DC BAR FOUNDATION
WE INVEST IN JUSTICE
DCBF

655 New York Ave., NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20001
www.dcbarfoundation.org
P | 202-467-3750
F | 202-467-3753

Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants Performance Oversight Hearing

Before the Council of the District of Columbia Committee on Public Safety and the Judiciary

Testimony of Kirra L. Jarratt
The District of Columbia Bar Foundation
January 27, 2022

Introduction

Chairman Allen and Members of the Committee, my name is Kirra Jarratt. I am the Chief Executive Officer of the DC Bar Foundation (DCBF), the leading funder of civil legal aid in the District of Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Since 1977, the Foundation's mission has been to fund, support, and improve the legal representation of financially disenfranchised people and those living in vulnerable situations or otherwise underserved in the District of Columbia.

More recently, the DC Bar Foundation has focused on three things – 1) increasing coordination, cooperation, and collaboration among the various organizations that comprise the civil legal aid network, 2) prioritizing racial equity and justice, and 3) centering community voices. Our goal is to transform the civil legal aid ecosystem so that all District residents have real access to justice and effective legal representation.

I am here today to discuss the success of the Access to Justice Initiative, which includes: the Access to Justice Program (ATJ), the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP), and the DC Loan Repayment Assistance Program (DC LRAP). All of this work is made possible through OVSJG funding, and we appreciate the leadership of Director Garcia and her team.

Given the extraordinary challenges of navigating the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on District residents, we are especially grateful for the Council's historic investment of $22.5 million in FY22 funding for the Access to Justice Initiative.

With funds appropriated by Council, the DC Bar Foundation partners with our grantees, social services organizations, and other funders to address the most pressing and life-altering civil legal needs of District residents with low incomes. Especially during the pandemic, many residents have needed help navigating court and government benefits

systems as they seek justice. The ripple effects of the pandemic will impact District residents for years to come, resulting in higher than usual demand for legal assistance. Affording District residents the legal representation and service they need is fundamental to upholding our DC values.

Highlights of the Access to Justice Initiative

With this context in mind, I want to update you on the success of the Access to Justice Initiative. My testimony will focus on FY21 – the most recently completed fiscal year. Let me first provide some big picture highlights from the past year.

- Grantmaking - In January 2021, as the pandemic neared its first anniversary, the DC Bar Foundation awarded more than **$10.1 million** in grants funded by OVSJG to 31 DC legal aid organizations that provide free legal assistance to thousands of District residents with low incomes.

    - **$5.6 million** of these grants (or 55% of the total) helped **keep District residents in their homes** through eviction defense and other representation that supported affordable housing.
    - **$2.6 million** (or 26% of the total) helped **amplify the voices of those who are perhaps the most vulnerable** – children, the elderly, and immigrants facing life-changing situations, for whom navigating the justice system alone can be an insurmountable challenge.
    - **$1.9 million** (or 19% of the total) helped **protect District residents' rights in the marketplace** – for example, their rights as employees, consumers, and patients in the health care system.
    - The majority of the grants targeted residents in Wards 5, 7, and 8, where nearly two-thirds of the District's Black families live, and a concentration of families of four live on an annual income of less than $25,000.

- Prioritizing racial equity - In April 2021, the DC Bar Foundation conducted a grantee diversity survey to collect demographic data on staff, leadership, and board composition. We also commissioned racial equity assessments of the Foundation's grantmaking processes, operations, and overall structure, with the ultimate goal of developing a Racial Equity Roadmap that outlines specific steps and timelines to continue advancing DCBF's racial equity priorities within its Strategic Framework. We also continued to offer grantees a four-part training on racial equity and racial justice.
- Convening - In June 2021, the DC Bar Foundation brought together nearly 60 legal aid providers, funders, community activists, social service providers, and other stakeholders to discuss reimagining a more equitable civil justice system in the District. The DC Legal Aid Transformations Network (DC LATN) grew out of

this convening. The group will meet quarterly to increase collaboration and transform the delivery of legal aid in the District.

- Mapping - In June 2021, the Foundation conducted the first-ever mapping of the District's civil legal aid network to change outcomes so that all residents have access to justice, regardless of wealth, income, or power. This specific type of network data shows us how members of DC's civil legal aid network currently interact and where there are opportunities to increase collaboration.

- Network building - In addition to birthing the DC Legal Aid Transformations Network, whose priority is to launch a District-wide Coordinated Intake and Referral System, the Foundation also provided financial and technical support for two issue-specific networks. The Landlord-Tenant Assistance Network, composed of Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP) grantees, operates a single phone line intake for tenants facing eviction. The Family Law Learning Network surveyed clients to better understand their experiences with remote hearings during the pandemic.
- Centering community voices/participatory grantmaking - In July and August 2021, the DC Bar Foundation partnered with Bread for the City to host community listening sessions at Bread's Michelle Obama Southeast Center. Anacostia residents provided feedback on community priorities, issues facing the community, and their experience accessing legal support for those issues. A subset of the group was involved in a participatory grantmaking pilot made possible by support from the Momentum Fund. This privately-funded pilot will inform our expanded commitment to participatory grantmaking with public funds in the coming year.

Having provided this overview, I will now offer more detailed reporting on three programs under the Access to Justice Initiative that are funded through the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants: the Access to Justice Program (ATJ), the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP), and the DC Loan Repayment Assistance Program (DC LRAP).

Access to Justice Program (ATJ) Highlights

In 2007, the DC Bar Foundation began awarding grants under the Access to Justice Program (ATJ) when the DC Council designated DCBF as the administrator. ATJ supports legal assistance in three areas: (a) underserved areas, (b) housing-related matters, and (c) a shared legal services interpreter bank. Since 2007, the Foundation has administered nearly $62 million to provide critical legal assistance to underserved DC residents with low incomes. We disbursed $6.2 million in Access to Justice grants to 28 legal aid organizations in FY21.

