



January 17, 2025

The Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

RE: FY26 Access to Justice Initiative Funding

Dear Mayor Bowser,

The District's longtime investment in the **Access to Justice Initiative** promotes community stability and strength by keeping District families safe, housed, and financially secure. The District government's leadership in prioritizing this work serves as a model for the nation in using legal help as a tool in creating stronger neighborhoods and communities. **Thank you.**

We respectfully request that you approve our FY26 budget request of \$32 million, which is comparable to FY23, FY24, and FY25 appropriations. As described further in our supporting materials, this includes \$20.65 million for the *Access to Justice Grants Program*, \$11 million for the *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program*, and \$350,000 for the *D.C. Poverty Lawyers Loan Repayment Program*.

Sustained funding at this level is necessary to ensure that District residents continue to receive the critical constituent services provided by more than 30 Initiative-funded organizations – services that address problems that put the safety, stability, homes, health, and economic well-being of District families and communities at risk. These problems often cannot be solved without legal help, making the Initiative uniquely essential. With your investment, the Initiative also promotes partnerships with the District government and other organizations. **The Initiative works.**

The Initiative promotes neighborhood and family stability. The Initiative helped 76-81% of District individuals and families served who were facing eviction retain possession of their home. When they didn't, there was typically a mutually favorable settlement to mitigate the legal and financial consequences for both landlord and tenant. Similarly, 89-92% of those served who were facing the potential loss of their housing voucher ultimately retained their voucher. This data reflects the consistent impact of the Initiative in addressing housing instability from its inception.

The Initiative promotes public safety and community well-being. Funded organizations address the root causes of community challenges like domestic violence, recidivism, and discrimination – one organization alone offers ten legal clinics each week to support domestic violence survivors. Other funded organizations focus on family and elder support, education, individuals with disabilities, medical-legal partnerships, advance the health and well-being of District residents, decrease individual, family, and community stress, and promote more stable and resilient neighborhoods across all eight Wards. One client who experienced domestic violence said during the FY25 budget oversight process: "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 handholding, I'm not sure where I'd be today."

COMMISSIONERS

Prof. Peter B. Edelman
Chair

James J. Sandman
Vice Chair

Hon. Errol Arthur

Hon. Corinne Beckwith

Karen A. Newton Cole

Karen M. Dale

Elizabeth Dewey

Rebecca Goldfrank

Hon. Sharon E. Goodie

Susan M. Hoffman

Rhonda Cunningham Holmes

Sheldon Krantz

Paul S. Lee

Ariel Levinson-Waldman

Deborah P. Lindenberg

Hon. Carmen G. McLean

Beth Mellen

Kelli Neptune

Koube Ngaaje

Abel Nunez

Herb Rouson, Jr.

Hon. Vanessa Ruiz

Prof. Jessica Steinberg

Aida Vindell

Katherine Zeisel

Nancy Drane
Executive Director

The Initiative promotes economic opportunity for individuals and the community. One funded organization kept a total of nearly \$1 million in the pockets of over 1,000 District families facing debt and consumer issues last year. Another organization reported that the equivalent of just under 2.5 lawyers secured over \$850,000 in vital public benefits for their clients. Community savings include \$14 million in Medicaid costs avoided by another organization over three years by keeping children out of hospitals and emergency rooms.

Finally, the District's investment in the Initiative promotes economic and human efficiency and leverages other resources: pro bono hours donated by private lawyers that are only possible with support from legal services organizations funded through the Initiative; strategic partnerships with D.C. government and other organizations; securing and maintaining millions of dollars in federally-funded public benefits; and the education and empowerment of District residents. The Initiative is a critical constituent service, helping District families more easily access legal help and legal information. Strategies described later in this budget request focused on coordinated intake and referral and access to legal information have the power to transform how D.C. residents access this help, building on work the Initiative's administrator, the DC Bar Foundation, does in partnership with other District social services agencies to foster a more cohesive, connected continuum of support for District residents, in response to community concerns and feedback.

As you said during an event celebrating the work of the DC Bar Foundation: *"Affording [District residents] the legal representation and assistance they need is fundamental to upholding our D.C. values."* Thank you for your continued partnership with the Commission and the DC Bar Foundation to advance our shared vision for a strong District community.

Sincerely,



Peter B. Edelman, Chair



James J. Sandman, Vice Chair

cc: Mr. Kevin Donahue, City Administrator
Ms. Lindsey Parker, Chief of Staff
Ms. Beverly Perry, Senior Advisor, Executive Office of the Mayor
Ms. Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel, Executive Office of the Mayor
Ms. Jennifer Reed, Director, Office of Budget and Performance Management
Ms. Lindsey Appiah, Deputy Mayor for Public Safety & Justice
Ms. Jennifer Porter, Director, Office of Victim Services & Justice Grants
Mr. Eugene Adams, Director, Mayor's Office of Legal Counsel
Mr. Tommy Wells, Director, Mayor's Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs

Ms. Kirra Jarratt, Chief Executive Officer, DC Bar Foundation
Mr. Benjamin Wilson, President, DC Bar Foundation Board of Directors
Ms. Nancy Drane, Executive Director, D.C. Access to Justice Commission

FY26 PUBLIC FUNDING REQUEST FOR THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Since fiscal year 2007, the Access to Justice Initiative (“Initiative”) has served as the District’s primary means to ensure that District residents otherwise unable to afford it have access to civil justice and free legal help. The Initiative promotes neighborhood and family stability, public safety and community well-being, and economic opportunity for individuals and the community. District residents, including families, elders, and individuals with disabilities, rely on the Initiative’s critical constituent services. The Initiative’s strategic approach to addressing problems that challenge our District community is a model for the nation. The Initiative currently falls within the purview of the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants (“OVSJG”). By statute, the DC Bar Foundation (“DCBF”) has administered the Initiative since its inception in 2007.

FUNDING REQUEST

The D.C. Access to Justice Commission¹ requests that the District fund the Initiative at \$32 million in FY26, comparable to FY23, FY24, and FY25 appropriations.² We request local, recurring funding to replace any local, one-time support that was appropriated in FY25.³ The request breaks down as follows:

- **\$20.65 million for the *Access to Justice Grants Program*.** This funding may support several efforts including: (1) *access to justice grants* to maintain current support for civil legal services in communities of highly concentrated poverty; expand representation in housing matters; and maintain a legal interpreter bank; (2) efforts targeted at *preventing eviction filings*; (3) maintenance of a *coordinated intake and referral system* to improve District residents’ access to legal services; and (4) an effort to bring nonprofit, government, court, and other stakeholders together to consolidate and streamline *community access to legal information*. Funds may also support investments in data and evaluation to better measure the benefits, impact, and effectiveness of funded projects in meeting community needs.
- **\$11 million for the *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program*.** This program funds legal help in eviction-related proceedings. This funding supports eviction-related legal services to individuals and families at risk of eviction and housing instability, plus continued program evaluation and assessment.
- **\$350,000 for the *D.C. Poverty Lawyers Loan Repayment Program*.** This program assists lawyers who have committed to serving low-income District residents with student loan debt. This funding helps nonprofit organizations recruit and retain a highly-qualified, diverse, and experienced pool of legal aid attorneys to deliver needed services to D.C. residents.

