

# Delivering Justice in Every Borough

Crisis as Catalyst: A Year of Turmoil and Progress



Annual Report 2021



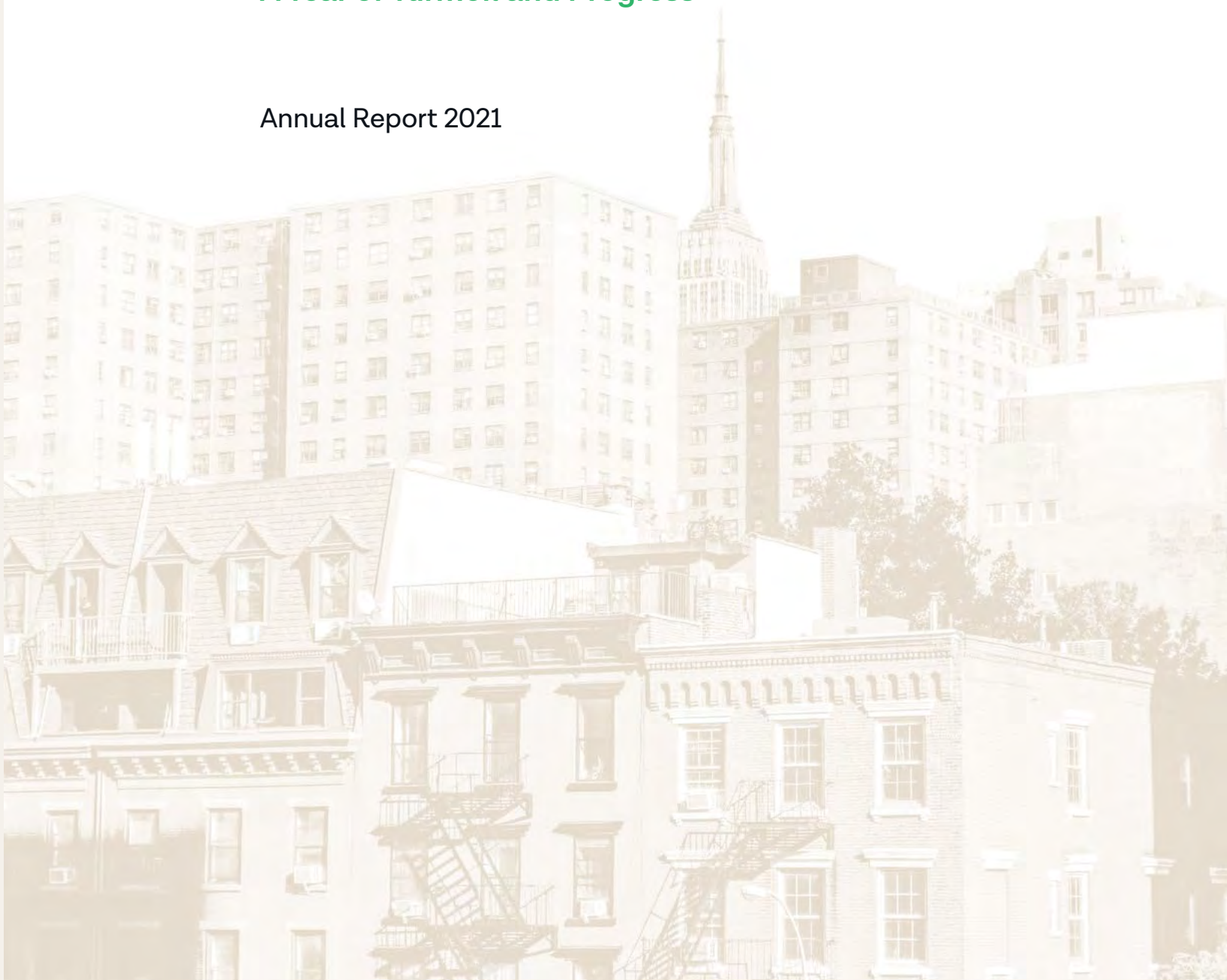
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# Delivering Justice in Every Borough

Crisis as Catalyst:  
A Year of Turmoil and Progress

Annual Report 2021







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The Legal Aid Society is built on one simple but powerful belief: that no New Yorker should be denied the right to equal justice. We seek to be a beacon of hope for New Yorkers who feel neglected—regardless of who they are, where they come from, or how they identify. From our start over 140 years ago, our growth has mirrored that of the city we serve. Today, we are proud to be the largest, most influential social justice law firm in New York City.

Our staff and attorneys deliver justice in every borough, working tirelessly to defend our clients and dismantle the hidden, systemic barriers that can prevent them from thriving. As passionate advocates for individuals and families, The Legal Aid Society is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of our City.

# Crisis as Catalyst: A Year of Turmoil and Progress

COVID-19 brought into sharp focus the challenges faced by the people we represent and the communities The Legal Aid Society serves. For New Yorkers trapped in a dehumanizing cycle of racism, economic disadvantage, and social injustice, the ramifications of the pandemic were devastating and life-altering. This crisis has been a catalyst for transformative policies and legislation intended to break that cycle. Informed by our direct representation of thousands of clients, our life-changing advocacy in this period illustrates that confronting inequity and injustice is possible where there is leadership, determination, and compassion.

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## 146K+

Individual legal matters handled by The Legal Aid Society.

