



Mother's Outreach Network

Mother's Outreach Network (MON) is a legal services and advocacy organization that *advances* the inclusion and empowerment of Black mothers in the struggle for family preservation by transforming government income and child welfare laws, policies and practices *from punitive to empowering*. We do so, in relevant part, through our legal programs, which undergird and provide women identifying as mothers and their families with life changing legal services. This informs our advocacy, organizing and systems change for broader policy transformation.

While MON's strategies are multidisciplinary, our goals are simple: to help Black families find stable footing economically and to keep as many families together as long as possible. To this end, MON's niche practice areas in advocacy and legal services seek to make an impact on the large footprint of poverty in DC. MON pushes to fill a crucial otherwise unmet legal need on issues that impact marginalized impoverished DC residents, 10% of the city's population. Additionally, the legal work multiplies other efforts: Clients in our legal program become galvanized as change-makers, whether after attending our know-your-rights legal information sessions or receiving representation. Our efforts fall into two broad categories that mirror or organization wide focus:

- Our family defense legal program supports mothers in pursuing economic stability while navigating the child welfare system: by providing brief advice, counsel, and representation to mothers in matters at the investigation and pre-petition stage of a child welfare matter, through low-income tax advice and workshops, public benefits assistance, and in expunging their name from the child protection register.
- Second, Mother's Outreach Network provides niche tax advice legal services and does so 1) on a year-round basis and 2) in brief advice format: customized to the needs of marginalized DC residents that are often cautious and hesitant to address their tax issues. Clients leave MON's clinic confident they can tackle their tax matters, and some walk away surprised they are likely owed refunds rather than owing them. MON's tax legal work aims to chip away at the information and participation gaps, as 25% of DC residents are not claiming their federal or increasingly generous local Earned Income Tax Credits. With ATJ support, MON's clinic has helped several dozen DC residents on a better path with their tax issues.

A smaller ATJ-funded program, Mother's Outreach Network lands an outsize impact that touches a portion of the population impacted by the child welfare system, many of them due to poverty-factors.

- Mother's Outreach Network advises parents on wrongful placement on the Child Protection Register, a barrier to employment, work which only one other provider in DC specializes.
- If a parent comes to MON with housing insecurity or housing code violations, MON works with them to advocate for improved conditions or housing vouchers, and thereby wards off allegations of neglect.
- In the first quarter of 2023, MON served/and or is in the process of serving 11 low-income DC households in extended representation matters before the city's child welfare agency in fair hearings, custody and/or housing conditions matters in D.C. Superior Court.
- Additionally, MON has successfully pressured CFSA to withdraw its wrongful neglect findings against parents otherwise facing employment barriers and in one case it resulted in our client reunifying with their children and celebrating one of their children's birthdays.
- Without our work in this niche area spreading awareness through dozens of community canvases and pop up legal clinics touching hundreds of individuals, many would not be served. In December 2022, through holiday events, we reached over 200 individuals raising awareness of the legal issues we address.

Finally, and noteworthy, our work is in tackling issues that the ABA has called attention to. In August 2022, the American Bar Association (ABA) adopted **Resolution 606**, which calls on all legal professionals to recognize how over-surveillance of and underinvestment in Black families has shaped the child welfare field for centuries with the prevalence of involvement of families in the child welfare system and the destabilization caused by poverty. The resolution highlights that there is a need for vigorous representation of parents. The disproportionate impact on Black families, gives this greater urgency.

MON's legal program work thereby prevents and mitigates factors that could lead to involvement in the child welfare system.