¹ Created by the DC Court of Appeals in 2005, the Commission addresses civil justice barriers experienced by low- and moderate-income D.C. residents and includes judges and staff from local courts and tribunals, private bar leaders, legal services representatives, law school faculty, and business & community leaders. Learn more at <https://dcaccesstojustice.org/>. Commissioner Karen Newton Cole, Executive Director of Neighborhood Legal Services Program, recused herself this submission due to Legal Services Corporation regulations.

² The FY25 [Local Budget Act](#) reads, “... provided, that \$31,667,840 shall be made available to award a grant to the District of Columbia Bar Foundation for the purpose of administering the Access to Justice Initiative, of which not less than \$350,000 shall be available to fund the District of Columbia Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program, and of which not less than \$10,000,000 shall be available to fund the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program; provided further, that the funds authorized for expenditure for the Access to Justice Initiative, including the Access to Justice Grants Program, the District of Columbia Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program, and the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program, shall remain available for expenditure, without regard to fiscal year, until September 30, 2025.

³ The sources of the Initiative’s FY25 appropriation include \$10,457,256 in local recurring funds and \$21,210,584 in local one-time funds.

ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

PROMOTING NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY STABILITY

Initiative funds support a continuum of strategies that keep District families safely housed:

- Through the *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program*, Initiative-funded organizations provide legal help and representation to individuals and families facing eviction in D.C. Courts and in other eviction-related proceedings. 13,156 cases have been closed and 10,646 tenants served since program data collection began in August 2019 through June 2024. Recent data shows that 76-81% of tenants facing eviction represented by funded organizations retained possession of their unit and 89-92% of those facing voucher terminations were able to retain them with legal help.
- Additional funding made available through the *Access to Justice Grants Program* supports other activities aimed at *preventing evictions and eviction filings from occurring*. In fiscal year 2023 and the first half of fiscal year 2024 there have been over 6,000 knocks on doors and over 9,400 outreach letters sent to those facing eviction. Tenant Empowerment Specialists help clients apply for rental assistance and public benefits, facilitate voucher transfers, work closely with emergency rental assistance providers to assist clients facing imminent eviction, and offer community trainings. Over the past year and a half, over 7,400 individuals have attended close to 460 community education sessions offered by funded organizations to help them maintain housing.
- Further, the *Access to Justice Grants Program* supports other housing-related projects that keep District residents stably housed in affordable, healthy, safe, and discrimination-free environments.

Our FY26 funding request includes funding to support eviction-related representation through the CLCPP program; and additional funding through the Access to Justice Grants program to support eviction prevention efforts and other housing work. To learn more about the Initiative's housing strategies, see "Appendix A: Promoting Neighborhood and Community Stability."

PROMOTING PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

The Initiative supports a wide range of legal organizations through the *Access to Justice Grants Program* that promote public safety, address family instability, and improve community well-being. Left unaddressed, these issues make our community vulnerable to crises. Instead, successful legal intervention promotes community resiliency and stability. Examples of this life-changing work include:

- *Keeping individuals and families safe* through legal services and crisis safety planning for survivors of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and sex trafficking and exploitation.
- *Specialized support for individuals with disabilities*, including ensuring safe and healthy environments and combatting discrimination.
- *Assisting seniors aging in place* with estate and end-of-life planning, public benefits support, combatting fraud and abuse, and safekeeping intergenerational transfer of property.
- *Promoting family stability* through early intervention legal services for children and families at risk of entering foster care, representation of District parents and caregivers trying to resolve family conflict or child support issues, and specialized support for custody-involved children.
- *Managing health crises* by helping District residents secure public benefits, gain access to housing, food, and medications, and identify legal remedies to health problems like asthma – often by providing specialized services through medical-legal partnerships with District health systems.

- *Promoting education opportunities for youth* including legal support to students and parents to prevent school exclusion and ensure access to a free and appropriate education.
- *Re-entry support for returning citizens to prevent recidivism and promote public safety* by helping them transition back to the community after incarceration and navigate legal challenges in education, custody, employment, and consumer protection. Expungement work is also provided, and studies cited below show those who have had their criminal records expunged are less likely to recidivate and more likely to receive higher future wages.
- *Supporting the District's immigrant population* with legal help in combatting notario fraud, protecting unaccompanied minors, and offering culturally specific legal services to targeted populations within the immigrant community.

Our FY26 funding request includes funding for the Access to Justice Grants program to support a wide range of projects, including those that promote public safety and community well-being. To learn more about this funded work, see "Appendix B: Promoting Public Safety and Community Well-Being."

PROMOTING ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND THE COMMUNITY

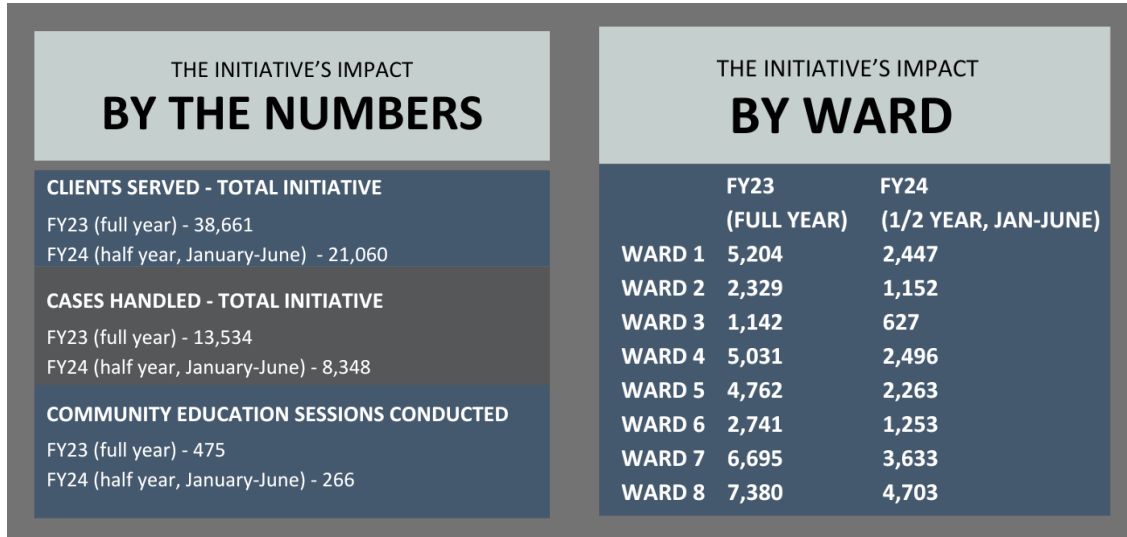
Initiative-funded organizations also lessen economic risk and inopportunity and promote community well-being and stability through the *Access to Justice Grants Program*. Examples include:

