment issues for his constituents. Notably, an MFJ Supervising Attorney has a standing appointment with the Senator’s Deputy Chief of Staff to discuss any pressing constituent case issues.

African Communities Together (ACT): ACT is a community-based organization in Harlem that provides social services, civic engagement opportunities, and leadership training to African immigrants residing in NYC. ACT and MFJ continue to collaboratively conduct legal clinics (held virtually during this reporting period) to African immigrants seeking assistance with immigration matters. Such matters include, for example, application assistance, and advice, counsel, or representation on matters regarding Citizenship, Adjustment of Status, or Asylum claims.

NYC Department of Education District 79: MFJ partners with the City’s Alternative Schools District, which serves over 5,000 students a year, including adults, to provide legal clinics for students seeking assistance with immigration matters. In this reporting period, we began working with District 79 to provide bimonthly telephonic clinics and collaborated to ensure that prospective clients received preferred appointment timeslots in a private, confidential settings to ensure that our conversation did not disrupt their work or school schedules. Our District 79 partners help us reach out to clients and serve as an intermediary to assist with any technology issues to provide us with paperwork and documents necessary to evaluate a prospective client’s immigration case.
With respect to Board training, we conduct New Board Member Orientation when we have a critical mass of new board members. Our most recent Orientation was on March 4, 2020, presented to a class of new board members who were actively recruited in the Board’s ongoing efforts to diversify the Board with people committed to our mission. The Orientation included a history of the organization, organizational structure, practice areas, board member responsibilities, and the organization’s legal documents. We also regularly provide training to our Board at regular meetings and at special meetings, including an annual review of our most recent strategic plan.

Staff training is ongoing and multi-pronged. For new attorneys, there is an initial new-staff orientation about the history and structure of the organization, the supervisory structure and expectations, best practices in client interactions, policies and procedures and training opportunities. For both new and existing staff, training opportunities include: in-house trainings (i.e., this past year on NYC Cares, NYS Courts E-Filing, and COVID-related power of attorney), trainings in coordination with LEAP (e.g., trial practice), Practicing Law Institute trainings which we can access for free, and miscellaneous trainings and conferences. Particularly important during the reporting period was a training for MFJ staff in conducting virtual hearings from the National Institute for Trial Advocacy. All managers are required to attend Management Information Exchange (known better as MIE) trainings that cater to legal services attorney supervisors and the unique challenges they face.

Additionally, we conduct an annual training on implicit bias and other diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) issues. During this reporting period, all MFJ managers participated a web-based three-part racial justice training on issues including structural racialization, supervising across differences and mitigating bias conducted by the in Shriver Center on Poverty Law.
Impact Cases

**Pre-Foreclosure Notice Appeals**: MFJ pursued three appeals to the Second Department on the issue of mortgage servicer compliance with pre-foreclosure notice requirements. (US Bank, N.A. v. Gurung, 2019-04690, 2019-04874, 2019-05677; Bank of New York Mellon v. Brumskine, 2019-13354; US Bank, N.A. v. Chrisms-Beck, 2020-06649.) In each of these cases, the lower court found that a servicer complied with New York’s pre-foreclosure notice statute, even though the notice itself was inaccurate. **MILESTONE**: The three cases were either noticed, perfected or argued during the grant year. **IMPACT**: Taken together these cases will add increased definition to the required content of pre-foreclosure notices. MFJ hopes that the three cases will ensure that homeowners in New York are not foreclosed upon when their pre-foreclosure notices have an inaccurate list of housing counselors, demand an incorrect reinstatement amount, or fail to include mandatory language about the homeowners’ rights.