While this funding covers many areas of civil legal aid, I want to highlight three areas

where our grantees are addressing critical challenges during the pandemic:

1. Mitigating housing issues through eviction defense and prevention. Investment in housing issues addresses a broad public concern and seeds improvement in the housing ecosystem by preserving affordable housing where residents can challenge unlawful rent increases, building conditions, and voucher terminations. Even though the eviction moratorium and StayDC were in place during the past year, eviction defense was still a necessary investment, as the following story illustrates.

> Ms. D is a single mother who came to DCBF grantee Christian Legal Aid of DC (CLADC) when her landlord began pursuing an eviction during the pandemic. Ms. D had gotten behind on rent. Because she was already bound to a consent agreement from previous legal action, hearings on her case moved forward despite the eviction moratorium. Not only was she asked to leave, but the back rent she was said to owe was also much higher than it should have been because her household's income was not reported accurately. CLADC was able to step in and renegotiate the consent agreement on behalf of Ms. D, keeping Ms. D and her seven children in their home. The amount she owed was also recalculated, and the payment schedule was revised to a workable amount.

2. Securing employment and other public benefits. Between March 13, 2020, and September 27, 2021, the District of Columbia Department of Employment Services received 250,178 claims for unemployment benefits.[1]

More than 13,000 DC unemployment claimants did not receive their expected payments last spring as the City was adjusting to a change in federal benefits.[2] DCBF grantees provided much-needed assistance to clients seeking to navigate a challenging unemployment compensation system – complicated by the fact that many District residents work in Virginia or Maryland. DCBF grantee Washington Lawyers' Committee (WLC) shared the following story.

> Federal unemployment benefits were expanded due to the unprecedented job loss related to COVID-19. Workers whose most recent employment was outside of DC must apply for benefits in that state before receiving the pandemic-related extension. Like many DC residents who live in DC and work in another state, Ms. M worked in both Maryland and DC before being laid off at the pandemic's beginning. Since she had most recently worked in Maryland, she first applied in Maryland and received unemployment benefits in March 2020. After her first 26 weeks of benefits, she applied for the pandemic-related extension in Maryland. In November 2020, Maryland denied Ms. M the pandemic extension of benefits. It issued her an overpayment notice, demanding that she pay Maryland back for the extended benefits they had already provided her.

---

[1] District of Columbia Department of Employment Services website, accessed January 26, 2022
[2] *The Washington Post*, "More than 13,000 District unemployment claimants missed payments this spring," May 12, 2021

Ms. M, who relied on unemployment benefits to survive, then spent months trying to navigate the bureaucracy between the DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) and the Maryland Department of Labor (MD DLLR) to reinstate her benefits. Each time she spoke to the MD DLLR, they claimed that she must apply in DC. However, each time she talked to a DOES representative, they incorrectly told her that she did not qualify for benefits in DC. Compounding her frustration, Ms. M could not find anyone who would assist her in this cross-jurisdictional problem from either government office. She described dealing with both offices as approaching "roadblock after roadblock." She reported that the stress of dealing with these offices significantly worsened her mental health, interfered with her ability to seek new employment, and caused her to take on significant debt.

Ms. M then contacted WLC's Workers' Rights Clinic for assistance in June 2021. By advocating on her behalf to DOES and MD DLLR, the Workers' Rights Clinic helped Ms. M receive the benefits she was entitled to in DC. The benefits that the Clinic ultimately helped Ms. M. secure were backdated to November 2020, when MD DLLR had initially denied her pandemic unemployment extension.

DCBF grantees also play a vital role in helping residents navigate safety net benefits like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and Medicaid. Residents especially need legal assistance when the benefit programs inappropriately deny or terminate these benefits. These benefits have been more critical than ever during the pandemic as residents rely on them to feed their families and stay healthy.

3. Supporting victims of domestic violence. During the pandemic, grantees have improved access to court systems and safety-net supports for residents who are survivors of domestic abuse. The need for services has skyrocketed during COVID, and the cases can be time-consuming and protracted, as the following case illustrates.

Several years ago, Ms. G approached our grantee Bread for the City (BFTC) for help obtaining a Civil Protection Order (CPO) against her abusive ex-partner, Mr. M. He had a long history of violence against Ms. G, including strangling her, beating her with his fists and locking her in a room. A BFTC attorney represented Ms. G at her CPO trial, and the court granted her CPO after a contested hearing. The CPO's temporary custody and visitation provisions gave Ms. G sole custody.

The same BFTC attorney represented Ms. G in her permanent custody case against Mr. M. The custody case took over three years of litigation, culminating in a custody order in 2021. Ms. G felt that Mr. M should have a relationship with his son. Her BFTC attorney filed a new motion to modify the temporary custody order each time Ms. G felt an increased level of access could safely occur. Unfortunately, problems arose with Mr. M violating the CPO during exchanges of the child, including shoving Ms. G and throwing a bottle at her. The BFTC attorney had the temporary order

modified by the court to add more protection for Ms. G. After another contested hearing, the BFTC attorney also helped Ms. G obtain an extension of her CPO for another year. The BFTC attorney also responded to several problems created by Mr. M. For instance, early in the pandemic, Mr. M became ill and told Ms. G that he believed he had contracted COVID. He insisted that he had a right to visit his child as ordered and was unwilling to postpone the visit. The attorney filed an emergency motion to suspend Mr. M's visits when experiencing COVID symptoms and for the subsequent quarantine period. The judge granted the request.