- *Stabilizing credit for low- and moderate-income residents and protecting critically needed funds* by fighting predatory lending and illegal debt collection schemes and averting negative court judgments and credit reports, including focused efforts in Wards 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8.
- *Protecting wages and jobs* by helping District residents recover stolen wages, fight discrimination and harassment, and seek assistance from employment-related organizations.
- *Promoting economic security and lessening government burdens* by ensuring D.C. residents secure benefits for which they are entitled through advocacy and legal representation involving unemployment, TANF, SNAP, SSI, SSDI, rental subsidies, shelter services, and health benefits.
- *Preserving intergenerational homes and wealth* through heirs property and probate-related work.
- *Offering services to individuals experiencing homelessness* to gain access to housing, employment, and other benefits.
- *Reducing health-related costs* by addressing health-harming problems that can be resolved through legal solutions.

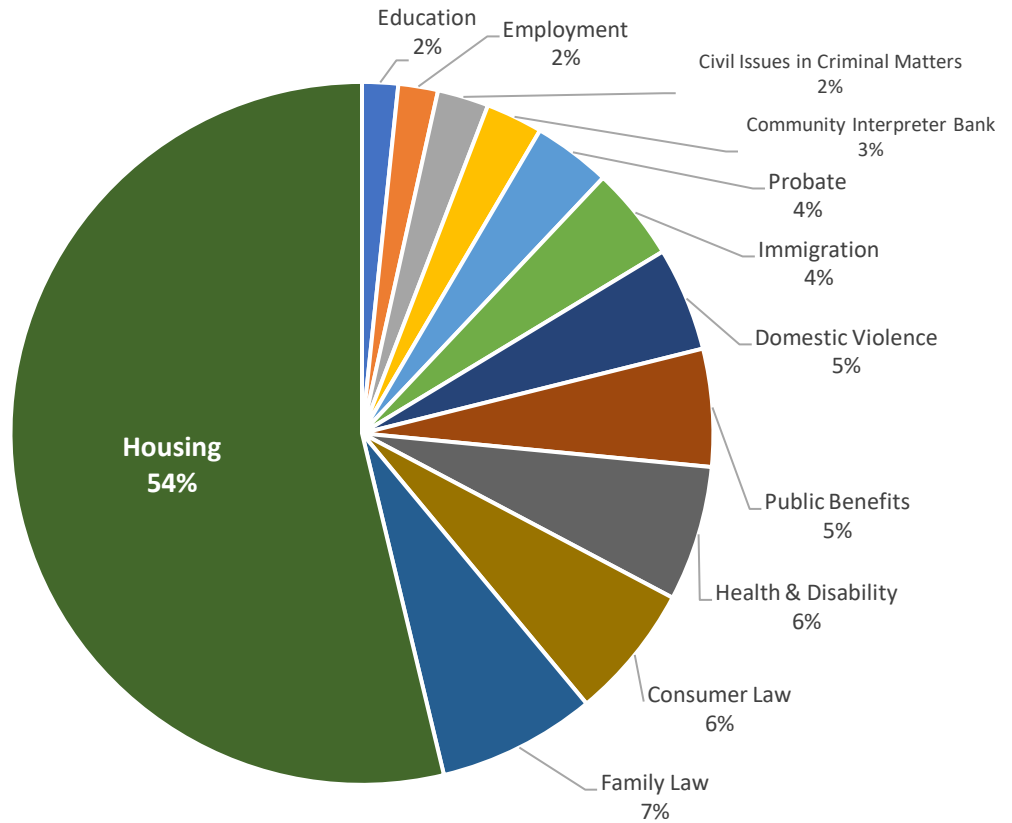
Our FY26 funding request includes funding for the Access to Justice Grants program to support a wide range of projects, including those that promote economic security. To learn more about these strategies, see "Appendix C: Promoting Economic Security for Individuals and the Community."

BY THE NUMBERS

The Initiative’s impact demonstrates its breadth and community reliance across all eight D.C. Wards:



Initiative-funded projects in fiscal year 2024 by issue area:



SUPPORTING LANGUAGE ACCESS

The *Access to Justice Grants Program* also funds the Community Legal Interpreter Bank, a one-of-a-kind model operated by Ayuda that enables low-income residents who are limited English proficient or Deaf to access services from over 30 District nonprofit legal services providers, and thus promotes equal access and procedural justice. In FY23, 26% of those served through the Initiative (or 10,227 of 38,661) were low-income District residents with limited or no English proficiency. In the first half of FY24, that percentage was 25% (or 5,225 of 21,060). Providers describe the Bank as an “indispensable” partner in their outreach and community engagement efforts, allowing them to conduct ‘Know Your Rights’ trainings over Zoom using simultaneous interpretation. Ensuring that these virtual events go smoothly requires training of the interpreters and the legal services providers. The Community Legal Interpreter Bank offers:

- Dedicated support to funded organizations to ensure legal services are provided in the client’s native language, with the most common languages being Spanish, Amharic, and French. Thirty-six organizations were served in FY23 and again in FY24.
- Interpretation services offered by professionals specially trained in legal language interpretation, with 7,569 telephone interpretations offered in FY23 and another 3,840 in the first half of FY24.
- Community education and other documents offered in multiple languages to promote client understanding, with 440 documents translated in FY23 and another 125 in the first half of FY24.

MAKING LEGAL HELP MORE ACCESSIBLE

The *Access to Justice Grants Program* also reduces barriers that District residents face in accessing legal information and legal help, a vital constituent service. The Initiative’s interest in this work reflects a recognition that it is critical that District residents have access to a continuum of legal services that fit their scope of need, spanning from access to high quality legal information to full legal representation.

