Overview of Achievements

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 in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island. We continue to serve low-income families whose children attend public schools and experience 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. This year saw the return to in-person school for most students which brought with it additional obstacles for students. While most recognized the additional emotional toll on students, many were not provided with appropriate support to overcome the fallout of learning loss and emotional stress. LIAC saw an increase in school failures, truancies, and disciplinary problems across all students that we serve. LIAC continued our outreach efforts by creating and presenting webinars to educate and outreach to parents and community-based service providers regarding the educational rights of families and students during COVID-19 and the return to school.

Throughout the year, LIAC assisted thousands of students and families. Our attorneys provided legal assistance and/or representation to 938 students, including:
- 839 brief service; legal counsel and advice or limited action;
- 83 students received negotiated settlements without litigation; and
- 16 students received litigated settlements.

Population Served: Low Income Children and Families

Area Served: Nassau and Suffolk Counties

Total IOLA Grant: $150,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
- Total Staff: 20
- Lawyers: 5.5
- Paralegals: 11
- Other: 3.5
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Education Law:
A Nassau County student was repeatedly suspended and asked to go home due to their ongoing and escalating behaviors which impeded their ability to access their education and learn. LIAC’s investigation revealed that the school failed to appropriately handle current and previous suspensions and disciplinary matters as per their own code of conduct. Our agency’s advocacy and involvement resulted in the student returning to school immediately and the district providing a 1:1 aide for the student to assist with ongoing safety and behavioral issues.

The advocate attended CSE meetings with the parents to discuss the existing evaluations and to request new evaluations based on the suspicion of additional disabilities. The requests for the following were approved: a neuropsychological evaluation, an Autism Diagnostic Observation (ADOS), a Speech & Language evaluation, a Functional Behavioral Assessment, and a Psychiatric Evaluation. Obtaining these evaluations through the school district saved the parent a minimum of $7,500.
An 8th grade student was referred to the Suffolk County PINS Diversion Program for incorrigible behaviors. According to the parent, their child had been struggling and failing academically since early elementary school. The student was already a classified Special Education student but the district had no data to support the classification, the student was not making any progress toward the IEP goals, and was continuing to fail all classes. Additionally, the student was suspended almost every time they stepped foot into the building for behaviors clearly connected to their disability. The district sought an out-of-district placement for the student, which the parent was ultimately in agreement with as she felt her child was being targeted by teachers and staff.

LIAC assisted the parent in requesting updated evaluations since the student’s existing evaluations were five years old, and all recommendations for their education were based on those evaluations; additionally, LIAC assisted in obtaining new evaluations to clarify the student’s disability, specifically a neuropsychological evaluation and psychiatric evaluation.

The student started to attend their new placement weeks before the onset of COVID-19. When the new school year started in September 2020, the student was now in High School, and as such, was placed in a different alternative setting. The student did not attend a single day of school due to threats they received from students who attended their new school. The district filed multiple CPS reports on the parent throughout the 2020-2021 school year for educational neglect as they claimed she was intentionally keeping her child home from school. The parent lost their professional license and was told she may lose custody of her child.

In June 2021, the parent moved to another school district looking for a fresh start for their child. LIAC attended the new-entrant CSE meeting with the parent at the new district, and advocated for the district to request a new screening for the student at a different alternative placement; one where the student felt they would be safe, more comfortable, and better able to attend successfully. The district agreed to request a new screening and the student was accepted into a different alternative High School for the start of the 2021-2022 school year. The student has attended consistently, is passing all of their classes, has not had a single behavior or disciplinary problem, does their homework every day, and has started to talk about plans for college after high school. This was a student who repeatedly stated, as early as 8th grade, that they would drop out of high school as soon as possible because they believed they would always fail at school. LIAC was also able to assist the parent with their CPS charges by providing documentation to the Court which disputed every claim the district made against the parent. The case was closed and expunged by the Court and the parent’s professional license was reinstated.
Other Services: Overview