Ultimately, the parties arrived at an agreement that gave Ms. G primary physical custody of the child and tie-breaking authority if the parties could not agree on something involving legal custody. The judge granted the parties' proposed custody order after hearing reassurances that Ms. G would be protected from any violence by Mr. M during exchanges. Ms. G was happy to resolve the custody matter without a trial. She expressed that she felt very supported by the Bread for the City attorney, who assisted her throughout the three-year process.

Trends and New developments

Increasingly, the DC Bar Foundation understands its role as a catalyst for systems change – transforming the District's civil legal aid ecosystem by increasing coordination and collaboration among many stakeholders. There are three developments over the past year that I would like to highlight, each of which is made possible in large part because of the public funding support.

1. Centering community voices. Changing systems begins by listening carefully to the persons most impacted by those systems. The DC Bar Foundation is centering community voices in multiple ways.

- To guide systems design - We held several client focus groups to hear community input on the design of a Coordinated Intake and Referral System that will connect all legal aid providers in the District and make it easier for residents to find and receive legal help.
- To inform our grantmaking - Participatory grantmaking is a philanthropic approach that engages constituencies in the grantmaking process. As mentioned above, in collaboration with grantee Bread for the City, we launched a successful participatory grantmaking program in Anacostia in July 2021. Our vision is to increasingly work with District residents to co-design community-based responses and programs and make decisions regarding grant funding, consistent with the statutory requirements of our funding.
- To understand how court processes can be improved - From July through November 2021, our consultant NPC Research worked with the DCBF-supported Family Law Learning Network to survey clients about their experiences with remote hearings during the pandemic. Overall, both litigants and their attorneys

saw a considerable benefit to remote hearings and agreed that virtual platforms increased access and reduced barriers for many low-income litigants. The full report, "Litigant Perspectives on Remote Hearings in Family Law Cases," was distributed broadly and is available online at this link.

This type of community engagement is in line with our strategic framework, which calls for us to "engage the larger community to identify community priorities."

2. Convening and mapping the network. In June 2021, the DC Bar Foundation convened nearly 60 legal aid providers, funders, community activists, social service providers, and other stakeholders to reimagine our City's more equitable civil justice system. The DC Legal Aid Transformations Network (DC LATN) emerged from this convening with the purpose of "advancing a user-centered system, grounded in wellbeing, anti-racism, and anti-poverty." The group meets quarterly to increase collaboration and transform the delivery of legal aid in the District. Launching a Coordinated Intake and Referral System is DC LATN's highest priority. A first-ever mapping exercise of DC's civil legal aid network highlighted how members currently interact and where there are opportunities to increase collaboration.

3. Coordinated Intake and Referral System. In FY21, the DC Bar Foundation began working with a consultant with expertise in developing coordinated legal aid systems in other parts of the country to research our community and past efforts and recommend a strategy.

The overarching goal of the system we hope to create is to streamline access to services by allowing District residents to make one contact via phone or the internet to find an appropriate legal services provider and avoid having to call multiple organizations or navigate the maze of eligibility criteria. The system will complement – not replace – existing intake procedures at legal services organizations.

The DC Bar Foundation envisions a future where access to civil legal aid does not depend on prior knowledge of the civil legal system, political power, or financial and other resources. To streamline legal services access for DC residents, we understand that we will have to increase coordination among civil legal aid providers.

A complete list of FY21 ATJ awards is attached to my testimony.

Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP) Highlights

The Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP) was established by the Council of the District of Columbia through the Expanding Access to Justice Amendment Act of 2017, which designates the DC Bar Foundation as the administrator. The program was formally launched with initial funding to four organizations in January 2018, and two more organizations joined in July 2018. The DC Bar Foundation has administered more

than $18 million in CLCPP funding since the program's inception. We disbursed $3.935 million in grants to the six CLCPP organizations in FY21.

The pandemic has created many challenges. But the civil legal aid community, primarily through DCBF-funded projects, stepped up to quickly pivot operations and legal aid services to address the ever-changing needs of DC residents facing housing insecurity. I want to share three highlights and learnings from the past year.

1. We now have detailed demographic data about tenants who receive CLCPP services. Despite the changing numbers of cases closed over the period we have collected data (August 2019 – August 2021), the demographic characteristics of tenants seeking legal assistance remained broadly consistent.

- **Gender and age.** Of the 3,731 tenants served by the CLCPP since August 2019, 67% were women, and 22% were 60 years old or older. By comparison, 2019 American Community Survey data indicate that 53% of DC's population is female, and 17% are over 60.

- **Race and ethnicity.** Additionally, 82% identified as Black or African American, while the 2019 American Community Survey indicates that 47% of DC's population is Black. Eight percent identified as Hispanic or Latinx.

  Previous evaluation findings documented a change in the racial distribution of CLCPP clients coinciding with the pandemic. Specifically, in the eight months before the pandemic, 85% of clients identified as Black and 3% as White, contrasted with eight months during the pandemic, when 77% of clients identified as Black and 9% as White. The general conclusion was that the pandemic-related economic downturn had put a more diverse cross-section of renters at risk of eviction. While this is true and this change was statistically significant, it was not substantial enough to alter the long-standing racial bias seen among tenants seeking legal help with an eviction. In short, even though more White District renters were at risk of eviction than before COVID-19, eviction risk was still overwhelmingly and disproportionately carried by Black District residents.

- **Household income.** Since the start of CLCPP, roughly three-quarters of clients have had household incomes below 100% of FPG ($26,500 for a family of four)[3] – an indication of extremely low incomes. (The DC statute requires that tenants' household incomes cannot be more than 200% of the Federal Poverty or $53,000 for a family of four.) According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in DC in 2021 was $1,765.[4] The monthly income necessary to afford this rental rate without

[3] Office for the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation data, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, accessed January 26, 2022
[4] Out of Reach 2021: District of Columbia, National Low Income Housing Coalition website, accessed January 26, 2022

experiencing a rental cost burden was $5,883. In contrast, the median household income among all CLCPP clients was $1,040 per month, equivalent to an annual income of $12,480. Before the pandemic, around 13% of clients reported no income. However, from April to June 2020, this figure jumped to 29%, which aligns with news reports of mass layoffs and job loss during this time.