## 208K+

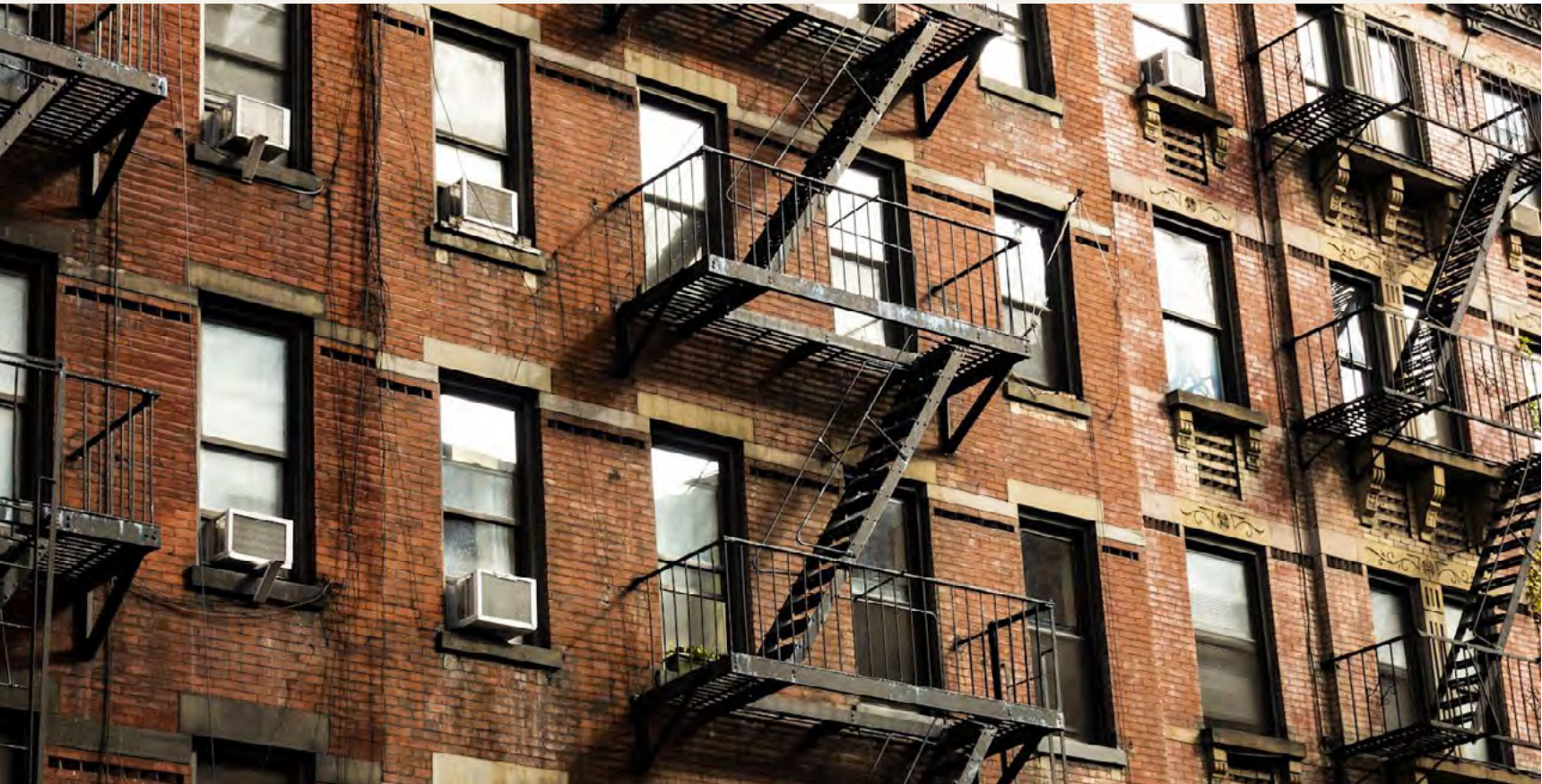
Hours of pro bono work by 2,915 legal volunteers.

## 22K+

Helpline calls answered for a range of legal issues.



# Our Leadership



## Report of the Attorney-in-Chief

The people who make up The Legal Aid Society proved again this year their stalwart commitment to the clients we serve. Our attorneys, paralegals, investigators, social workers, support, and administrative staff rose to meet the challenges of the communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are an organization driven by the simple but powerful belief that no person should be denied the right to equal justice.

Our direct representation of thousands of people informs our litigation efforts and policy advocacy. This year, we saw that advocacy in action and made significant steps towards removing the systemic barriers that have long stifled opportunity for the communities we serve.

The pandemic proved, in many areas, to be a catalyst for meaningful change for those we serve. With our guidance, New York State enacted historic parole reforms through the Less is More Act and legalized marijuana with careful consideration for sealing past criminal convictions. We fought to decarcerate Rikers Island, where a humanitarian crisis has claimed the lives of at least sixteen New Yorkers this year. We secured new, stronger eviction protections that will allow families to stay in their homes. Our advocacy and litigation helped turn the tide on harmful immigration policies from the previous administration. And the settlement of our class-action suit against the City of New York brought working WiFi to thousands of students living in homeless shelters. Because of our work New York City is a more humane place for our children, with new laws that center the humanity of our youngest clients as they navigate the foster and juvenile rights systems.

As we look to the future, The Legal Aid Society is excited to welcome Zachary W. Carter as our new Chair of the Board of Directors. Zachary brings years of public service to this position, most recently



serving as Corporation Counsel for the City of New York. His vast legal knowledge and leadership experience will serve us well at this pivotal moment. I also want to acknowledge the significant contributions of Richard J. Davis, our outgoing Chair. Rich Davis has devoted extraordinary time and passion to Legal Aid for the past twelve years, always concerned about our staff and focused on our mission. He has been an unrelenting champion for Legal Aid.

After returning to Legal Aid three years ago, I will step down in the spring of 2022. I am incredibly proud of what our staff achieves every day in pursuit of justice for our clients and the communities we serve. It has been a pleasure and privilege to serve as Attorney-in-Chief of this organization that means so much to me and to all New Yorkers.

Despite its challenges and hardships, this year illustrated that by centering our clients and their core issues, transformative change is possible. Through our legal work, our fiercely passionate staff showed every day what can be achieved through leadership, compassion and a deep commitment to justice. Yet again they proved how vital Legal Aid is to the fight for equity and justice in New York City.

**JANET SABEL**  
**ATTORNEY-IN-CHIEF AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**



# Report of the Chair of the Board

The Legal Aid Society is a New York City institution, serving our most vulnerable neighbors on a myriad of issues each and every day. As the new Chair of the Board of Directors, I am very much looking forward to this new challenge, using my experience in public service to ensure that Legal Aid clients have the best possible representation on legal matters city-wide. I began my career as an intern with Legal Aid’s Juvenile Rights Practice and it is an honor to return in this leadership role.

I have served as the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, as a judge of the Criminal Court of the City of New York and most recently as Corporation Counsel of the City of New York. I have observed first hand the fierce advocacy of Legal Aid lawyers, both in the representation of individual clients and in affirmative litigation that has revealed government operations in need of reform. I believe my years in government will provide valuable perspective on how Legal Aid can constructively engage with the City to produce the best possible results on the many issues which deeply affect the lives of our clients.

The Legal Aid Society’s Board of Directors will be an active participant in helping steer the organization towards a sustainable future. We will demand pay parity with employees of government agencies with whom we engage as partners or adversaries. We will expand the scope and reach of our fundraising efforts to ensure our critical work extends beyond our constitutionally mandated representation—work that continues to grow.

I would like to thank my predecessor Richard J. Davis for his years of leadership at Legal Aid, and tireless commitment to our staff and the communities we serve.