This includes a coordinated intake and referral system, known as “D.C. Resource Bridge,” where there will be ‘no wrong door’ for District residents to access legal help. Instead of being forced to contact multiple organizations, District residents seeking help will have a single point of entry – a phone number and website initially – where they’ll be connected with someone who will listen to their problems and connect them with a legal services provider. A successful pilot of the system is currently in place and a host for the full system will be announced in February 2025, anticipating a full launch in 2025.

We also recognize the importance of efforts to ensure District residents have access to high quality and accurate legal information. FY26 funding may support efforts to consolidate and streamline community access to legal information, building on the Commission’s September 2024 report, *Justice for All: Report on Self-Help in the District of Columbia and Recommendations for a More Efficient and Coordinated Future*.⁴ The Commission’s report detailed its three-year effort to inventory and assess existing legal information in the District, finding that it was often outdated, inaccurate, too complicated for the average District resident to understand, and hard to find. The Commission recommended that the District invest in improving our community approach to maintaining legal information by pursuing a model, based on successes in other jurisdictions, that would increase efficiency and accessibility of legal information for individuals and non-legal professionals in the District. The Commission’s report contains a roadmap for nonprofit, government, court, and other stakeholders to use to launch this model in the District.

With a civil justice system as complex as the District’s, these approaches are desperately needed.

Funding through the Access to Justice Grants Program may support efforts like these. To learn more, see “Appendix D: Making Our Legal System More Accessible.”

⁴ D.C. Access to Justice Commission, *Justice for All: Report on Self-Help in the District of Columbia and Recommendations for a More Efficient and Coordinated Future* (September 2024), available at <https://dcaccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Final-ATJC-Self-Help-Report-Online.pdf>.

RETAINING HIGHLY QUALIFIED, EXPERIENCED LAWYERS TO SERVE DISTRICT RESIDENTS

The *D.C. Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program* (“D.C. LRAP”) is a critical tool for maintaining a high quality, diverse corps of legal services lawyers. This program currently enables 98 attorneys at 26 legal services organizations to devote their skills to helping District low-income residents. This helps legal services employers recruit and retain high-quality, experienced staff. This is critical when legal services salaries in D.C. are currently significantly below-market (an average of \$73,378 among enrolled participants at all experience levels) compared with their government or private sector peers (with entry-level salaries for first-year associates at private law firms averaging at \$200,000⁵).

Our FY26 funding request includes funding to support loan repayment for the District’s legal services attorneys. To learn more, see “Appendix E: Retaining Highly Qualified, Experienced Lawyers.”

MEETING THE GROWING NEED FOR LEGAL HELP

Despite the District’s significant investment in the Initiative over time, the community need for these critical, free legal services continues to outpace available resources:

- *The need for representation in our courts and tribunals is great.* The most recently available data shows that rates of litigants in civil proceedings appearing in court without a lawyer are as high as 75-97% in D.C. Courts and at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings.
- *Community needs are increasing.* The largest provider of general legal services in D.C. reports a 40% increase in client intakes across the organization in 2024 compared to the same period in 2023, including a 74% increase of requests for help in housing, 41% increase in requests for help in family/domestic violence, 20% increase in requests for help in public benefits, and 15% increase in requests for help in consumer issues. It reports that on-site intakes at the D.C. Courts have similarly grown by 227% in housing and 69% in family law.
- *Eviction remains at crisis level.* Help navigating eviction-related issues is certain to continue to be a growing community need. Both the number of scheduled and actual evictions rose by about 64% in 2024 compared with the prior year, with fiscal year executed evictions on pace to be higher than pre-pandemic numbers. Funded organizations have received over 7,700 calls to the Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network in 2023 and the first half of 2024.
- *Domestic violence remains a chronic, growing area of need.* One in four women in the District have experienced domestic violence, and cases have continued to rise, not letting up on the surge providers saw during the height of the pandemic. One domestic violence provider received 25% more requests for help in 2023 as compared to 2022, and continued to experience these elevated numbers in 2024. D.C. SAFE – the source of a majority of referrals for civil protection orders received by Initiative-funded organizations – experienced 35,464 calls to their Crisis Response Line and made 16,635 unique referrals in fiscal year 2024.⁶
- *Economic stressors persist.* Credit defaults, which are typically a predictor of debt collection volume, are at a 14-year high. One provider reported a 15% increase in requests for consumer debt legal help over the previous year. Across Wards 7 and 8, 78% of low-income residents are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Half of these residents have delinquent debt, with only 42% having at least \$2,000 in emergency savings.

⁵ NALP’s 2023 Associate Salary Survey report shows that the overall median first-year associate base salary as of January 1, 2023, was \$200,000 compared to \$64,000 for legal services attorneys, whose salaries even fall well below their public service peers. National Association of Law Placement, *Salaries and Compensation Research*, available at <https://www.nalp.org/salariescompensation>.

⁶ DC SAFE FY24 by the Numbers, available at <https://www.dcsafe.org/financials-reports>.

- *Family conflict often requires legal intervention.* Stable families lead to stable communities, but thousands of District residents face a wide range of family-related needs that require legal support. In D.C.'s Family Court, 83-93% of litigants lack counsel. The Initiative-funded Family Law Assistance Network ("FLAN") has fielded close to 4,400 calls from individuals seeking help since its inception in March 2020, with a trend of year-over-year increases. For example, as of December 2024, FLAN had served 152% more people than the prior year (from 951 to 1,433).
- *Protecting intergenerational wealth in D.C. families.* The ability to navigate the probate system can mean the difference between keeping a multigenerational home in D.C. or losing it and being forced to leave the community. As the Bowser administration has itself recognized, a lack of legal support in probate matters (as high as 97% in some cases) has been a long-standing civil justice gap, even with several new Initiative projects.

These are just a few examples of growing community need. *To learn more, see "Appendix F: The Initiative's Role in Addressing Community Need."*

**APPROVING OUR FY26 BUDGET REQUEST IS NEEDED TO ENSURE
INITIATIVE-FUNDED LEGAL HELP CONTINUES TO BE AVAILABLE**

The Initiative uniquely increases access to justice by expanding the capacity and reach of organizations to address District residents' legal needs through a continuum of services that brings transformative solutions to problems that have long challenged District residents. The Initiative uniquely promotes collaborative planning and service delivery as it positions funded organizations to partner and promote collective learning, adopt consistent and effective best practices, and pursue economy of scale. Continued support will allow Initiative-funded organizations to multiply successful interventions and develop new ones when the need is more profound than ever.