2. Tenants who get CLCPP help are more likely to have a favorable legal outcome. Across the 212 eviction cases with outcome data from January – August 2021, 74% of tenants retained possession of the unit, and possession reverted to the landlord in 26% of cases. We consider both results to be favorable outcomes because keeping possession of the unit is not always a possible or desired outcome.

In many cases where possession reverted to the landlord, the tenant agreed to leave the property or negotiated a departure settlement that mitigated the legal and financial consequences of an eviction and gave tenants more agency over the circumstances of their move. Not all tenants fought to stay in their homes. Some tenants wished to leave the unit but still needed legal assistance to resolve their case under favorable terms by reducing the financial burden of rent obligations or avoiding the ongoing challenges that an eviction judgment presents.

Understanding whether the tenant successfully responded to the landlord's eviction complaint requires a more nuanced perspective on how possession was determined. To this end, the following analyses explore how the possession outcome affected the tenant by incorporating the method of case resolution, the tenants' desire to stay in the rental unit, and the terms of party settlements.

- When landlords regained possession, it was often because of a settlement agreement (42% of landlord possessions) in which tenants may have agreed to move in exchange for other benefits such as reduced rental debt or because the landlord dismissed the case after the tenant left or decided to leave (29%). Only 22% of cases ending in landlord possession – 7% of overall cases with complaints and outcome data – resulted from an unfavorable ruling against the tenant, such as a default judgment or judgment after trial, that put them at risk for a lockout.

- When tenants retained possession, they generally did so outright due to landlord dismissal (54%), which often happened because tenants repaid rent or cured violations, or under the terms of a negotiated settlement (31%), which allowed tenants to stay if they complied with specific terms. Ten percent of tenant possessions ended with a ruling against the landlord.

Taken together, these results indicate that only a tiny percentage of cases end with an unfavorable ruling against the tenant. Even when possession of the property reverts to a landlord, there are frequently additional circumstances that, if not aligned with the tenant's desire to remain in the unit, soften the impact of being unhoused.

3. CLCPP organizations are providing much more than direct legal services. In addition to providing direct legal services to tenants, the CLCPP network partners undertook several important activities to strengthen the program and adapt to the changing circumstances for tenants.

- CLCPP partners expanded and refined the Landlord-Tenant Legal Assistance Network (LTLAN). The LTLAN operates a single phone line for low-income litigants to call, Monday–Friday from 9 a.m.–5 p.m., staffed by an intake specialist who collects basic eligibility information. If a client is eligible for CLCPP services, the data is entered into the shared database for triage and referral among the partners. Staff from one of the CLCPP partners then contacts the caller to conduct a more thorough case assessment and legal assistance.

- CLCPP partners expanded outreach to pre-complaint tenants by advocating for the DC Superior Court to include the LTLAN phone number on eviction notices and court summonses sent to tenants. As part of this effort, tenants saw the LTLAN contact information on pre-court eviction notices that landlords send to tenants. Further, the Court agreed to announce the LTLAN at the start of all hearings. Taken together, these efforts to increase awareness about the LTLAN aim to give tenants seeking legal advice and representation greater access to the CLCPP services.

- CLCPP partners developed new and continued previous modes of community outreach. CLCPP partners knew that tenants were likely unaware of or misunderstood the emergency legislation's details, including the rules about the eviction moratorium and other renter protections that might apply to them. With the courthouse closed, the primary point of service access was removed, and many tenants may not have known where to look for help. As a result, CLCPP partners emphasized tenant outreach and community education. This outreach included sending postcards with tenants' rights information to buildings where tenants may be facing eviction; holding outreach sessions with tenant associations, tenant organizers, and other community service organizations via conference call; and utilizing social media, mail, and community partners to educate the public.

- CLCPP partners conducted important outreach and education to connect tenants with emergency rental assistance funds. Following the launch of the new STAY DC rental assistance program in May 2021, CLCPP partners collaborated with a DC law firm to send outreach letters to tenants with pending eviction cases. These letters were intended to connect with tenants who needed rental assistance to avoid eviction and provide them with information about the new resource. Over 900 letters were sent to tenants, with more than 600 of those letters mailed to tenants with ongoing litigation and over 300 sent to tenants who had an eviction judgment against them but may still have been able to avoid

eviction by catching up on back rent. The DC Superior Court helped identify eligible tenants in this effort.

- In addition to this direct outreach, CLCPP partners continued to engage in various forms of community education, including partnering with tenant organizers, mutual aid organizations, and other community-based groups to provide general information on eviction protections, what to expect when those protections expire, and available resources (e.g., LTLAN, STAY DC). The CLCPP partners educated tenant organizers about the LTLAN to bring this information to tenants as they canvassed neighborhoods; in some instances, canvassers helped the tenants fill out the online LTLAN intake form.

- CLCPP organizations collaborated to train pro bono attorneys. CLCPP organizations regularly use pro bono attorneys, referring cases for pro bono representation whenever possible. Anticipating an increase of eviction filings after the moratorium expired, the partners recognized how pro bono attorneys might be a critical resource to help meet this need. To prepare the pro bono attorneys for an anticipated increase in eviction cases, the DC Bar Pro Bono Center hosted a five-part eviction law and defense training series in May and June 2021. Other CLCPP partners supported this training by leading sessions during the series. Overall, 145 pro bono attorneys received this training. The CLCPP partners have also begun working on a plan to reconnect with previously trained pro bono attorneys and their law firms. As part of this planning effort, the CLCPP has engaged with 20 private firms and the federal government agencies participating in the Housing Right to Counsel Project.