I would also like to acknowledge the leadership of our outgoing Attorney-in-Chief and Chief Executive Officer Janet Sabel, who guided Legal Aid through the worst months of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Janet’s accomplishments include expanding the organization’s client services, securing staff pay parity with City prosecutorial offices, modernizing the organization’s operations, and building an affirming workplace that draws on and celebrates Legal Aid’s diversity, equity and inclusion values.

The Board’s first priority is to find a worthy successor to Janet. The process has already begun, and we look forward to bringing forward the best qualified individual to fill this important role.

While COVID-19 has had a profound impact on the communities we serve, I am proud of the way our staff and leadership have worked tirelessly on behalf of our clients and of the many successes that are the result of their efforts. They have ensured that this crisis has also been a catalyst for positive change. I look forward to working across The Legal Aid Society’s practices to further our mission of ensuring all New Yorkers have access to equal justice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Z. W. Carter'.

**Zachary W. Carter**  
**CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**



# A Tribute to Richard J. Davis, Chair of the Board

Richard J. Davis has led The Legal Aid Society for the last twelve years as the Chair of the Board, never wavering in his commitment to our mission and clients. His passion for the work of The Legal Aid Society and his deep respect for the staff of Legal Aid informed his day-to-day work. Rich served on the Board of Directors for two terms, first in the early eighties and then again in early 2000. In 2004, when Legal Aid was staring down a financial crisis that threatened to interfere with our ability to carry out our mission, Rich galvanized his firm, Weil Gotshal & Manges LLP, to assist with our financial recovery and ensure we could serve the next generation of New Yorkers in need.

In January 2011, Rich was elected Chair of Legal Aid’s Board. He continued to place clients and staff first in this role, continually advancing our mission and the communities we serve. We will always be grateful for his efforts to promote diversity among our leadership team and the Board, and his dedication to seeing equity and inclusion become cornerstones of our work.

In addition to his service to our organization, Rich served as Chair of the Commission to Combat Police Corruption, Chair of Citizens’ Union, the Randall’s Island Park Alliance, and the New York City Bar Criminal Justice Council. Before joining the private bar, Rich was an Assistant United States Attorney in the Southern District, Assistant Watergate Special Prosecutor, and Assistant Secretary of the Treasury.

We are now and will always remain grateful for Rich’s years of service to New York City and the individuals and families we serve, and his commitment to the cause of equitable access to justice for all. His tireless dedication has left a lasting mark on our organization, and he will be missed.



## Officers and Board of Directors

Comprised of some of the brightest minds from law firms, law schools, corporations, and communities, our board members provide crucial guidance that strengthens our work.



### OFFICERS

**John K. Carroll**  
**PRESIDENT**

**Janet Sabel**  
**ATTORNEY-IN-CHIEF AND**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

**David Greenwald**  
**TREASURER**

**Scott Rosenberg**  
**SECRETARY AND GENERAL COUNSEL**

**Archana Jayaram**  
**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER**

**Premali Shah**  
**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

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**Zachary W. Carter**

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**Thomas M. Cerabino**

**Douglas F. Curtis**

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**Tracy Richelle High**

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## Leadership

Leaders of The Legal Aid Society are some of the most respected in their fields, offering decades of experience and perspective gained from dedicating their careers to ensuring equal justice.

**Janet Sabel**  
ATTORNEY-IN-CHIEF AND  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

**Adriene Holder**  
ATTORNEY-IN-CHARGE,  
CIVIL PRACTICE

**Tina Luongo**  
ATTORNEY-IN-CHARGE,  
CRIMINAL DEFENSE PRACTICE

**Dawne Mitchell**  
ATTORNEY-IN-CHARGE,  
JUVENILE RIGHTS PRACTICE

**Scott Rosenberg**  
SECRETARY AND GENERAL COUNSEL

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CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

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**Louis Sartori**  
DIRECTOR OF THE PRO BONO PRACTICE



# 2021 Year in Review

## Crisis as Catalyst: A Year of Turmoil and Progress

COVID-19 brought into sharp focus the challenges faced by the people we represent and the communities The Legal Aid Society serves. For New Yorkers trapped in a dehumanizing cycle of racism, economic disadvantage, and social injustice, the ramifications of the pandemic were devastating and life-altering. This crisis has been a catalyst for transformative policies and legislation intended to break that cycle. Informed by our direct representation of thousands of clients, our life-changing advocacy in this period illustrates that confronting inequity and injustice is possible where there is leadership, determination, and compassion.

The pandemic underscored the need for housing protections for New York tenants. We fought tirelessly for a federal emergency rent relief program with strong eviction protections. When the Supreme Court struck down New York State’s eviction moratorium, we crafted and helped enact a new law that would survive a legal challenge.

We demanded decarceration as City jails filled to pre-pandemic levels. As a wave of mass absenteeism by corrections officers on Rikers Island combined with a surging Delta variant created a humanitarian crisis, we filed multiple lawsuits and summoned federal emergency intervention. We also successfully lobbied Governor Hochul to sign the Less is More Act, which comprehensively reforms New York’s draconian parole laws and provided relief on Rikers.

We sued the City on behalf of students living in homeless shelters to ensure working WiFi so they could join in remote learning, an educational format forced on the city’s students because of the pandemic. As a result of our settlement, over 240 shelters housing 11,000 school-aged children now have reliable internet access.



These examples represent only a fraction of how The Legal Aid Society responded to the changing needs of our clients due to COVID-19. But we did not stop there.

Through our ongoing advocacy, the City and State approved new laws and policies that will drastically improve the lives of our clients. The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act is a national model for legalization combining criminal record expungement and investment in communities of color that have borne the brunt of prohibition. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will no longer be able to arrest clients at court without a judicial warrant, and Trump’s Public Charge rule is no more. Because of our efforts, students in foster care will finally have dedicated staff in the NYC Department of Education. New legislation taking effect will center the humanity of our youngest clients as they navigate the foster and juvenile rights systems.

In this report, we share more about the challenges we overcame and the victories we celebrated. At the core of our work are our clients. In what have been isolating times for our communities, we invite you to enjoy these bright achievements while recommitting to our mission to ensure low-income New Yorkers have quality legal representation and thrive in vital aspects of their lives.





## Crisis on Rikers, Comprehensive Parole Reform

Rikers Island has always been synonymous with violence, abuse, and failure. Today, the City's jails are experiencing a full-blown humanitarian crisis. At least sixteen New Yorkers have died in NYC Department of Correction custody this year. In addition to the spread of COVID-19, a wave of mass absenteeism of corrections staff has exacerbated long-standing problems, creating a hazardous environment for people in custody.

