

# BUDGET TESTIMONY HIGHLIGHTS

## ACCESSING JUSTICE in D.C.



### *Budget Oversight Hearings: What We Heard*

More than 50 witnesses testified at the D.C. Council on April 25, 2024 about how drastic cuts to the Access to Justice Initiative will undermine the safety, health, housing, and economic stability of District residents.

Dozens more expressed support for Initiative funding. Key points from oral and written testimony are below. We urge the D.C. Council to restore FY24 funding of \$31.7M to ensure these services continue.

### What Clients Said ...

*“The victimization I experienced bled over to my family, friends, and neighbors.... Let me assure you, the threats to the victim can quickly become problems to the community.... Without the legal aid and literal hand-holding, I’m not sure where I’d be today.”* C.N., DCVLP Client

*“I’m asking this Committee - will you keep me safe? Will you protect my life? Or will you take away the funding that has helped this - my life- become possible?”*

T.M., Georgetown HJA Cancer Law Project client who required legal help to stabilize housing before she could receive a lifesaving surgery and medical device

### What This Funding Cut Will Mean:

- **Thousands fewer clients will be served** across the entire spectrum of vital legal needs, meaning:
  - Instability for families and children without help in custody, child support, legal support for kinship care arrangements, and other legal help that keep families together
  - A provider having to turn away 1 in 3 domestic violence survivors seeking life-saving services
  - Hundreds of District households uprooted by eviction
  - The potential loss of the District’s only dedicated workers’ right clinic
  - Less support for returning citizens seeking employment and stability
  - Less or no support for elderly residents and residents with disabilities who want to live in the community
- Gutting of the Community Legal Interpreter Bank, leaving non-English speakers isolated and at risk
- **Significant loss of dedicated, experienced staff**, potentially 1/3 to 1/2 of legal staff at some organizations
- **Some funded projects and organizations could cease to exist entirely.**

### Need is Growing:

- The Initiative’s largest grantee is on track to accept 49% more cases in 2024 than in 2023 while still having to turn clients away
- Domestic violence needs are growing. One provider handled 1,200 consults in 2023, double the number the previous year
- The Family Law Assistance Network has received over 3,100 eligible referrals since 2020, with a 55% increase in volume in 2023
- Evictions are on the rise, with double the number scheduled so far in 2024 as in the same period of 2023
- The need for services to assist recently arrived migrants and combat fraud against immigrants, and for District residents facing debt and consumer fraud, is outpacing provider capacity

### What the Initiative Means to the Community:

- A **collaborative, robust legal community** that supports the courts, District agencies, non-legal services providers and their clients
- **More than 5,000 low-income residents have remained housed** since June 2020 because of Initiative eviction-related services
- **More youth in school and engaged in their education** due to receiving necessary supports
- **District families receiving millions of dollars** in benefits, tax credits, and protecting assets from debt and fraud, including \$14M saved by the District in Medicaid costs by keeping children out of hospitals and emergency rooms
- **Dignity and autonomy** for low-income District residents aging in place, remaining in their communities, and managing end-of-life planning