You can read the most recent CLCPP Annual Evaluation Report at this link. A complete list of FY21 CLCPP awards is attached to my testimony.

DC Loan Repayment Assistance Program (DC LRAP) Highlights

DCBF administers the DC Loan Repayment Assistance Program (DC LRAP), which provides each attorney who receives an LRAP award with a one-year, interest-free, forgivable loan of up to $12,000. Established by the Council in 2007, DC LRAP supports legal aid attorneys working at nonprofit legal services providers, making less than $90,000, and living in DC. We believe that when DC civil legal aid can attract and keep skilled DC lawyers, more of our most vulnerable neighbors get the representation they need. Since 2007, the Foundation has forgiven more than $3 million in loans for more than 300 legal aid attorneys. LRAP applicants typically have salaries that range from $45,000 to $89,000, with an average debt of $139,000.

Over the past year, we have explored what improvements could be made to DC LRAP. As a result, we have made significant changes. First, we contracted with Fosterus, a nonprofit with broad expertise in LRAP, to administer DC LRAP. Second, we made

changes to the process that we believe will make it easier for attorneys to take advantage of these forgivable loans.

The most significant of these is moving from an annual application process dependent on legal aid attorneys providing information to a rolling enrollment process dependent on legal aid employers providing information. This change allows legal aid attorneys to take advantage of LRAP forgivable loans soon after hiring, rather than waiting for a once-a-year application. It also lifts the administrative burden from LRAP recipients because their employers provide monthly employment certification, and loans are paid directly to lenders.

With these changes that make it easier for attorneys to take advantage of DC LRAP forgivable loans, we hope that more attorneys will consider employment with a legal aid organization, resulting in greater representation for those in need of these services.

Continued Due Diligence

The DC Bar Foundation has been an effective, efficient, and responsible fiscal partner. Following statutory requirements, the Foundation is audited every year. We are currently undergoing our FY21 audit, which will be completed in February. We consistently receive a clean audit and have never been found to have any problems, irregularities, or concerns with managing these public funds.

All applicants for subgrant awards must submit financial information used in performing a risk assessment based on financial condition, liquidity, and other measures. These risk assessments help DCBF identify grantees who may require additional support or technical assistance.

Subawards delineate the post-award reporting and monitoring requirements. During the first 60 days of the subawards, DCBF holds financial compliance training for subgrantees covering Uniform Guidance and District award compliance requirements and has follow-up discussions with grantees requesting additional assistance.

Post-award, subgrantees are required to provide quarterly financial reports on the expenditure of funds and semi-annual program reports monitoring progress against subaward milestones. We conduct financial site visits (now virtual) with select subgrantees to review supporting documentation for reported expenditures, and we investigate and resolve any concerns.

We conduct site visits with all new subgrantees deemed moderate or high risk during the initial grant period. We conduct site visits with these same grantees the following award year when necessary. All subgrantees are subject to a site visit at least once every four years. Monitoring continues between site visits by reviewing the quarterly financial and semi-annual program reports and other grantee interactions.

I can confidently say that we maintain the highest standards of integrity and transparency in all our work and the strategic allocation of these public resources.

2021 and Beyond

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight some of the DC Bar Foundation's accomplishments made possible with funds awarded by OVSGJ.

This has been a remarkable year. The DC Bar Foundation has made significant strides in strengthening the District's civil legal aid ecosystem. Legal aid providers, social services agencies, District agencies, funders, and others collaborate efficiently and effectively as never before to benefit the community. None of this would be possible without the continued generous funding and support of the DC Council.

The DC Bar Foundation pledges to do even more to encourage collaboration, center community voices, and prioritize racial equity and justice in our work in the coming year. Our ultimate goal is to transform the District's civil legal aid network so that all residents have a fair and equal legal experience.

Again, thank you for entrusting the DC Bar Foundation with the funds to carry out this essential work.

DC BAR FOUNDATION
WE INVEST IN JUSTICE
DCBF

655 New York Ave., NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20001
www.dcbarfoundation.org
P | 202-467-3750
F | 202-467-3753

FY2021 Grantees

Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program

The Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program funds are awarded exclusively to DC legal aid organizations that provide legal representation for DC tenants with low incomes facing eviction proceedings in the landlord-tenant court in Washington, DC.

1. Housing Preservation Project - $1,100,000

The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia provides Attorneys of the Day at the courthouse for eviction defense, as part of the court-based eviction defense collaboration with Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Bread for the City, Rising for Justice, and DC Bar Pro Bono Center. Attorneys focus on tenants living in subsidized housing and facing eviction to preserve the few remaining subsidies in DC.

2. Eviction Defense Practice - $410,000

The DC Bar Pro Bono Center uses full-time attorneys for its Landlord-Tenant Resource Center, which serves as one of the main entry points for many DC residents with low incomes facing eviction. The DC Bar Pro Bono Center has assisted DC residents in eviction defense cases at the Landlord-Tenant Court since 2008 through its Landlord-Tenant Resource Center, supplemented by rotating volunteer attorneys.

3. Eviction Prevention Initiative - $1,075,000

Rising for Justice (RFJ) places several housing attorneys in DC Superior Court to provide tenants with low incomes with free-same day representation in eviction cases. These attorneys also formally collaborate with Neighborhood Legal Services Program on a referral basis and other court-based providers. RFJ continues to leverage its impact by using law students to conduct outreach to DC residents with low incomes facing eviction and assisting with eviction cases.

