

# BUDGET TESTIMONY HIGHLIGHTS

## ACCESSING JUSTICE in D.C.



### Budget Oversight Hearings: What We Heard

40+ witnesses testified before the D.C. Council on April 13, 2023 about how drastic cuts to the Access to Justice Initiative will put the safety, health, housing, and economic stability of the District's most vulnerable residents at risk. Statements of support came from the Chief Judges of the DC Courts, the President and 30 past Presidents of the DC Bar, and the DC Attorney General. Key points are below, including, most importantly, statements from the clients of Access to Justice Initiative grantees. We urge the D.C. Council to restore FY23 funding of \$31.689M for these essential services.

### What Clients Said ...

*These are the only programs that people like me who are less fortunate have to depend on for people to help us. - Ms. M., Legal Counsel for the Elderly Client*

*You never know when the tables will turn and you'll need legal assistance. - Ms. G., Bread for the City Client*

*I never knew or expected to get this much support, it meant everything to me... it felt empowering, like I finally had a voice. - Ms. C., Legal Aid of DC Client*

### Need is Growing:

- Domestic violence filings are up 65%, with 2,000 new filings in Q1 of 2023
- Eviction filings are up 42%, with 3,500 new filings and over 1,000 calls to the eviction hotline in Q1 of 2023
- Some providers are serving 40-50% more clients in 2023 than the same period in 2022
- More clients with disabilities are seeking help with supported decision-making and recovering stolen benefits
- Cuts to benefit programs and Medicaid recertification will create new legal need

### What This Funding Cut Will Mean:

- Fewer clients served with fewer culturally- and issue- specific services available
- Fewer knocks on tenant doors offering help with eviction; for one organization, cuts translate to 3,000 fewer tenants calls answered, 100 fewer housing cases handled, and 100 fewer cases placed with pro bono volunteers
- Isolation for homebound older District residents who won't receive legal house calls
- Gutting of the the Legal Interpreter Bank, leaving non-English speakers isolated and at risk
- Widespread elimination of staff positions, since substantial cuts cannot be absorbed without reducing staff
- **At Risk:** half of one organization's staff -which served 5,000 clients in 2022 - are Initiative-funded; another organization could lose up to 9 attorneys who help domestic violence victims

### What Services Mean to the Community:

- More than 8,000 calls to a landlord-tenant legal help line answered since June 2020
- 9,800 DC households at risk of eviction got door knocks from a canvasser offering help
- \$1.4 million saved for 767 families served in debt and consumer cases
- \$14M in Medicaid costs avoided over three years by keeping children out of hospitals and emergency rooms
- Over 2,000 residents received help with family law matters through coordinated family law project since 2020
- DC courts and District agencies rely on legal services providers to serve clients and enhance the administration of justice - phone numbers of legal services are included in court notices and other government documents