DCBF is committed to ensuring that funded organizations continue to effectively serve District residents. The Initiative incorporates strategic investments in learning, professional development, and evaluation that ensure continuous improvement of the work. Through its partnership with NPC Research,⁷ DCBF continues to evaluate the impact of Initiative-funded legal help through tracking and assessing outcomes through client interviews; the impact of various forms of representation; and the effectiveness of services.⁸ Initiative-funded organizations receive training and technical assistance on collecting, analyzing, and using data to bring a data-informed perspective to their work and planning.⁹

Sustained funding is essential. Cuts to the Initiative will result in thousands fewer clients served, loss of staff, the elimination of some funded programs entirely, and the loss of external resources uniquely leveraged by the Initiative, like pro bono service by private lawyers who rely on the support of legal services staff.

There is no higher function of government than to ensure that all of its residents, no matter their economic status, have equal access to justice. You have embraced this most fundamental of obligations through your support of the Initiative. We respectfully request that you approve our FY26 request of \$32 million to support work that directly improves the lives of thousands of District residents.

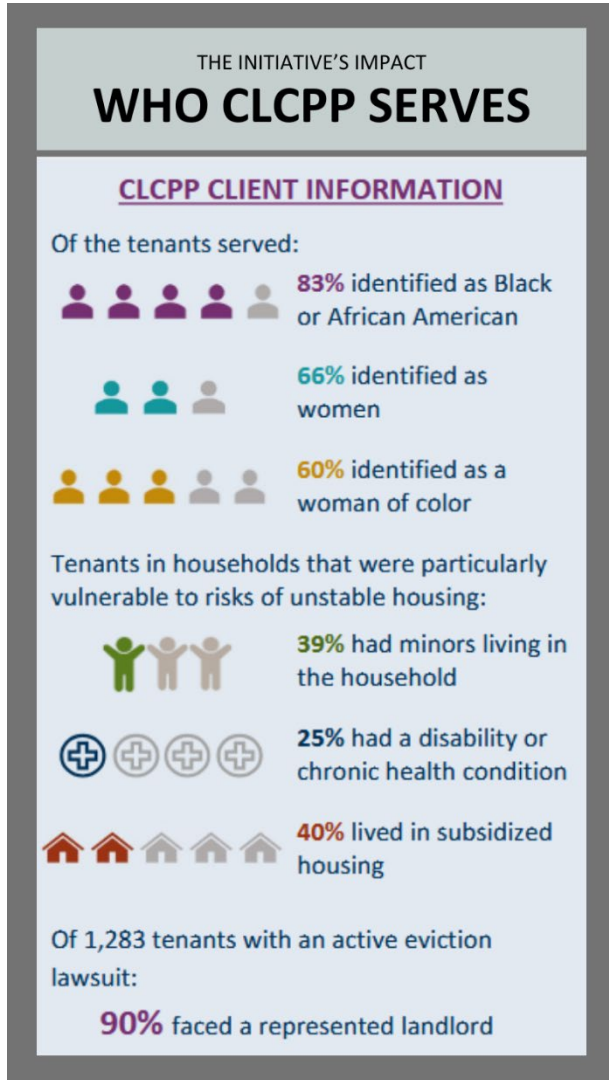
⁷ <https://npcresearch.com/>

⁸ NPC Research, [DC Bar Foundation's Family Law Learning Network: Summary Report](#) (October 2022).

⁹ NPC Research, [DC Bar Foundation's Family Law Learning Network: Litigant Perspectives on Remote Hearings in Family Law Cases](#) (December 2021).

APPENDIX A: PROMOTING NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY STABILITY

Initiative funds support a continuum of strategies that promote neighborhood and community stability by keeping District families safely housed. The *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program* provides legal representation to individuals and families facing eviction matters in D.C. Courts and in other eviction-related proceedings; the *Access to Justice Grants Program* supports additional *prevention-based strategies* aimed at stopping eviction filings from occurring and supports other housing-related projects aimed at keeping District families in affordable, healthy, safe, and discrimination-free environments.



NPC Research, *Biannual Progress Report to the Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program* (October 2024)

The need for continued support to preserve housing stability is as critical as ever. More than 81,000 District rental households are considered housing-cost burdened because they spend thirty percent or more of income on rent; 40,000 District rental households are “severely” housing-cost burdened because they spend half or more of their income on rent.¹⁰ Twelve percent of District residents (or 82,452) are experiencing housing insecurity, meaning housing unaffordability, inadequate housing, or frequent and unwanted moves – with that burden largely falling on families, children, and youth; Black and Hispanic residents; and Ward 7 and 8 residents.¹¹ One in five District children face housing insecurity.¹² In its 2024 publication of the annual *Out of Reach* report, the National Low Income Housing Coalition ranked the District as the sixth most expensive jurisdiction in the nation regarding rental housing, with the fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in D.C. at \$2,045 and monthly income necessary to afford it without experiencing rental cost burden at \$6,816.¹³ In contrast, the median household income among CLCPP clients served is \$1,515 per month.¹⁴

Eviction defense is a necessary intervention to maintain affordable housing, and our FY26 budget request seeks funding for the *Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program* (“CLCPP”) to ensure District tenants facing eviction have the legal help they need to protect their rights, assert legitimate defenses, and negotiate agreements that allow them to maintain their housing with achievable terms. The critical nature of this support is demonstrated by the

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates* (published Sept 2024) available at <https://data.census.gov/table?q=B25140&g=160XX00US1150000>.

¹¹ Claudia D. Solari, Lydia Lo, Alavi Rashid, Lynden Bond, Urban Institute, [Housing Insecurity in the District of Columbia](#) (November 16, 2023).

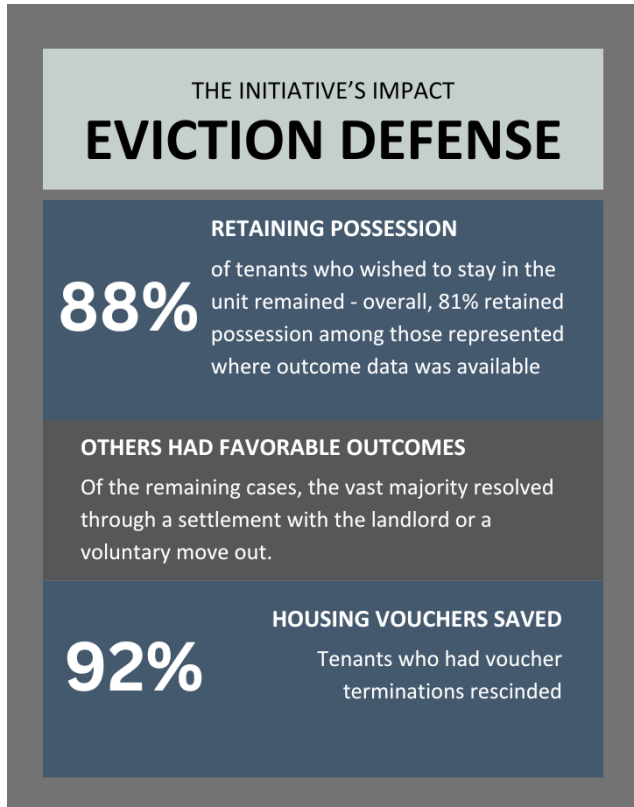
¹² *Id.*

¹³ Out of Reach: District of Columbia | National Low Income Housing Coalition, available at <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/dc>