4. Creating Partnerships & Leveraging Resources to Prevent Eviction - $410,000

Neighborhood Legal Services Program (NLSP) accepts referrals from the court-based eviction defense projects and conducts intake near properties with building-wide evictions. NLSP has extensive community-based experience in providing housing-related legal assistance to DC residents with low incomes, which will enhance the impact of court-based eviction defense projects.

5. Housing Preservation Project - $655,000

Bread for the City provides same-day representation to DC residents with low incomes facing eviction at DC Superior Court's Landlord-Tenant Court. The attorneys also conduct outreach to tenants living in subsidized housing and facing eviction. The project is part of the court-based eviction defense collaboration with Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, Rising for Justice, and DC Bar Pro Bono Center.

6. Housing Preservation Project - $485,000

Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) assists elderly residents (60+) with low incomes in eviction defense cases at the Landlord-Tenant Court. The project's attorneys are based at the courthouse and collaborate with the other court-based eviction defense projects. LCE also conducts pre-court outreach to tenants living in subsidized housing and facing eviction.

Access to Justice Grants Program

The Access to Justice Grants Program funds projects in three categories: (a) a shared legal services interpreter bank, (b) underserved areas, and (c) housing-related matters.

Civil Issues in Criminal Matters - $449,000

1. Civil Protection Order Project (CPO) - $40,000

Rising for Justice represents individuals facing a civil protection order and related family law matters to increase perceptions of fairness and provide a voice to this population. Attorneys provide same-day advice, mediation support, and representation to respondents.

2. DC Focus Project - $30,000

The Mid-Atlantic Innocence Project's DC Focus Project investigates and litigates cases of DC prisoners who have been convicted of a crime that they may not have committed. Compared to other states, DC prisoners lack two traditional remedies for innocent prisoners: ineffective assistance of counsel claims at post-conviction and access to federal habeas review.

3. DC Jail and Prison Advocacy Project - $180,000

Disability Rights DC at University Legal Services (ULS) serves as DC's federally mandated protection and advocacy organization charged with working for the rights of people with disabilities. ULS attorneys provide legal aid and direct advocacy for inmates with mental health disabilities in the DC Jail and other DC correctional facilities. Their attorneys work closely with the DC Department of Corrections, the DC Department of Mental Health, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons on behalf of DC prisoners.

4. DC Legal Connect - $65,000

Christian Legal Aid of the District of Columbia staffs its monthly intake center based at Central Union Mission, a men's homeless shelter and social service agency in Ward 6. Staff attorneys and volunteer attorneys staff the clinic, providing legal assistance in various matters such as housing, public benefits, expungements, estate planning, and family law. About 50 percent of the clinic's clients are homeless, while the remainder are residents with low incomes from Wards 6, 7, and 8.

5. Removing Barriers to Opportunity Project - $89,000

Through the Expungement Clinic, Rising for Justice provides legal assistance to District residents with low incomes who have a criminal arrest, charge, or conviction that they wish to seal. Even if they were never charged for or convicted of a crime, individuals might have a criminal record, making it more challenging to secure a job or housing, pursue education, and receive public assistance. The Expungement Clinic's attorneys work closely with eligible District residents with low incomes to seal their records and increase their chance at securing the essential components of a prosperous life.

6. Victim Legal Network of DC (VLNDC) - $45,000

The Network for Victim Recovery of DC focuses on empowering victims to achieve survivor-defined justice by addressing their holistic needs (including social, medical, and mental health services) through a collaborative approach encompassing advocacy, case management, and legal services. Funding supports the Victim Legal Network of DC's expansion to reach more clients by adding a new bilingual attorney to serve as an entry point for crime victims seeking legal assistance.

Consumer Law – $817,000

7. Consumer Law Court-Based Legal Services Project - $70,000

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia provides access to same-day representation in debt collection cases to protect the limited income and assets of DC residents with low incomes. The project places legal aid attorneys at DC Superior Court to serve pro se litigants with low incomes in debt collection matters before the Small Claims Court and the civil collections calendar.

8. Probate & Estate Planning (PEP) - $50,000

Legal Counsel for the Elderly (LCE) assists DC seniors in preparing and filing wills and other pertinent documents necessary to open probate. The Project will represent clients in court proceedings related to the probate estates. The Project will untangle titles to homes through the probate process, prepare new deeds titling real property, and file deeds with the Office of Recorder of Deeds.

9. Debt-Related Legal Services - $145,000

Tzedek DC assists DC residents with low incomes in debt-related legal matters. Tzedek DC helps residents avoid the effects of an adverse court judgment and bad credit reports, such as losing their driver's license, seizure of their bank account, impossible payment plans, and the inability to obtain employment. Tzedek DC also conducts community outreach by partnering with the United Planning Organization in Ward 7, where single females head approximately 9,380 households.

10. Project END (Eradicating Notario Deceit)- $80,000

Ayuda's Project END advises, counsels, and represents immigrant victims of fraud in potential immigration, civil, and criminal processes stemming from fraudulent acts by "representatives" purporting to serve the immigrant community. These representatives are often known as "notarios" or "immigration consultants." The intended beneficiaries of Project END are immigrants with low incomes residing in the District who a notario has defrauded.

11. Economic Security Unit (ESU) - $100,000

NLSP's Economic Security Unit (ESU) addresses our client communities' multi-layered economic insecurity issues, primarily connected to racially discriminatory behaviors and policies. Clients come to NLSP's ESU with needs that include securing benefits, including addressing denials or termination of public services, barriers to employment resulting from criminal records and background checks, unfair debt collection, credit reporting problems, and unaffordable or defaulted student loans.

12. Polk Street Office - $372,000

Neighborhood Legal Services Program's (NLSP) office located in the Northeast neighborhood of Deanwood provides neighborhood-based legal aid in housing, family law, and public benefits. Staff attorneys are physically located at NLSP's office on Polk Street NE to provide residents with low incomes of this underserved community with free and accessible legal assistance.

