



# WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE

## FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS

### Access to Justice Funding April 10, 2023

There is a profound crisis in equal justice, driven far too often by the unavailability of an attorney to protect rights embedded in the law. The District of Columbia, through its Access to Justice funding, is a leader in the national movement to close the justice gap. The Washington Lawyers' Committee receives funding through the Access to Justice Program to support our work to address housing discrimination and segregation, assist low-wage workers, and to fight for the rights of prisoners and persons with a disability. Through these grants, we are able to assist thousands of low-income District residents. Despite the extraordinary commitment of the District to equal justice, the needs of low-income communities have not been fully met.

Among the cases and projects that the Committee pursued with Access to Justice funding are the following:

- The Committee operates a clinic for low-wage workers that serves hundreds of District residents each year. The client provides advice, brief serves, and referrals on a broad range of legal issues, including wage theft, discrimination, and workplace safety.
- Discrimination against persons with a record of conviction denies many people of color access to meaningful employment. The Committee represented three District of Columbia residents in a mediation that resulting in a change in policy by a national employer that opened up opportunity for hundreds of District residents and thousands of people nation-wide.
- The Committee represents tenants who are coming together to collectively resolve disputes with their landlords. In 2022, the Committee brought the first ever litigation to enforce the District's right to organize statute.
- To address housing conditions and preserve affordable housing, the Committee represents all of the tenants in litigation regarding disrepair and hazardous conditions at Meridian Heights, a building in the Columbia Heights neighborhood. The Committee also has a docket of housing cases that address source of income discrimination.
- The Committee brought litigation to ensure that COVID home testing was available for persons who are blind or have visual disabilities.
- During the height of the pandemic, the Committee secured and supported scores of pro bono lawyers who assisted District of Columbia prisoners to seek compassionate release.
- Scores of District prisoners write to the Committee each year for advice and assistance on prison issues. We provide a response to each with detailed self-help materials and for a smaller set, we provide representation.

If our funding is cut, it will severely impact our ability to pursue cases and projects that ensure housing stability and justice, secure an income to lift a family from poverty, or that protects the rights of persons who are incarcerated from abuse.