The Legal Aid Society has been a leading voice for decarceration in New York City, and this new crisis has amplified that call. We filed lawsuits on multiple fronts demanding basic access to medical care and transparency about conditions in the jail system's rebranded solitary confinement units. As counsel for the plaintiff class in *Nunez v. City of New York*, litigation challenging the systemic brutality by staff against incarcerated people, we petitioned for emergency intervention and secured important first steps to protect people in City jails.

We also successfully lobbied Governor Hochul to sign the Less is More Act, making it possible to release nearly 200 people held on technical parole violations. Less Is More's impact will be felt beyond the current crisis. It comprehensively reforms a draconian parole revocation system that has helped perpetuate mass incarceration for decades.

As the City's sole provider of representation in parole revocation hearings, this is a profound, positive change for our clients. While the crisis in City jails is ongoing, Less Is More will ensure fewer New Yorkers are sent there going forward.

“New York City's jails are in a full-blown humanitarian crisis. The Department of Correction has repeatedly demonstrated it cannot keep people safe, and decarceration is the only viable option.

Veronica Vela  
Prisoners' Rights Project



## Strong Protections for Tenants in Danger of Eviction

Housing remains a pillar of The Legal Aid Society’s work as the pandemic wreaks havoc on our communities and economy. Our focus is always on keeping people housed safely. In addition to individual representation, this year, we secured federal rent relief funding for New Yorkers on the brink of homelessness. At the state level, we worked to achieve a critically important eviction moratorium along with a New York-specific rent relief program that included some of the strongest tenant protections in the country.

Securing these programs and protections is only the first step. We don’t stop until our clients receive the support to which they are entitled. Though there was an infusion of over \$2 billion in federal emergency rent relief allocated to New York State, we discovered that the funding was not getting to eligible tenants. With legal challenges to New York’s eviction moratorium and the expiration date of the protections fast approaching in August 2021, we took swift action.

We called upon the New York State legislature to reconvene. As a result of our advocacy, the legislature approved a new eviction moratorium protecting tenants from eviction until January 15, 2022. Importantly, the new moratorium includes a provision protecting it against another legal challenge.

The new bill provides a lifeline to New York’s vulnerable tenants and allows additional time for the state to disburse the money to those who desperately need it. The Legal Aid Society helped families navigate the complex Emergency Rental Assistance Program application, issuing resources that included a focus on undocumented and mixed-status families.

As the pandemic continues, we have redoubled our efforts behind legislation we have long championed—the “Good Cause” eviction bill that is part of our broader effort to protect even more New Yorkers from losing their homes.



“ No one understands the housing issues faced by the communities most impacted by COVID-19 better than Legal Aid. Their guidance was indispensable as we crafted legislation that allowed New Yorkers to stay in their homes. These protections literally saved lives.

Brian Kavanagh  
New York State Senator





## Improving the Lives of New York's Children

During the past year of the continuing COVID-19 crisis, New York City's children whose families are connected to the foster care or juvenile justice systems have suffered ongoing loss and trauma. Our teams focused on finding solutions in the face of these historically unprecedented challenges.

Legal Aid's lawyers for children successfully advocated for the passage of the Preserving Family Bonds Act, which gives Family Court judges the discretion to order contact between children and their birth families after adoption. We helped pass new legislation to prohibit the inhumane use of mechanical restraints on children appearing in court. In a particularly trying year, these new laws center our clients' most basic human needs and their families.

**“ I decided I needed to re-enter foster care. Before I did, I had to make sure that my Legal Aid attorney would continue to represent me if I re-entered. She knows me and my case so well, is compassionate, and never stops fighting for me.**

**N.J.**  
Legal Aid Client

The approximately 6,000 city students who spend time in foster care during any given school year—students who are disproportionately Black and come from the city's poorest communities—face enormous educational challenges. We worked with the NYC Department of Education to prioritize homeless children and children in foster care to receive remote learning devices during the pandemic. We also successfully lobbied them to create a team dedicated to addressing the specific needs of children in foster care, a historic change in the NYC Department of Education.

Over the last year, we saw widespread disruptions to how the City operated. To respond to growing gaps in city systems, we created a rapid response team to identify issues and trends, saving hundreds of children from unnecessary harm. This team acted quickly, moving children from group settings into the care of their relatives and therapeutic foster settings. We also took extraordinary steps to ensure children in care had valued time with family despite the obstacles of the pandemic.





## WiFi Access for Students who are Homeless

The COVID-19 crisis forced all New Yorkers to rely on technology in unprecedented ways, none more profound than school-aged children. As the City moved overnight to remote learning, it failed to address the learning needs of over 11,000 school-children living in City shelters who did not have reliable internet.

The Legal Aid Society, together with pro bono partner Milbank LLP, brought a class action suit, *E.G. v. The City of New York*, to challenge the City's abdication of its mandate to educate all of New York City's young people. As a result of our litigation, the City was required to install wireless internet in over 240 shelters housing more than 11,000 school-aged children across the five boroughs enabling shelter residents to participate in remote education for the first time. With the installation complete, expanded WiFi capacity in shelters helps bridge the digital divide well beyond the pandemic. Reliable access to the internet grants families residing in shelters access to resources and public benefits and gives them the ability to search for permanent housing and employment well into the future.

The settlement also ensures that the NYC Department of Education responds promptly to technical issues with city-provided WiFi-enabled devices. Shelters are also required to provide clear signage in multiple languages about the availability of dedicated help desks and technical support.

“ They helped thousands of other students get an education during this pandemic. In December of 2020, my shelter was finally wired for my internet access... my grades skyrocketed from a C average to an A average.

Aaron M.  
Legal Aid Client



## Dismantling a Harmful Immigration Legacy

Through immigration policy advocacy and law reform litigation led by The Legal Aid Society, we rolled back some of the most heinous Trump-era immigration policies. Principle on that list was the prior administration's public charge rules, which denied immigration status through a wealth test designed to discriminate against lower-income immigrants. Legal Aid litigation brought against the Trump Administration ultimately helped spur the Biden Administration to enact policy changes that ended these damaging rules.

As intended, the rules had a chilling effect on the use of benefits in immigrant communities, creating fear that applying for public benefits—from food support to rental assistance—would lead to the denial of immigration relief and even deportation. An important component of our work moving forward is educating our clients on benefits to which they are entitled, free from the fear of repercussion.