¹⁴ NPC Research, *Biannual Progress Report to the Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP)* (October 2024).

work accomplished through CLCPP, as outlined in greater depth in DCBF’s comprehensive evaluation reports.¹⁵

CLCPP-funded organizations jointly maintain the Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network (“LTLAN”), a coordinated and accessible telephone-based intake and referral system for low-income litigants to be connected with an attorney from a CLCPP-funded organization. Funded organizations ensure LTLAN information is widely available through partnerships with community organizations, in mailed court documents about upcoming hearings, and through announcements during court hearings. LTLAN has fielded over 7,700 calls from tenants and small landlords seeking help in the last year and a half.¹⁶ In the first half of 2024, 83% of clients reached CLCPP organizations through LTLAN (61%) or called a funded organization directly (22%).¹⁷



NPC Research, *Biannual Progress Report to the Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program* (October 2024)

CLCPP-funded organizations have a regular presence in court hearings to connect with unrepresented tenants to offer services, including remote hearings. Judicial officers have found the CLCPP’s role instrumental in the administration of justice.

CLCPP-funded organizations participate in D.C. Superior Court’s Landlord Tenant Working Group, its Landlord Tenant Rules Committee, and its Eviction Diversion Stakeholders Group to provide recommendations to the Court on process improvements, working in partnership with affordable housing providers.

Robust data collection for the CLCPP program began in August 2019. Since that time and through June 2024, CLCPP-funded organizations have closed 13,156 eviction, voucher termination, and other eviction-related cases, providing legal assistance to 10,646 low-income D.C. residents.¹⁸

In order to leverage funds effectively, CLCPP organizations collaborate to train and refer cases for representation to pro bono attorneys. Each year, CLCPP organizations host a five-part eviction law training series attended by pro bono attorneys and offer a series of courthouse tours.¹⁹

The *Access to Justice Grants Program’s* additional investment in *eviction prevention* allows DCBF and Initiative-funded organizations to also pursue prevention-based strategies to halt evictions, including more directly involving non-legal, community-based organizations as partners. Our FY26 request includes funding to support eviction prevention efforts that will allow Initiative-funded organizations to continue

¹⁵ A range of relevant reports is available at <https://www.dcbfoundation.org/reports>. Another good exploration of these efforts is available at [Annemarie Cuccia, “We’re Trying to Make it a Level Playing Field: How a New Hotline Helped Stop Two-Thirds of Evictions in DC,” *The DC Line* \(August 22, 2022, updated December 9, 2022\).](#)

¹⁶ [NPC Research, *Biannual Progress Report to the Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program \(CLCPP\)* \(October 2024\)](#) at 6.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 5.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

work with canvassers to knock on doors and offer other support to ensure tenants at risk of eviction are aware of the availability of services to help.

Initiative-funded organizations work to identify those tenants at risk of eviction by requesting and tracking data on pre-court notices served on tenants, new case filings, upcoming hearings, new judgments, and new writs, and then using this data to inform coordinated outreach with tenant canvassers, housing counselors, and relevant government agencies, including the Office of the Tenant Advocate.



Initiative-funded organizations ensure tenants are aware of their rights that may allow them to avoid eviction, critical when tenants often misunderstand relevant rules and renter protections that apply to them. This outreach includes sending postcards with tenants' rights information to buildings where tenants may be facing eviction; holding outreach sessions with tenant associations, tenant organizers, and other community service organizations; holding pop up events on-site at buildings; and using social media, mail, and community partners to educate the public. They also educate tenant organizers about LTLAN so that this information is shared with tenants. Initiative-funded organizations participate in training and outreach events held by other community organizations, including Housing Counseling Services, the Latino Economic Development Center, D.C. Public Libraries, D.C. Public Schools Early Childhood program, local hospitals, and various school groups.

Initiative-funded organizations approach this work holistically, also working to connect District residents with related supports that could help them become stably housed, such as disability, unemployment, and financial planning if facing long-term financial issues; and help with issues that may affect housing stability, such as deep cleaning and hoarding therapy intervention. Initiative-funded organizations have been able to hire staff whose duties include connecting tenants to services that will help them remain stably housed.

DCBF co-leads the D.C. Eviction Prevention Working Group with the Greater Washington Community Foundation and with support from the Urban Institute, a group set up after the White House's Eviction Prevention Summit. Here, Initiative-funded organizations participate in strategic partnering between lawyers, housing providers and landlords, the District government, housing counselors and organizers, and the Court to reach tenants in the community with a goal of avoiding eviction. The Working Group has developed a multi-faceted collaborative framework that calls for increased community outreach and education, more partnering between legal organizations and community-based canvassers, and more engagement with housing providers and tenants alike before landlords file eviction actions.

Finally, securing affordable housing goes beyond eviction prevention. FY26 support for the *Access to Justice Grants Program* will support numerous other housing strategies Initiative-funded organizations employ to keep District residents in safe, healthy housing, such as:

THE INITIATIVE'S IMPACT

HEALTHIER HOMES

ATTACKING HEALTH DISPARITIES
Children with asthma in Wards 7 and 8 are 20 times more likely to end up in the ER for asthma than a child growing up in Ward 3

LEGAL INTERVENTIONS MEAN HEALTHIER CHILDREN
Children's health improves – sometimes within days – after the conditions are addressed.

COMBATting HOUSING CODE VIOLATIONS
Mold, lead, and vermin exacerbate asthma and lead to emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS ARE CLEAR
A legal intervention, alongside medical treatment, keeps children out of the hospital and emergency room and results in significant Medicaid cost avoidance – on average \$10,000 in the first 18 months alone after a housing conditions case is initiated

Children's Law Center

- helping tenants facing environmental health hazards and unsafe housing conditions secure health-saving improvements from landlords and property owners through individual and building-wide advocacy;
- keeping families in their historic communities through work in foreclosure and estate administration to foster continued, intergenerational communities;
- promoting housing preservation by safeguarding low-equity housing cooperatives, tenant organizations, and other groups that keep District residents in their homes;
- supporting fair housing and combatting housing-based discrimination;
- keeping tenants in their housing by combatting illegal rent increases and unlawful voucher terminations; and
- working with individuals experiencing homelessness to provide holistic, legal support to address issues like access to public benefits, estate planning and probate, housing, and record sealing.

