Overview of Achievements, 2010-2021

The Long Island Advocacy Center (LIAC) works with families, students, and individuals with disabilities by ensuring the protection of their legal rights within the public education system on Long Island. We continue to serve low-income families whose children attend public schools and experienced school related problems. An area of focus for LIAC continues to be assisting students who are considered at-risk. We provide educational advocacy and legal assistance to families and students across Long Island, to address school related problems, including but not limited to truancy/school avoidance, discipline and suspensions, residency and enrollment, Special Education services, English Language Learner services, and dropout prevention.

COVID-19 exacerbated the problems for these students as the pandemic highlighted the obstacles and poor educational outcomes for at-risk youth. During the pandemic, NYSED (New York State Education Department) enacted regulations to address the needs of students to have access to technology and to meet the needs of students with disabilities and students who are English Language Learners. LIAC worked throughout the pandemic to inform parents and students of their rights and to ensure schools were complying and meeting the needs of their students. LIAC created and presented webinars to educate and outreach to parents and community-based service providers regarding the educational rights of families and students during COVID-19. To reach as many individuals as possible during this time, LIAC created a bi-monthly newsletter highlighting any changes or updates to NYS regulations, new information regarding COVID-19 and education, and links to LIAC and community resources.

Throughout the year, LIAC assisted thousands of students and families. Our attorneys provided legal assistance and/or representation to 439 students, including:

- Four hundred eight (408) brief service; legal counsel and advice or limited action;
- Twenty-four (24) students received negotiated settlements without litigation; and
- Seven (7) students received litigated settlements.

Our education advocates provided non-litigated advocacy to seven thousand one hundred thirty (7,130) school-age children in Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Population Served: Low Income Children and Families

Area Served: Nassau and Suffolk Counties

Total Funding: $1,882,593

Total IOLA Grant: $150,000

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 18.70
- Lawyers: 4.50
- Paralegals: 11.70
- Others: 2.50
LIAC started working with JJ, an 18-year-old student, through a program with the Nassau County Office of Mental Health (OMH), in October 2019. In reviewing JJ’s records, LIAC’s advocate learned that JJ was first classified as a student with an educational disability during the previous school year when JJ was 17 years old. JJ had an IEP and received Special Education services as a student with an Emotional Disturbance. JJ had a long history of depression and mental health concerns which resulted in multiple psychiatric hospitalizations for suicidal thoughts. The impact of JJ’s mental health in high school was significant and resulted in poor school attendance. When LIAC’s advocate reviewed JJ’s current IEP, she realized JJ could not read. Throughout the IEP, there were comments such as “JJ needs to learn to decode” and “JJ needs to take responsibility for reading”. JJ’s parent told LIAC they had been asking the school district to help JJ with reading since elementary school. LIAC assisted JJ’s parent in requesting a CSE meeting to specifically discuss JJ’s deficits in reading. LIAC strongly advocated for the school to provide JJ with a specialized reading program, however, the CSE felt the problem was emotional and that JJ needed to be placed in a therapeutic placement. JJ refused the CSE’s placement recommendation and the district agreed to provide JJ with 1:1 specialized reading instruction 5 times a week- JJ excelled.

At JJ’s Annual Review CSE meeting, the reading teacher informed the district that JJ had no ability to decode and was testing at the lowest level of the reading program. Based on the reading teacher’s report, and LIAC’s advocacy, the district agreed to provide an additional 40 minutes of daily reading instruction for comprehension deficits and JJ would receive daily Extended School Year (ESY) services for 60 minutes specifically for reading. Learning to read changed JJ’s life. JJ hasn’t missed any reading sessions during school closures and remote instruction. The reading teacher noted exponential gains in decoding and a commendable commitment to learning. JJ told the reading teacher that before learning to decode ‘words were just letters’; JJ went on to say “I have bought a lot of things over the years, but only recently could I read the word “thank you” on the shopping bags.” JJ is hopeful for the future and is scheduled to graduate with a diploma in June 2021.
Other Services...

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37,749 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>18,661 people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
<td>812 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
<td>18,276 people</td>
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**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

All of our trainings include Google Slide presentations and/or handouts with information on education law and advocacy techniques. This information provides individuals who otherwise do not have access to knowledge about their rights in the education process the tools necessary to ensure that their children receive the educational services for which they are entitled. This year, a total of one thousand nine hundred forty-six (1,946) individuals including: parents, school personnel, and human service agency providers received training and subsequent materials on education law and student rights. Topics presented included (English and Spanish): *Education Rights During COVID-19, English Language Learners rights during COVID, Special Education and Discipline, Accessing Advocacy, OPWDD Eligibility Overview, Suspension Disparity and Education Equity, ELL Rights and McKinney Vento, Restorative Justice Symposium: Breaking the School to Prison Pipeline, and The Power to Change the Narrative: Opening Minds and Transforming Systems.* Additionally, LIAC continues to educate and inform families on Transitioning to Adulthood, in both English and Spanish, since school districts are often out of compliance with the requirements of IDEA and the Part 200 Regulations.

LIAC provided pro se assistance to eight hundred twelve (812) individuals via self-help materials accessed through our website, such as DASA complaint forms, NYS Education Department complaint forms, and residency and enrollment packets. We distributed sixteen thousand seven hundred fifteen (16,715) legal education materials and eighteen thousand two hundred seventy-six people (18,276) accessed self-help materials through LIAC’s online newsletter, website, and/or our social media pages.