**“ We fought for immigrant communities through impact litigation and in the trenches on a range of matters. COVID-19 made our work more difficult than ever, but our dynamic team met the challenge.**

**Hasan Shafiqullah**  
Immigration Law Unit



We also achieved progress at the state level stopping federal immigration enforcement agents from staking out New York courts and arresting undocumented immigrants. Every person has the right to appear in court without fear of immigration enforcement action. Our successful advocacy for the Protect Our Courts Act makes this fundamental proposition a reality. Now, immigrant clients in New York State can appear in court free from the threat of arrest by ICE agents.

When the United States withdrew armed forces from Afghanistan, we rose to the occasion by filing over 40 emergency humanitarian parole requests for Afghan nationals who were at risk of retaliation or persecution by the Taliban. And as the global pandemic continued to create extraordinarily dangerous carceral settings, we fought for our clients detained by ICE, securing the release of 120 individuals.





## A National Model for Marijuana Legalization

New York's groundbreaking Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act, a law The Legal Aid Society helped draft, was signed into law in March 2021. The bill provides a national model on how to shift from excessively punitive approaches to restorative social justice.

The legislation legalizes adult personal use of cannabis and drastically downgrades penalties for illegal use, eliminating many of the most harmful and destructive effects that had characterized marijuana prosecutions of otherwise law-abiding New Yorkers. It creates and regulates a legal marketplace for cannabis sales that ensures that revenue from the legal sale of marijuana is reinvested into communities targeted by prohibition.

The law also provides for the automatic expungement of hundreds of thousands of cannabis-related convictions, the vast majority of which involve Black and Latinx individuals, allowing them to move forward with their lives unencumbered by the legacy of the disastrous War on Drugs.

“ This legislation automatically expunges conviction records that have stigmatized countless young Black and Latinx New Yorkers and have impeded their access to opportunities. It delivers economic justice by ensuring that communities who have suffered the brunt of marijuana prohibition will be at the vanguard of the new industry and have the chance to reap economic gains.

Anne Oredoko  
Racial Justice Unit



# Our 2021 Impact

Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society works in courtrooms and communities to deliver justice to New Yorkers. Every year, our direct representation of thousands of individuals informs our impact litigation efforts and policy advocacy, providing us with a powerful perspective from which to begin dismantling the systemic barriers that keep our clients from thriving.

146K+

Individual legal matters handled by The Legal Aid Society.

208K+

Hours of pro bono work by 2,915 legal volunteers.

22K+

Helpline calls answered for a range of issues including access to benefits, immigration, and prisoners’ rights.

16K+

Adults vulnerable to severe complications from COVID-19 who are now eligible for better shelter placements, the result of a Legal Aid suit.

4,300+

Legal services provided by the Community Justice Unit, including rap sheet clinics, safe surrenders, and Know Your Rights events.

700

Youth clients diverted from Criminal Court to Family Court, pursuant to Raise The Age, where they will be given the chance they deserve.

3,200+

Clients who received holistic social work services, including advocacy for alternatives to incarceration and individualized sentences based on their circumstances.

11K+

School-aged children now have reliable internet access, after a settlement with the city requiring wireless installation at 240 homeless shelters.

120

Noncitizen clients freed from ICE detention through habeas petitions, bond hearings, and advocacy with ICE, since March 16, 2020, when the pandemic hit New York City.



# Our staff is our greatest asset at The Legal Aid Society.

## The Marden Awards

Without the people who dedicate themselves to the fight every day, pursuing our mission to deliver equal justice would not be possible. The Legal Aid Society’s Marden Awards celebrate our hardworking staff and honor their commitment and achievements.

The Legal Aid Society established the Orison S. Marden Awards in 1976, our centennial year, to recognize the excellence and dedication of our staff. The awards honor the memory of Orison S. Marden, a leader of the organized bar, a partner at White & Case LLP, and a former Chair of our Board of Directors. For over 40 years, Mr. Marden was a dedicated supporter of The Legal Aid Society, often traveling to the Harlem Neighborhood Office to volunteer as a pro bono attorney.

Each year, the awards are presented at our Annual Meeting. A diverse committee of managers, exempt, and union representatives select award recipients from nominations submitted by staff.

Whether on the front lines providing direct client services or working on critical office operations, this year’s recipients demonstrated efforts that went above and beyond to make a difference in the lives of our clients. Marden Awards are given to attorneys, managers, and core staff, including paralegals, social workers, investigators, and support staff.

Below are the dedicated staff members honored with our 2021 Marden Awards.

### CORE STAFF MARDEN AWARD



**Johari Commodore**  
Paralegal 2 Specialist Rikers,  
Criminal Defense Practice



**Katharine Hussung**  
Support Staff,  
Juvenile Rights Practice



**Anna Vaysleyb**  
Paralegal Casehandler,  
Civil Practice

### STAFF ATTORNEY MARDEN AWARD



**David Crow**  
Staff Attorney,  
Criminal Appeals Bureau



**Ellen Davidson**  
Staff Attorney,  
Civil Practice



**Hannah Kaplan**  
Staff Attorney,  
Juvenile Rights Practice

### MANAGER MARDEN AWARD



**Kenneth Ansley**  
Office Manager,  
Civil Practice



**Jerome Greco**  
Digital Forensics Supervising  
Attorney, Criminal Defense  
Practice



**Jamien Weddle**  
Interim Attorney-in-Charge,  
Juvenile Rights Practice

## The Sandra Scott Memorial Award

The Legal Aid Society suffered a terrible loss on July 1, 2016, when our beloved Chief Financial Officer Sandra Scott lost her valiant struggle against cancer. Her courage, integrity, and dedication serve as her legacy. The Sandra Scott Memorial Award for Excellence recognizes the dedication and outstanding achievement of a member of our non-lawyer central administrative staff.



**Joshua Perez**  
Desktop Support Manager





| THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY PRO BONO AWARDS

## 2021 Pro Bono Awards

Each year nearly 3,000 volunteers from the private bar, corporate legal departments, and law schools throughout the country generously partner with the staff of The Legal Aid Society on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers. Their advocacy helped ensure family stability, protect safe and affordable housing, and defend the rights of the accused. They fought tirelessly in demanding racial, social, and economic justice for the clients and communities we serve.



