

April 6, 2023

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council of the District of Columbia,

As the Legal Director of Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities, I write to support continued funding of the Access to Justice Initiative (ATJ). Quality Trust is a DC-based nonprofit that operates the Jenny Hatch Justice Project (JHJP). Funded through the DC Bar Foundation's Access to Justice Initiative, JHJP helps people access alternatives to guardianship, including supported decision-making, so that they can maintain the maximum degree of autonomy possible. We provide community education about alternatives to guardianship as well as direct legal representation and short-term advice.

ATJ funding has enabled us to hire a dedicated staff attorney who works closely with clients, often over the course of several meetings, to discover individually tailored solutions that can help people meet their support needs and preserve their independence. Because our work is time intensive, without dedicated staff our ability to provide direct legal advocacy to DC residents would be significantly curtailed.

JHJP has had tremendous impact on the people we serve. We have been able to help young people aging out of the foster system create plans for continued support with finances, benefits and medical care. We have helped people escaping domestic violence to maintain access to benefits that had previously been managed – and in some cases stolen – by their abusers. And we have helped people execute formal support agreements to avoid unnecessary guardianship.

Our services are needed across all Wards of the District. This year, of those intake calls for which we currently have Ward information, 41% are from Wards 5, 7, and 8. This is in line with historical trends. The vast majority of our clients with disabilities are multiply marginalized across race, disability, and income level, and most rely on SSI as their primary or sole source of income.

This year we have seen a significant influx of new cases. In just the first three months of this year we have been contacted 45 times for legal advice and have received over six requests for trainings. If this trend continues, it is likely that we will need ATJ funding in 2024 more than ever.

In this time of unprecedented inflation, ATJ funding also helps us offer compensation that remains competitive in the DC market, where DC's high cost of living and competition with the federal sector make it additionally difficult to recruit and retain legal staff.

We thank the Council for funding Access to Justice. For more information, please contact Sam Crane, Legal Director, at scrane@dcqualitytrust.org.

Sincerely,



Sam Crane