APPENDIX B: PROMOTING PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

The Initiative supports a wide range of funded projects at legal organizations that are specifically targeted to promote public safety, address family instability, and improve community well-being through the *Access to Justice Grants Program*. Left unaddressed, these issues make our community vulnerable to crisis. Instead, successful intervention promotes community resiliency and stability. Some examples of the ways the program promotes public safety and community well-being include:

- *Keeping individuals and families safe.* Initiative-funded organizations offer trauma-informed services to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence in all eight Wards. Initiative-funded organizations have mobilized to offer support in the form of emergency legal services and crisis safety planning and launched new and expanded virtual and in-person clinics to meet the growing need. Court-based services are essential when the most recently available data²⁰ show that 88% of petitioners in domestic violence matters seeking civil protection orders lack counsel. Specialized services support survivors of sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and victims of crime.
- *Specialized support for individuals with disabilities.* The Initiative supports a wide range of projects aimed at serving individuals with disabilities, including ensuring the least-restrictive options for those facing undue adult guardianship, assisting those facing housing challenges due to mental illness or behavioral challenges, and combatting discrimination based on disability or medical status.
- *Assisting seniors aging in place.* Low-income seniors get support in drafting wills and advance directives, renewing public benefits, fighting scams, and dealing with housing-related issues. Probate is a long-standing gap in our civil legal services network. While for years there was only one legal services provider offering services in probate matters, expanded Initiative funds have allowed more legal services providers to develop a practice in this area. Low-income, Black, and Latino populations are less likely to have wills and estate plans, leading to complex probate proceedings after a death in the family and threatening intergenerational transfer of property. Legal help to navigate these complicated systems is essential.
- *Promoting family stability.* The Initiative supports a wide range of projects at funded organizations that promote family stability. At least three projects aim to prevent children from entering the foster care system through early intervention legal services at key points of instability, legal support for relative caregivers seeking to step in to care for children whose parents are unable to care for them, and support to parents whose families are at risk of entering the foster care system. Initiative-funded organizations partner with the D.C. Child & Family Services Agency (CFSA) in their effort to establish a new 211 Warmline prevention program, which is intended to increase families' early access to health and human services to build stability, well-being, and resilience, therefore preventing child abuse and neglect.
- *Minimizing family conflict.* Initiative-funded organizations provide representation to District residents trying to resolve family conflict in the D.C. Superior Court. For example, one project is aimed at providing specialized, trauma-informed support to children involved in custody disputes identified as being in critical need of representation. Representation of parents and primary caregivers with child support issues is also provided, notable where 80-97% of litigants traditionally pursue these cases without legal help.²¹ In 2023, the Family Law Assistance Network (FLAN) expanded beyond remote services to meet the demand for legal assistance. In addition

²⁰ [D.C. Access to Justice Commission, *Delivering Justice: Addressing Civil Legal Needs in the District of Columbia* \(December 2019\) at 204.](#) A summary of representation rates in DC Courts and the DC Office of Administrative Hearings is available at https://dcaccesstojustice.org/reports_extra.html.

²¹ *Id.*

to operating a Hotline and email referral system four days per week, FLAN now operates an in-person walk-in center within D.C. Superior Court.

- *Managing health crises.* Funds support medical-legal partnerships that place lawyers alongside medical staff at some of the District’s highest-volume primary care providers, including projects that offer specialized services to children, pregnant and postpartum individuals, cancer patients, and other special populations. Legal services providers continue to help low-income D.C. residents stay stable and healthy by pursuing and maintaining local and federal benefits and gaining access to housing, food, and medications, as they continue to identify legal remedies for health problems, such as uncontrolled asthma due to mold-infested homes.
- *Promoting education opportunities for youth.* Initiative funds support legal services to parents and students to ensure that they are free from school exclusion and have access to a free and appropriate education, including special education and related services, language access, and other required supports to promote successful educational and life outcomes. Other services specifically target court-involved youth or youth at risk of court involvement.
- *Re-entry support for returning citizens.* Several projects provide support to individuals transitioning back to the community after being detained in local or federal juvenile, residential, or adult facilities through legal support in education, custody, employment, consumer, and post-incarceration issues. Specialized support for women returning from incarceration in issues like expungement, probation issues, child support, child custody, and consumer issues is also offered. Projects at funded organizations also offer support in expungement and record sealing. A 2020 study found that there is a significantly lower recidivism rate among those who have their criminal records expunged. The study also found “sharp upturns” in wage and employment trajectories for those who obtained expungement relief, finding that “on average, within one year of expungement wages go up by over 22% versus the pre-expungement trajectory.”²²
- *Support to the District’s immigrant population.* Initiative funds support legal help to combat notario fraud, protect unaccompanied minors, and offer culturally specific legal services to targeted populations within the immigrant community.

²² Prescott, J., Starr, S., [Expungement of Criminal Convictions: An Empirical Study](#), Harvard Law Review, 133, no. 8 (2020) at 2460-2555.

APPENDIX C: PROMOTING ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR INDIVIDUALS AND THE COMMUNITY

Projects at Initiative-funded organizations also lessen economic risk and inopportunity and promote community well-being and stability through the *Access to Justice Grants Program*:

- *Stabilizing credit for low-income residents and helping protect critically needed funds.* Projects at funded organizations help residents fight predatory lending and illegal debt collection schemes and avert negative court judgments and credit reports, which can affect housing and employment opportunities – including focused community efforts in Wards 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8. They also seek to avert or minimize the extraction of wealth from D.C. residents by debt collectors, which occurs disproportionately against Black and Latino D.C. residents. The District saw an alarming number of these consumer problems before the pandemic, and District residents have since faced more consumer and debt-related legal issues as billing cycles and wage loss create a toxic personal financial environment for thousands of already vulnerable D.C. residents. Scams have also become more sophisticated with the rise of AI, putting D.C. residents at risk. Six Initiative-funded organizations partnered to establish the D.C. Debt Collection Hotline, which has already served thousands of residents, and, as cases continue to spike, is the phone number provided by D.C. Superior Court to litigants facing debt collection lawsuits. One funded organization kept a total of nearly \$1 million in the pockets of over 1,000 District families facing debt and consumer issues last year.