All of our trainings includes 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 eight hundred and eighty-seven (1,887) individuals including: parents, school personnel, and human service agency providers received training and subsequent materials on education law and student rights. Topics presented included Preparing to Transition; Truancy and PINS Diversion; Know Your Rights in the School Disciplinary Process; Educational Rights of Homeless Families; Discipline for Students with Disabilities; Parent and Advocate Perspective: Special Education and School Discipline; Code of Conduct and the Impact on School Culture; Supporting Students with Mental Health Needs; and Special Education Evaluations and Assessments: What do All Those Numbers Mean? 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 one thousand seventy-six (1,076) 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 twenty-three thousand five hundred ninety-seven (23,597) legal education materials and twenty thousand sixty-eight people (20,068) accessed self-help materials through LIAC’s online newsletter, website, and/or our social media pages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro Se Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Assistance</td>
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**46,628 People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation**
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Currently, all LIAC attorneys and advocates use Chromebooks, and utilize Google Workspace, 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. In addition, LIAC acquired a Zoom account and trained all staff on its use, thereby allowing for the greater expansion of our reach.

LIAC creates and publishes a 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. Our internal system of using Google Workspace to manage our intakes and share resources between staff has impacted our ability to be more efficient in addressing clients needs and supporting each other. We regularly use Google Meet to connect in small groups to discuss cases and office procedures.

Other Services: Trainings

Professional Development for our staff and Board is ongoing. This year we once again partnered with CTAC (Community Technical Assistance Center of New York) and presented webinars in education law. Our staff continued to attend 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. LIAC staff attends webinars and trainings that focus on marginalized populations. For example, all Staff was required to attend the webinar titled Pride, Policy and Passion: LGBTQ Issues presented by Michael Hinkley, Ph.D. on September 28, 2021. In addition, all staff attended a lunch and learn series that LIAC provided which covered the topics of Trauma Informed Practices, Restorative Justice, Transition Services, Accessing Services through the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), and Educational Evaluations and Assessments. Our attorneys attend PLI Continuing Legal Education webinars in a variety of subjects including diversity, inclusion and elimination of Bias as well as legal ethics. We participate in the local Bar Association trainings as well.
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. This year we were able to once again have law students in our office for internships.

LIAC also hires college student interns who assist our advocates with a variety of tasks, dependent upon staff needs. LIAC had a college student who interned this year to assist with general administrative tasks, 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 2021-2. We anticipate again hosting such a volunteer in the near future.

4 Law Students volunteered 480 hours

3 Other Volunteers volunteered 100 hours
Significant Collaborations

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.

This year we began a pilot program (Pre-PINS Diversion) in Suffolk County which allows LIAC to provide educational advocacy to students referred by schools to PINS Diversion before they are sent to PINS Diversion and assigned a Probation Officer. This program allows LIAC to advocate for the student’s educational rights and hopefully divert the student from moving forward to PINS Diversion.

LIAC has continued to network with other organizations state-wide that align with the mission to address the disproportionality of exclusionary school discipline in an effort to affect change in public policy. This collaboration (Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition) remains focused on proposed legislation, bringing new allies to the table, and accessing those who may help shed light on the need for State level public policy response to the issue of disparities in school discipline. Meetings are convened to strategize the implications of existing regulatory language in light of proposed statutory changes but also to recognize the current altered education landscape and how education is delivered to students. Conversations center on meeting the existing needs, recognizing budget priorities and reframing existing needs within the bandwidth of the audience’s priorities.

We have joined learning and advocacy communities with the Social Racial Equity Committee of Council of Parent Advocates and Attorneys as well as CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy). These opportunities permit us to take a deeper dive into national trends as well as NYS practices and policies in the wake of recovery aid. In addition, we have continued to maintain and build our relationship and collaboration with NYS centered organizations, both those that have direct ties to our client population and those that focus on broader advocacy initiatives.

In addition, our work with JD cases impacted the sentencing for youth which included the prevention of out-of-home placements and violations of probation. The Raise the Age legislation has led to an increase in the number of our JD clients this year.
Significant Collaborations

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 minority 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, EAC Dispute Resolution, Suffolk OMH System of Care, IDD subcommittee of the Suffolk County Division of Community Mental Hygiene Advisory Board, OPWDD, SEQA, NYSDRA, NYS DCDT and The Self Advocacy Association of NYS (Long Island Chapter).

Sources of Funding

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<th>Source</th>
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<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
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<td>State Funding</td>
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<td>Federal Funding</td>
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