Domestic Violence/Victims' Rights – $655,000

13. Empowerment Project - $100,000

The Amara Legal Center provides free legal aid to individuals whose rights have been violated by involvement in commercial sex, regardless of the reason for entry into commercial sex. The project's attorney provides legal assistance in the areas of child custody and support, civil protection orders, public benefits, crime victims' compensation, and record sealing.

14. Domestic Violence Community Legal Services Project - $140,000

Bread for the City's Domestic Violence Community Legal Services Project provides legal aid, including civil protection orders, divorce, child custody, and public benefits, to District residents with low incomes who are experiencing violence.

15. Domestic Violence Underserved Communities Holistic Representation Project - $130,000

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia provides focused outreach and legal aid to domestic violence survivors in poor and underserved communities in DC. The project attorneys have also established an office at the Domestic Violence Intake Center located in DC Superior Court.

16. Legal Services for Domestic Violence Victims - $110,000

DC Volunteer Lawyers Project (DCVLP) represents domestic violence survivors in civil protection orders, custody, child support, and divorce matters. DCVLP utilizes a network of volunteer attorneys to address the severe shortage of free legal assistance for low-income people in the District who have urgent family law needs.

17. East of the River Women's Legal Services Project/ Keep Black Girls Safe DC Project - $175,000

The Safe Sisters Circle (SSC) provides free culturally specific, holistic, and trauma-informed services to address issues faced by Black women survivors of domestic violence and/or sexual assault primarily living in Washington DC's Wards 7 and 8.

Education - $230,000

18. Direct Representation & Systemic Advocacy Project - $110,000

The School Justice Project (SJP) protects and advocates for the special education rights of court-involved students, ages 17 to 22, during incarceration and throughout their reintegration into the community. SJP attorneys increase access to appropriate special education to improve educational, employment, and life outcomes for this traditionally excluded student population.

19. School Discipline and Equitable Access to Education Project - $120,000

Advocates for Justice and Education address the increasing demand for legal representation and support in suspension and expulsion proceedings. The project provides on-site free legal assistance (information, advice and counsel, and/or brief services) to parents, guardians, or students at student disciplinary hearings before the Office of Administrative Hearings.

Employment - $240,000

20. Employment Justice Project - $170,000

Through its Employment Justice Project, the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs assists DC workers with low incomes recover stolen wages and fight discrimination. The project also ensures that workers receive their lawful wages by hosting clinics, conducting outreach, providing rights training, and representing clients.

21. Immigrant Mother Outreach Project - $50,000

First Shift Justice Project provides workplace-related legal services to DC working mothers who are limited English proficient and/or from immigrant backgrounds to help them avoid job loss.

22. DC Paid Family Leave Access and Enforcement Project - $20,000

First Shift Justice Project provides legal services to conduct community education to workers regarding the availability of paid leave insurance benefits, including the DC Paid Leave law, which was effective July 2020.

Family Law - $425,000

23. Child Advocacy Program - $85,000

The DC Volunteers Lawyers Project (DCVLP) is one of only two organizations in the District that provide a voice for children at the center of a custody debate. DCVLP works to decrease the number of underrepresented and at-risk children by serving as court-appointed Guardians ad litem.

24. Child Support Community Legal Services Project - $95,000

Run by Bread for the City, the Child Support Community Legal Services Project maintains a court-based legal services office at the Paternity & Support Branch of the DC Superior Court. The attorneys improve individual outcomes for custodial and noncustodial parents in their child support cases, enhance the fairness of the court process, and increase the Paternity & Support Branch's efficiency.

25. Child Support Community Legal Services Project - $155,000

The Child Support Community Legal Services Project, run by the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, maintains a court-based legal services office at the Paternity & Support Branch of the DC Superior Court. The attorneys improve individual outcomes for custodial and noncustodial parents in their child support cases, enhance the fairness of the court process, and increase the Paternity & Support Branch's efficiency.

26. Family Law Assistance Network - $90,000

The DC Affordable Law Firm provides advice and limited scope representation to litigants, including parents and third-party caregivers, on civil cases in the Domestic Relations Branch, including custody, child support, and divorce cases.

General Services - $505,000

27. Brief Services Unit (BSU) - $120,000

At Neighborhood Legal Services Program's Brief Services Unit, attorneys perform an initial diagnosis of legal problems and provide advice or brief service, when such limited assistance may be sufficient, to enable the individual to resolve the issue. The project beneficiaries are DC residents with low incomes living in Wards 5, 7, and 8.

28. Southeast Neighborhood Access Project - $385,000

At the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia's office in Anacostia, attorneys assist Ward 7 and 8 residents with a range of civil legal issues, such as domestic violence and family law, public benefits, housing, and consumer law.

General Services to a Specific Population - $185,000

29. Project HELP (DC Homebound Elderly Legal Project) - $100,000

Project HELP under Legal Counsel for the Elderly assists homebound elders with low incomes in need of wills, advance directives, and public benefits audits, as well as those affected by consumer scams and housing-related issues. The Project HELP attorney also draws support from a pool of pro bono attorneys and other volunteer professionals to provide increased legal aid to homebound seniors.

30. Transgender Legal Care - $85,000

Whitman-Walker Health helps DC's large transgender population on various legal issues, including discrimination in the workplace, school, housing, health care; public benefits; immigration; private health insurance; and obtaining accurate identity documents. The project serves transgender clients seeking assistance at its name and gender change clinic.

Health and Disability - $580,000

31. Healthy Together Medical-Legal Partnership - $320,000

Children's Law Center runs a medical-legal partnership in Northeast and Southeast DC. The project provides legal representation on a wide range of issues and health outcomes for children. Attorneys work with the clinic's doctors

to identify and address each young patient's legal needs, such as substandard housing conditions, unmet educational needs, and lack of access to health care for acute medical episodes.