**Debora Ramirez v. 2020 Grand Realty, LLC, 20-cv-9385 (S.D.N.Y.)**: This is a federal civil rights case premised upon discrimination on the basis of disability, in violation of the Fair Housing Act (“FHA”) and New York City Human Rights Law (“NYCHRL”). The Complaint alleged that the Defendant had violated the FHA and NYCHRL by refusing to make the entrance to our client’s building wheelchair accessible and by failing to make or permit reasonable modifications to our client’s apartment. Our client has a disabled daughter who, as a result of Defendant’s conduct, was prevented from using and enjoying her home. **MILESTONE**: After commencing litigation, the Defendant agreed to make requested modifications to the apartment’s interior at its expense. It has also agreed in principle to train its staff on anti-discrimination laws, and further consented to a monetary settlement for our client that is over $35,000. **IMPACT**: For the first time in its history, this 55-unit building will soon have a wheelchair accessible entrance for all tenants with disabilities, as well as for their visitors. The Defendant’s property manager, who also must receive the training materials mandated by the settlement in principle, manages dozens of buildings in New York City. Thus, the impact of this case could be far reaching by preventing future discrimination.

**Stephens v. Borah, Goldstein, Altschuler, Nahins, & Goidel, 19-cv-11702 (S.D.N.Y.)**: This case was brought by MFJ on behalf of longtime client Eula Stephens against known landlord’s firm Borah, Goldstein for violations of the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, General Business Law § 349, and Judiciary Law § 487 by sending her rent demands and repeatedly suing her for rent arrears which she did not owe. The Defendant repeatedly sued Ms. Stephens for rent arrears owed by her Section 8 voucher provider even after this error was pointed out them in prior proceedings. This case is a continuance of MFJ’s work in Wang v. 7 Rivington, et al., Dzganiya v. Cohen Hurkin Ehrenfeld Pomerantz Tenenbaum LLP, et ano, and Urena v. Lawrence J. Silberman, PC et al. **MILESTONE**: The litigation is currently in the process of settlement the terms of which are confidential. **IMPACT**: This case serves to deter landlords and landlord firms from engaging in abusive debt collection practices against vulnerable tenants.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

During the reporting period year, 272 pro bono attorneys, law students and volunteers provided approximately 23,627 hours of service to MFJ and its clients. MFJ has two long-standing externship programs in which associates from Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP and Willkie Farr and Gallagher LLP serve four-month rotations in our housing unit. During the reporting period, the externs closed 43 cases. In addition, about 81 attorneys participate in MFJ's Pro Bono Kinship Caregiver Law Project every year, working on adoption, custody, and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status cases. Morrison & Foerster LLP and Shearman & Sterling LLP provide advice and assistance on tax issues, and Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP and Sidley Austin LLP provide assistance on special education matters.

MFJ has a longstanding and active network of pro bono partners from NYC law firms, banks and corporations who work with MFJ attorneys to leverage the resources available to comprehensively support the legal needs of low-income New Yorkers. Thirteen volunteer attorneys and three law graduates provided assistance in-house this year. MFJ hosts dozens of law students and Pro Bono Scholars every academic year, each of whom is assigned to one of our four aforementioned practice areas. Several firms also provide pro bono assistance by co-counseling class action lawsuits and other litigation with attorneys which are ongoing and will continue to be litigated over the next year, such as Paul Weiss Rifkind Wharton & Garrison, Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, and Pillsbury Winthrop, who are co-counselling with MFJ on longstanding impact litigations involving our Disability and Aging Rights clients.

Additionally, during the reporting period, pro bono partners helped launch and staff two virtual clinics. MFJ partnered with Milbank and Davis Polk to staff Stimulus Payment Virtual Clinics to assist low-income New Yorkers apply for economic impact payments using an online portal. Blank Rome staffed virtual COVID Emergency Rent Relief Clinics to assist low-income New Yorkers apply for rent vouchers and helped contact 300 current and former clients to inform them of this benefit.

Pro Bono Statistics

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<th>Attorneys:</th>
<th>193 Volunteers</th>
<th>15,675 Hours</th>
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<tr>
<td>Law Students:</td>
<td>41 Volunteers</td>
<td>7,605 Hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
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<td>347 Hours</td>
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Sources Of Funding

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>City &amp; County Funding</td>
<td>$9,768,617</td>
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<td>State Funding</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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