**Other Legal Related Services: Examples**

LIAC provides Community Legal Education on an ongoing basis. Examples include:

1. **PUSHOUT: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools;** LIAC fostered an interactive panel presentation and discussion designed to explore the current climate which has resulted in the disproportionality of school discipline as it relates to Black Girls.

2. LIAC presented a webinar to a statewide audience that outlined the updated regulations for education, explained the impact school closures would have on students with disabilities and how parents could advocate for their children, and provided resources re: food insecurity, access to technology, and housing needs.

3. LIAC presented to a Nassau County SEPTA on *Special Education and COVID: Know Your Rights.*
LIAC has continued a significant collaboration with the Suffolk County Probation Department this year by providing educational advocacy and attorney representation for at-risk and court involved youth. Through our collaboration with the AFY, PINS Diversion, and JD programs, LIAC has been able to significantly impact the educational services for these youth. LIAC ensures that our students receive appropriate educational evaluations and appropriate educational services and programs. LIAC represents youth facing out of school suspensions and compels schools to provide appropriate interventions instead of excluding them from school. In addition, our work with JD cases impacts sentencing, including preventing out of home placements and prevents violations of probation. The Raise the Age legislation has led to an increase in our caseloads of JD clients this year. Similarly, LIAC collaborates with the Nassau County Department of Social Services, the lead agency for the Nassau County PINS Diversion program. LIAC is able to divert cases from Family Court by advocating for appropriate educational services and by defending students accused of school misconduct at school discipline hearings. LIAC also collaborates with the Nassau County Office of Youth Services working with families of at-risk youth. LIAC continued its collaboration with SOBLI and the Urban League to address the disparities in school discipline as it affects African American Youth. Similarly, our collaborations with MLK Center of Long Beach and Rockville Centre, EOC of Nassau County, Littig House, Choice for All, Hispanic Brotherhood of RVC, Hispanic Civic Association, Safe Center/Child Advocacy Center, Safe Haven/Homeless Youth, Long Island Progressives, Legal Aid Society, Make the Road New York, Erase Racism and STRONG/Uniondale have continued. LIAC has also been a member of the Suffolk County Access to Justice Committee of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. LIAC has been part of the planning and implementation of the Community Legal Help Project. Other ongoing collaborations this year include the Community Technical Assistance Center of New York, Families Together New York State, ACCES-VR, Asperger’s and High Functioning Autism of NYS, EAC Dispute Resolution, Empire Justice Center, Long Island Language Access Coalition, OPWDD, SEQA, NYSDRA, NYS DCDT and The Self Advocacy Association of NYS (Long Island Chapter).
Trainings

Professional Development for our staff and Board is ongoing. In May 2020, we partnered with CTAC (Community Technical Assistance Center of New York) and presented a webinar training regarding all updates and changes to NYS regulations in response to COVID-19 and school closures. As the year progressed, our staff attended webinars and conferences that focused on the impact COVID-19 had on students and school, and to keep up with the guidance coming out of the State Education and the Federal Education Departments.

Additionally, we continued to focus on issues of equity and disparate treatment within educational systems. In August 2020, LIAC hosted an online panel and interactive discussion, which featured clips of the documentary *PUSHOUT: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, in which all staff also attended and participated.

Technology

Currently, all LIAC attorneys and advocates use Chromebooks, and utilize GSuite, to safely and remotely access emails, files, and information. The transition to a cloud-based network was critical to our staff’s ability to transition seamlessly to working remotely during COVID-19. Additionally, all staff members were issued work-based iPhones to ease communication with clients and partnering agencies without compromising personal information. LIAC staff also utilized the Remind app, which allowed staff members to send quick bursts of important information to parents in a way that was easy for them to access.

LIAC creates and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that is shared electronically via email, social media, and is posted on our website, www.theliac.org. Our website continues to run quite successfully and is updated regularly with new content and resources for parents and community members on various topics such as education law, suspension, diploma options, CPSE, bullying, and much more. LIAC staff also updated the website with critical information related to COVID-19 including school closures, school reopening plans, New York State guidance, device needs, remote learning, accessing Wi-Fi, free food resources, supports for English Language Learners, updated Regents exams waivers and how that impacts graduation and so much more.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

Law Students from local law schools routinely work at LIAC as interns and externs. LIAC participates in Job Fairs at the local law schools to recruit new interns. In addition, LIAC has postings in the Career Centers at the law schools. Potential interns are interviewed by LIAC attorneys; once hired, law students assist LIAC in expanding our mission to reach greater numbers of clients. Interns are trained by LIAC attorneys in basic Education Law and have the opportunity to shadow LIAC attorneys. Under the supervision of LIAC attorneys, law students assist with research, client interviews, client follow-up, outreach, and trainings. Our law student interns also attend CSE meetings with advocates upon client approval. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 enforced restrictions and social distancing mandates, we were unable to hire any Law Student interns for the summer of 2020 as we felt the appropriate supervision could not be provided.

LIAC also hires college student interns who assist our advocates with a variety of tasks, dependent upon staff needs; although we were unable to hire any in-person college interns this past year, LIAC had two college students who interned remotely to assist with family and community outreach, community data collection, social media development, and website maintenance. In past years, LIAC has also had volunteers who are assisted by a Job Coach to do some administrative tasks such as copying, shredding, scanning, and data entry, but COVID-19 prevented our ability to hire such volunteers in 2020.

Sources Of Funding

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