32. Max Robinson Center - $155,000

Whitman-Walker Health (WWH) provides legal representation, counseling, and outreach to people living with HIV/AIDS and other residents with low incomes in Wards 7 and 8 through lawyers based at its Max Robinson Center in Southeast DC. WWH offers its free legal aid to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals in DC, regardless of HIV status, and to health care patients at WWH irrespective of sexual orientation, HIV status, or gender identity.

33. Disability Rights Project - $45,000

Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs (WLC) provides legal assistance for individuals who seek representation for disability discrimination in the District. Discrimination against persons with disabilities impacts all aspects of life – housing, education, work, recreation, and participation in civic life; the most significant discrimination often occurs at the intersection of disability and race or gender.

34. Jenny Hatch Justice Project - $60,000

Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities provides legal representation, advocacy, education, and outreach to DC residents with low incomes and disabilities facing or in adult guardianship. The project focuses on protecting and advancing people with disabilities' Right to Make Choices - the main prerogative all people have to make their own decisions and direct their own lives to the maximum of their capabilities.

Housing - $1,509,000

35. Foreclosure Prevention Project - $70,000

Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia provides representation to DC residents with low incomes in foreclosure cases. Their attorneys are present in court every week for the call of the judicial foreclosure calendar to provide information and assistance to homeowners facing foreclosure.

36. Housing and Community Development Project - $70,000

The Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC) provides legal assistance to the District's Asian immigrants with low incomes and limited-English proficiency regarding evictions, threats, illegal rent increase, and inadequate housing conditions, as well as illegal relocation, denial of access to housing applications, and lack of language access in Section 8 housing developments.

37. Community Lawyering Project - $172,000

Bread for the City provides community lawyering at its site on Good Hope Road SE. The project's attorneys work directly with the community to help identify options to tackle issues affecting its residents and, when needed, provide substantial direct representation to the residents. The project focuses on preserving affordable housing and addressing housing conditions.

38. Housing Advocacy for People with Mental Illness and Behavioral Challenges - $65,000

University Legal Services (ULS) addresses significant housing barriers faced by people with disabilities, especially people with mental illness, through systemic and individual advocacy for reasonable accommodations by housing and service providers. The project advocates for accessible community residential facilities and access to needed Medicaid homes and community-based services to secure and preserve housing for people with disabilities. This project also advocates for individuals with disabilities at risk of institutionalization or eviction due to housing discrimination by the public, subsidized, or private housing providers.

39. Housing Cooperative Preservation Initiative (HCPI) - $70,000

Neighborhood Legal Services Program preserves tenant-owned limited equity cooperatives (LECs). The project's attorneys assist tenant groups in developing and maintaining their LEC's administrative infrastructure and governance, advise on regulatory compliance, and provide ongoing legal advice to the LEC board of directors. The project aims to prevent problems that may cause these affordable housing cooperatives to convert to market-rate housing.

40. Housing Justice Project - $200,000

The Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs project collaborates with Bread for the City, Legal Aid Society, and Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless to provide the full range of coordinated legal services to preserve and expand decent housing choices across the city. As part of the partnership, WLC focuses on addressing housing discrimination based on race, source of income, familial status, and history of a criminal conviction.

41. Housing Justice Advocacy Project - $165,000

In a network with Bread for the City, Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, and Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia represents tenants and tenant associations in building-wide cases as part of more extensive housing preservation. This project focuses on cases involving the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, redevelopment, subsidy expirations, rent control, and housing conditions.

42. Housing Preservation Project - $75,000

The DC Bar Pro Bono Center's project provides legal assistance in housing conditions and unlawful rent increases. The project's attorneys are based at the courthouse, and they also receive clients through their advice and referral clinic.

43. Increasing the Capacity of the Fair Housing Clinic - $110,000

Howard University School of Law provides community education through its Fair Housing Clinic and direct legal assistance and representation to tenants with low incomes facing discriminatory housing problems.

44. Stabilizing Communities Through Affordable Housing - $210,000

Neighborhood Legal Services Program and Rising for Justice collaborate on preserving affordable housing by representing tenants and tenant organizations in housing conditions cases, zoning cases, misuse of barring notices, and many other issues that jeopardize the future of affordable housing in DC.

45. Stabilizing Communities Through Affordable Housing - $302,000

Neighborhood Legal Services Program and Rising for Justice collaborate on preserving affordable housing by representing tenants and tenant organizations in housing conditions cases, zoning cases, misuse of barring notices, and many other issues that jeopardize the future of affordable housing in DC.

Immigration - $205,000

46. CARECEN Legal Service Program - $60,000

Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) provides legal assistance to immigrants in Washington, DC, who require help regarding citizenship, naturalization, and family-based petitions (family reunification). Also, CARECEN legal staff assists with work authorization under the U Visa Program for victims of crimes in the US.

47. DC ACT Immigration Legal Program - $65,000

African Communities Together provides the District's underserved African immigrant communities, particularly Africans with low incomes and limited English proficiency, with high-quality, culturally appropriate immigration legal services and immigration legal education.

48. TASSC Legal Services Program - $80,000

Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition's Pro Bono Asylum Program (PBAP) provides free legal aid to survivors of torture who reside in DC and are seeking political asylum. PBAP's attorneys help survivors prepare their

applications, affidavits, and evidence for asylum and represent them in their asylum interviews.

Interpreter Bank - $400,000

49. Community Legal Interpreter Bank - $400,000

Since 2007, Ayuda has run a shared legal interpreter bank that assists legal aid providers using trained community legal interpreters. The project serves as a national model for coordinated, point-of-service legal interpreter services.