# The Honorable Jonathan Lippman Pro Bono Publico & Public Service Law Firm Award

## Milbank LLP

The Legal Aid Society is proud to recognize Milbank LLP for its exceptional pro bono commitment to our organization and clients. Under the leadership of Managing Partner and Legal Aid Board Member Scott Edelman, Pro Bono Counsel Anthony Perez Cassino, and Deputy Pro Bono Counsel Rebecca Heller, the attorneys, legal assistants, and administrative staff at Milbank have been committed partners with our team in meeting the legal needs of the less fortunate in New York City.

No firm has made more of an impact on the clients and communities served by The Legal Aid Society in the past year. Advocating on behalf of young immigrants, homeless students, and people experiencing the scourge of unlawful police behavior, the attorneys at Milbank achieved outstanding results that improved the circumstances of Legal Aid clients and thousands of New Yorkers in every borough.

As students in New York City’s shelter system struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic, Milbank made WiFi access a reality. Together with the Education Law Unit and Homeless Rights Project, Milbank filed *E.G. v. City of New York*, a federal class action demanding a resolution to the ongoing systemic problems with remote learning for students in shelters due to lack of WiFi. As a result of that suit, 240 shelters housing more than 11,000 school-aged children have been wired.

In 2020, The Legal Aid Society and our police reform partners won a substantial legislative victory in repealing Civil Rights Law 50-a, which hid police disciplinary records from public view. This past year, the Police Benevolent Association tried to stop

the City from posting misconduct records (*UFOA v. de Blasio*). At the request of the Criminal Defense Practice Special Litigation Unit, Milbank lawyers submitted an amicus in opposition to the suit in less than seven days. The turnaround illustrates Milbank’s commitment to Legal Aid and the communities we serve. They are an ally we rely on when swift action is essential. Their brief helped lead to the ultimate dismissal of the case. Increased transparency and greater accountability of officers who betray the public trust are critical components toward reforming the New York City Police Department.

The Legal Aid Society Immigration Law Unit, Public Counsel in Los Angeles, and Catholic Legal Immigration Network in Minneapolis joined Milbank as co-counsels challenging the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s final rule regarding special immigrant juveniles (SIJS). SIJS allows abandoned, abused, and neglected immigrant children to seek lawful permanent resident status and creates a pathway to U.S. citizenship. Over 6,500 immigrant youth were granted SIJS status and set on the path toward citizenship due to our legal advocacy.



## 2021 Public Interest Law Leadership Award

### Jennifer Cowan, Debevoise & Plimpton

Jennifer Cowan is recognized for her outstanding achievement overseeing the Debevoise & Plimpton pro bono program and her constant support of The Legal Aid Society and its clients.

Each year, Debevoise volunteers handle more than 800 pro bono matters for low-income clients across the country. Thanks to Jennifer’s efforts, an average of 100 Debevoise attorneys and professional staff have contributed more than 4,000 hours each year to the clients of The Legal Aid Society since 2018. Debevoise has provided critical assistance to clients in areas as diverse as immigration defense, disability advocacy, civil rights litigation, criminal appeals, and the preservation of affordable housing, and Jennifer is actively involved in many of those cases. Despite the many challenges of practicing law during a global pandemic, Jennifer and her colleagues have continued to meaningfully engage in pro bono work on behalf of our clients, including as co-counsel with Legal Aid in *Douglas v. City of New York*, an action to ensure police officers comply with a new law requiring tickets, not arrests, for low-level offenses.

In addition to her responsibilities as Pro Bono Counsel at the firm, Jennifer is a Fellow in the Sterling Network NYC, which tackles issues of economic mobility in New York City. She is also a member of the Board of the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House; an active member of the Pro Bono and Public Service Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York; a member of the Public Service Committee of the Federal Bar Council; and a member of the Government Relations Committee of Nonprofit New York.





# Our Sponsors

## Sustaining Law Firms

The Legal Aid Society is proud to acknowledge the outstanding support of the Sustaining Law Firms, whose dedication helps ensure that all New Yorkers have access to justice.

## 2021 Pro Bono Honor Roll

Volunteers from the following firms have been nominated by the staff of The Legal Aid Society for providing outstanding pro bono assistance to the clients and communities we serve.

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We are deeply grateful to these law firms, corporations, foundations, and individuals for their support of The Legal Aid Society and our core principle that no New Yorker should be denied access to justice because of poverty.

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## Trinity Church Wall Street Philanthropies

The Legal Aid Society’s approach to criminal defense representation has always been holistic, aiming to support those who interact with the justice system before, during and after their case has concluded. Through robust community outreach, pre-trial advocacy and post-conviction relief efforts, our work breaks down the barriers that perpetuate mass incarceration and stifle opportunity for those seeking a second chance.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the unsanitary and dangerous conditions of our city’s jails and prisons produced infection rates nearly four-times higher than those in the general public. As a result of the collaborative advocacy efforts of various units in our Criminal Defense Practice, we were able to secure the early release of hundreds of individuals who were at heightened risk for infection. Early release, however, is not enough, as the post-release needs of these individuals often go unmet. Individuals released often have little to call their own, and limited access to basic necessities to ensure their immediate health and safety. With the support of Trinity Church Wall Street Philanthropies, Legal Aid provided cell phones, toiletries, clothing, and other small items to recently released individuals to help them meet basic needs and ultimately rejoin their communities and their loved ones.





| DONOR STORY

## Robert C. and Elizabeth Sheehan

Bob and Beth Sheehan’s support of The Legal Aid Society, and dedication to those we serve, is unmatched in our history. Over the years, the Sheehan’s launched and supported various programs and initiatives that provided The Legal Aid Society with critical funding and partnership that would ensure access to critical legal services for multiple generations of New Yorkers.

As Executive Partner at Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP, Bob Sheehan set a standard for pro bono service and philanthropic giving, deepening the firm’s leadership-level support of The Legal Aid Society—a commitment which continues to this day. In addition to his own pro bono service, Bob serves as a trustee of the Skadden Fellowship Foundation, which supports young lawyers interested in public interest law, many of whom have come to The Legal Aid Society as fellows.

During her time on the Board, when The Legal Aid Society was experiencing financial challenges, Beth Sheehan worked on a variety of projects supporting the organization’s survival and eventual growth. For many years, Beth volunteered for various initiatives that raised funds and awareness about Legal Aid’s civil law practice, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to the ideal of equitable access to justice.

It would be hard to find two people who are more supportive of, or dedicated to, The Legal Aid Society and those we serve than Bob and Beth Sheehan.

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The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated a host of issues for the communities we serve, exposed systemic inequity, and threatened our city’s ability to recover. For renters and small business owners, the economic shutdown and the ensuing housing crisis created unprecedented levels of fear and uncertainty and widened a resource gap that endangered the livelihoods of many.

