



WHITMAN-WALKER HEALTH

Mailing Address:

Whitman-Walker at LIZ

1377 R Street, NW, Suite 200

Washington, DC 20009

DC Access to Justice Commission

April 11, 2023

Re: Impact of Access to Justice (ATJ) Funds on Whitman-Walker Legal Services in Wards 7 & 8

I am writing to share information about the work at Whitman-Walker Health's Legal Services Program thanks to annual funding from the Access to Justice Initiative; and specifically, to share information about the work that we do to serve residents of Wards 7 & 8.

Whitman-Walker's Max Robinson Center (MRC) legal office was established in Anacostia in 2007; since that time, the volume of legal clients has grown exponentially from 139 in 2007, to 678 cases in 2022 for clients living in Wards 7 and 8. By working in a closely-knit medical-legal partnership, staff attorneys coordinate in-person and immediate client assistance/problem-solving with nurses, doctors, therapists, medical case managers, and medical assistants to address health-harming legal needs.

- Our clients in Wards 7 & 8 are able to meet with a lawyer when they visit their doctor, therapist, or dentist - saving them time and money to resolve everyday life issues including the inaccessibility of electricity, affordable medication, Social Security income, safety at work, housing, and reliable information needed to navigate these issues.
- Clients can stay in their home and community when home health aide services are obtained.
- Clients with a reliable Social Security income and SNAP benefits have economic security and can afford to pay their rent, buy food, and pay for transportation to medical appointments.
- Clients with proper health insurance can afford to pay for and adhere to their prescribed medications, and avoid medical emergencies.
- Clients with information and counseling can balance returning to work part time and retaining Social Security benefits.
- Clients with health insurance can access mental health services.
- Clients can access to pre-exposure prophylaxis medication (PreP) to prevent infection and HIV-meds for positive clients to maintain a suppressed viral load to prevent transmission; 65% of all MRC legal clients are living with HIV making such care essential to this community.

Residents of Wards 7 & 8 remain particularly vulnerable to the struggles of the Social Security Administration (including access to Medicare) and are desperate to obtain or maintain modest disability benefits as the SSA offices begin to re-open to in-person appointments and address the backlog of cases and clients that need attention. Our attorneys work diligently to manage these needs to avoid financial emergencies for clients likely to result in eviction. Likewise, DC agencies charged with administering public benefits such as Medicaid, the EPD Waiver Program, DC Alliance, and SNAP, struggle to process applications overwhelmed as the city readjusts to post pandemic operations. In the case of EPD Waiver program administration, clients end up living in unsafe conditions and often return to a hospital based on programmatic delays. The time and energy expended by already disabled or elderly residents leads to punitive and preventable health outcomes. Public benefits lawyers are critical to addressing these problems individually and systemically. ATJ funds make this life-saving work possible.

Sincerely,

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