Thanks to the support of Wells Fargo & Company, The Legal Aid Society was able to increase outreach to affected individuals and communities, serving as a lifeline for New Yorkers in need. With a grant from the Wells Fargo Open for Business Fund, our Community Development Project was able to assist small business owners as they navigated each new stage of the pandemic and recovery, planning for prolonged closures, negotiating amendments to commercial leases, and helping to navigate complex government relief programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program. At the same time, tens of thousands of New Yorkers found themselves at the forefront of another housing crisis facing potential eviction. The support of Wells Fargo enabled our Housing Practice to increase dedicated staff, hold responsible agencies accountable, and provide outreach to ensure tenants were aware of and knew how to apply for emergency rent relief funds. This work allowed families throughout the five boroughs to stay safely in their homes and landlords to secure significant rent arrears.

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# Servant of Justice

The Servant of Justice Awards is The Legal Aid Society’s annual celebration of our work, our victories, and our partners. Each year, we gather together to recognize those individuals and institutions who have stood together to fight for equitable access to justice in all its forms.

Though we were not able to come together in person this May, we were honored to welcome many more of our staff, supporters, and fellow advocates to share in a remote celebration of our work. The evening’s virtual program featured stories and conversations that spoke to the impact of our work as “legal first responders” during this past year where COVID-19 and racism plagued our nation and city.

We are most appreciative of those individuals and institutions whose support sustains our work and makes success possible.

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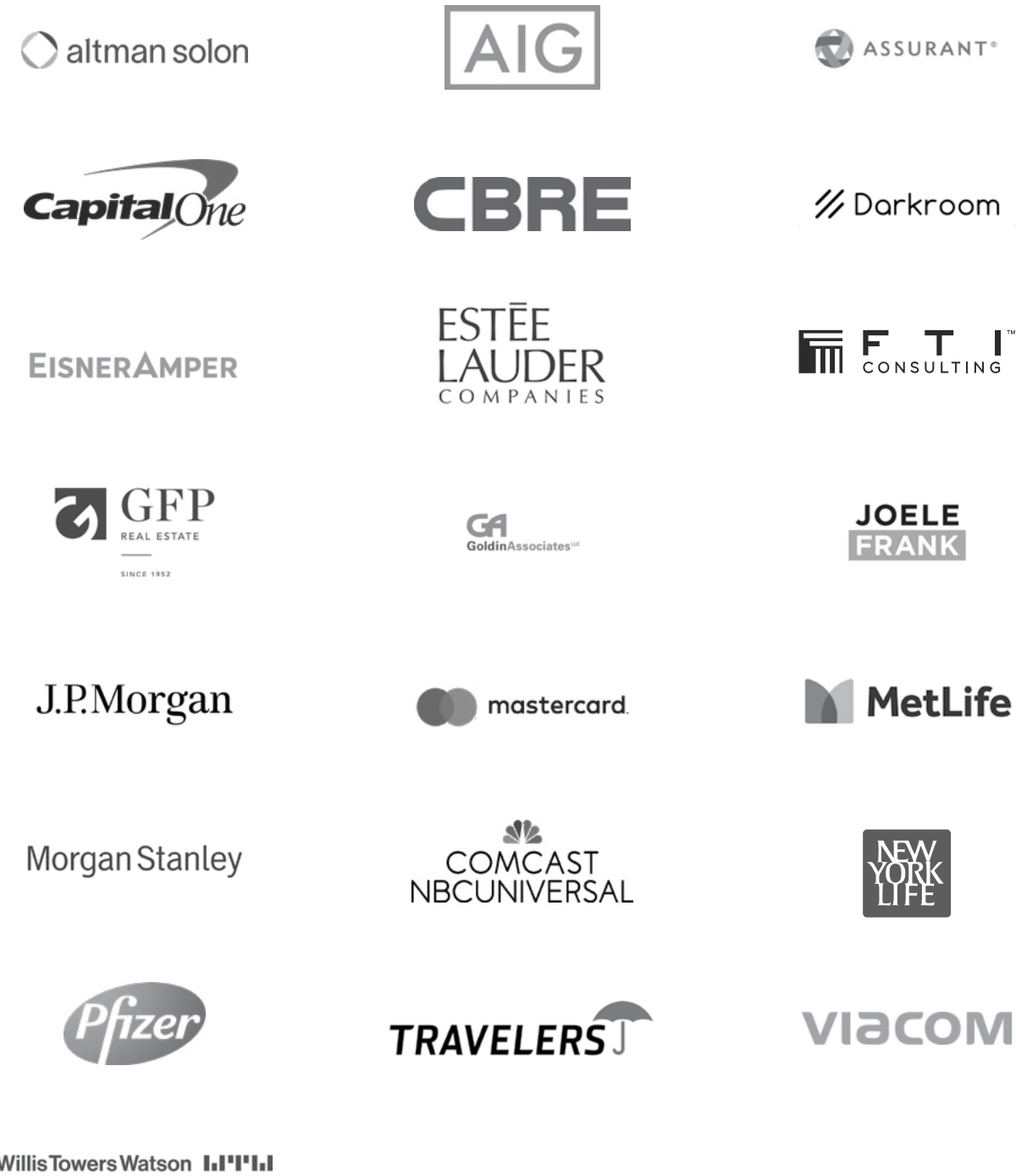
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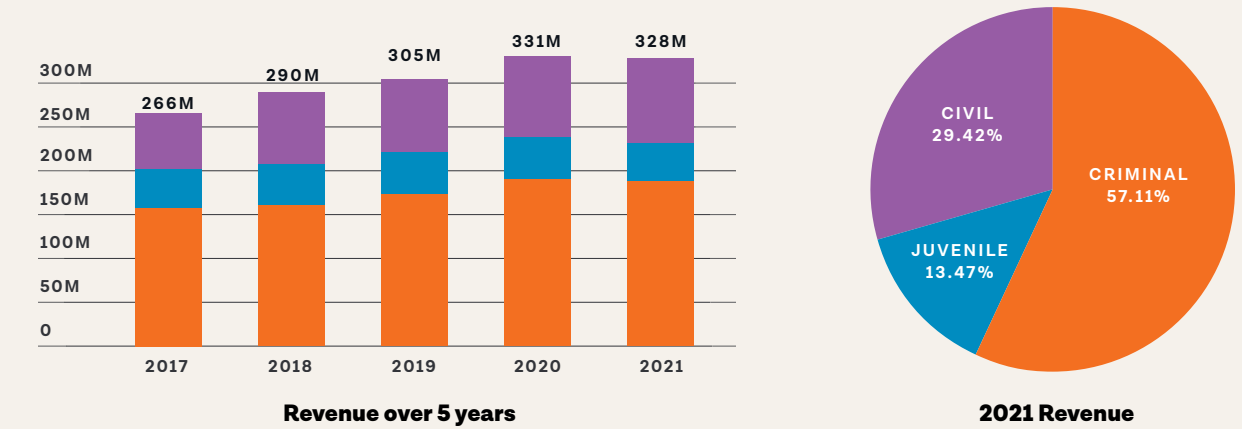
# Financial Summary

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
	2020	2021
<b>Assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	17,246,696	18,400,584
Receivables from grants and governmental contracts, and other	87,851,531	97,647,480
Investments, at fair value	20,333,650	11,268,514
Deferred charges and other assets	1,031,212	826,566
Property and equipment, at cost, net	4,239,865	3,930,825
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$130,702,954</b>	<b>\$132,073,969</b>
<b>Liabilities and Net Assets</b>		
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	12,227,252	13,132,074
Accrued payroll and other employee expenses	33,043,197	36,910,784
Program advances	-	952,521
Line of Credit	-	2,250,000
Accrued postretirement health and benefits cost	70,213,668	71,569,807
Pension liability	18,615,274	4,274,168
Deferred lease incentives and lease obligations	16,430,466	14,100,397
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>\$150,529,857</b>	<b>\$143,189,751</b>
<b>Commitments and Contingencies</b>		
<b>Net Assets</b>		
Without donor restrictions	(25,966,724)	(18,266,921)
<b>With donor restrictions</b>		
—Purpose and time restricted	4,048,798	5,050,116
—Perpetual in nature	2,091,023	2,101,023
<b>Total with donor restrictions</b>	<b>6,139,821</b>	<b>7,151,139</b>
<b>Total net asset deficiency</b>	<b>(19,826,903)</b>	<b>(11,115,782)</b>
<b>Total liabilities and net asset deficiency</b>	<b>\$130,702,954</b>	<b>\$132,073,969</b>

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REVENUES		
	2020	2021
Criminal Defense Practice	189,820,151	187,353,547
Juvenile Rights Practice	48,160,137	44,174,645
Civil Practice	76,282,732	80,345,165
Contributions (net of direct expenses related to the benefit)	15,414,814	14,887,978
Return (loss) on investments, net	907,533	1,244,937
Court awards	96,614	47,374
Other income	150,225	2,345
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$330,832,206</b>	<b>\$328,055,991</b>

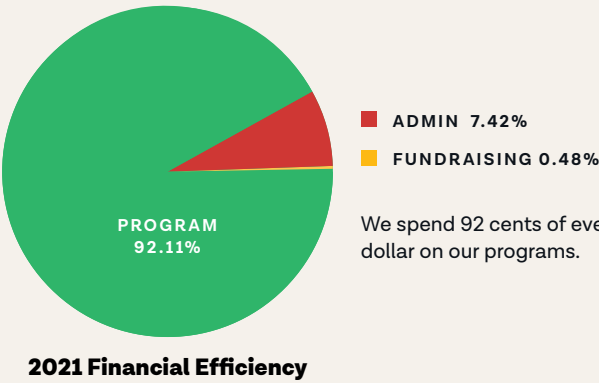
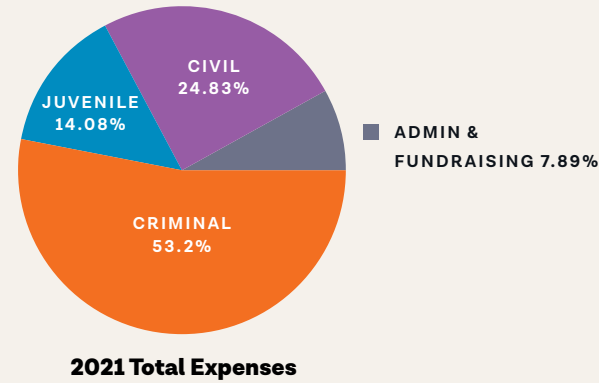


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EXPENSES

	CRIMINAL DEFENSE PRACTICE	JUVENILE RIGHTS PRACTICE	CIVIL PRACTICE	TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES	TOTAL ADMIN/ FUNDRAISING	2021 TOTAL EXPENSES	2020 TOTAL EXPENSES
Employee Expenses							
Professional staff salaries	82,691,743	22,707,399	35,583,338	140,982,480	7,226,457	148,208,937	140,591,747
Support staff salaries	23,815,643	6,293,592	10,112,441	40,221,676	4,882,436	45,104,112	44,613,142
Fringe benefits and other employee costs	53,170,028	14,456,780	22,782,790	90,409,598	5,786,977	96,196,575	88,857,047
Total employee expenses	159,677,414	43,457,771	68,478,569	271,613,754	17,895,870	289,509,624	274,061,936
Other Expenses							
Occupancy costs	11,092,129	2,443,057	6,573,828	20,109,014	1,520,213	21,629,227	22,709,864
Communications	1,191,906	314,688	662,954	2,169,548	157,009	2,326,557	1,833,665
Office operating	588,846	134,756	223,218	946,820	736,454	1,683,274	1,954,608
Purchases and leases of furniture and equipment	2,250,205	257,479	935,120	3,442,804	825,277	4,268,081	4,413,017
Law books and reference materials	578,979	118,993	553,508	1,251,480	16,034	1,267,514	1,468,944
Trial minutes	138,882	21,696	6,122	166,700	0	166,700	394,058
Cost of investigations and expert witnesses	789,532	18,191	619,493	1,427,216	7,204	1,434,420	2,044,873
Professional services	98,724	27,801	3,664,230	3,790,755	1,496,556	5,287,311	5,944,207
Transportation	305,682	8,606	43,796	358,084	4,220	362,304	971,813
Insurance	450,347	123,297	208,654	782,298	55,922	838,220	781,534
Depreciation and amortization	196,130	58,924	257,617	512,671	149,293	661,964	730,502
Other	383,579	43,339	735,395	1,162,313	3,501,504	4,663,817	4,819,681
Total other expenses	18,064,941	3,570,827	14,483,935	36,119,703	8,469,686	44,589,389	48,066,766
Total expenses, excluding other than net periodic costs	\$177,742,355	\$47,028,598	\$82,962,504	\$307,733,457	\$26,365,556	\$334,099,013	\$322,128,702



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