THE INITIATIVE'S IMPACT

ECONOMIC IMPACT

PROMOTING INDIVIDUAL SECURITY

One funded organization kept nearly \$1 million in the pockets of over 1,000 D.C. families facing debt & consumer issues last year.

BENEFITS SECURED

Another organization reported that the equivalent of just under 2.5 lawyers secured over \$850,000 in vital public benefits for its clients.

MEDICAID SAVINGS FOR THE COMMUNITY

One grantee tracked its impact and found that community savings include \$14 million in Medicaid costs avoided over three years by keeping children out of hospitals and emergency rooms.

- *Protecting wages and jobs.* These funds help teach low-income workers their rights, ensure they receive the wages they have earned and help them recover stolen wages, and fight discrimination and harassment. Requests for legal assistance have clustered around unemployment insurance, terminations, and employers' failures to pay wages or other benefits. Even before the pandemic, litigants in unemployment-related matters at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings were unrepresented by counsel 91% of the time.²³ Specialized employment projects at funded organizations support working mothers and those seeking assistance in applying for paid family leave benefits, and address discriminatory practices in the workplace in order to reduce income inequality.

- *Preserving intergenerational homes though heirs property and other probate-related work.* The District has prioritized maintaining and growing homeownership among longtime District residents. The ability to navigate the probate system can mean the difference between keeping a multigenerational home in D.C. or losing it and being forced to leave the community. A lack of legal support in probate matters (as high as 97% in some cases) has been a long-standing civil justice gap, but a growing number of Initiative projects offer support in this area.

²³ *Delivering Justice*, supra note 20, at 210.

- *Promoting economic security.* Helping District residents secure benefits for which they are entitled has always been an important part of the Initiative. Providers play a critical role in working with government agencies like DHS and the DHCf to ensure that public benefit programs are accessible to the client community. There is a large gap in services for District residents navigating issues at the D.C. OAH, which hears cases relevant to vital public benefits such as unemployment insurance, TANF, SNAP, rental subsidies, shelter services, and health benefits – a gap that providers struggle to fill.²⁴ The equivalent of just under 2.5 lawyers at one funded organization secured more than \$850,000 in vital public benefits for their clients. The Initiative also supports services to those experiencing homelessness to provide holistic, legal support to address issues ranging from public benefits, estate planning, probate, housing, and record sealing.
- *Reducing health-related costs* by addressing health-harming problems that can be resolved through legal solutions. For example, projects at funded organizations help District families address housing code violations or other environmental health hazards that often exacerbate medical conditions like asthma. One Initiative-funded organization tracked its impact and found that community savings include \$14 million in Medicaid costs avoided over three years by keeping children out of hospitals and emergency rooms.
- *Identifying financial support for health-beneficial investments* where one Initiative-funded organization helped secure \$20 million in federal funds in 2024 to upgrade more than 700 units across six properties in the District to reduce asthma triggers and improve air quality – both securing direct and immediate benefits for residents will also likely further reducing health-related costs for the District.²⁵

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ <https://childrenslawcenter.org/news/washington-business-journal-d-c-nonprofits-to-upgrade-air-quality-in-700-multifamily-homes/>.

APPENDIX D: MAKING OUR LEGAL SYSTEM MORE ACCESSIBLE

The *Access to Justice Grants Program* also supports strategies to make civil justice more accessible to District residents, a vital constituent service. The Initiative’s interest in this work reflects a recognition that it is critical that District residents have access to a continuum of services that fit their scope of need, spanning from access to high quality legal information to full legal representation.

This includes coordinated intake and referral. No system works if it is not connected to the people who need it. For twenty years, our legal community has talked about developing a system that would make it easier for District residents to access help, without success. From a user perspective, solutions to problems – even if they are recognized as legal problems (and often they are not) – are not easy to find. There are countless phone calls, online or in-person intakes, shuffling from organization to organization to get help. Often those efforts are ultimately unsuccessful. For District residents to have a justice experience that meets them where they are and provides them with the help they need, when and where they need it, we need a more coordinated, strategic approach.

DCBF is leading an effort to ensure that for District residents, there will be ‘no wrong door’ to accessing legal help with a single point of entry – known as “D.C. Resource Bridge,” a single phone number and website initially – where they’ll be connected with someone who will listen to their problems and connect them with a legal services provider. In August and September 2022, DCBF released two critical reports that are informing the development of our community’s long-awaited system. The first report is based on client and community member focus groups, and the second report captures input on the system design from legal services providers, allied organizations, and individuals.²⁶ Another related report was released in November 2023.²⁷ A successful pilot of the system is currently in place and a host for the full system will be announced in February 2025, anticipating a full launch in 2025.

This effort to develop a coordinated intake and referral system is deeply connected to DCBF’s efforts to transform our civil legal aid network to involve other community partners who serve District residents. Having a coordinated intake and referral system will also benefit social services, government, and other professionals who are often in the position of trying to connect individuals with legal help.

We also recognize the importance of efforts to ensure District residents have access to high quality and accurate legal information. FY26 funding may support efforts to consolidate and streamline community access to legal information, building on the Commission’s September 2024 report, *Justice for All: Report on Self-Help in the District of Columbia and Recommendations for a More Efficient and Coordinated Future*.²⁸ The Commission’s report detailed its three-year effort to inventory and assess existing legal information in the District, finding that it was often outdated, inaccurate, too complicated for the average District resident to understand, and hard to find. The Commission recommended that the District invest in improving our community approach to maintaining legal information by pursuing a model, based on successes in other jurisdictions,²⁹ that will increase efficiency and accessibility of legal information to individuals and non-legal professionals in the District. The Commission’s report contains a roadmap for nonprofit, government, court, and other stakeholders to use to launch this model in the District. The roadmap details the practical elements of its recommended model, including the importance of dedicated resources and staff devoted to ensuring legal information is accurate and readily accessible.

²⁶ NPC Research & DC Bar Foundation, [Designing a Coordinated Intake and Referral \(CIR\) System in the District of Columbia: Client and Community Member Input](#) (July 2022) and NPC Research & DC Bar Foundation, [Designing a Coordinated Intake and Referral \(CIR\) System in the District of Columbia: Input from Legal Services Providers and Allied Organizations](#) (August 2022).

²⁷ NPC Research & DC Bar Foundation, [Designing a Coordinated Intake and Referral System in the District of Columbia: Summary of Input Gathered from DC Residents](#) (November 2023).

²⁸ D.C. Access to Justice Commission, *Justice for All: Report on Self-Help in the District of Columbia and Recommendations for a More Efficient and Coordinated Future* (September 2024), available at <https://dcaccesstojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Final-ATJC-Self-Help-Report-Online.pdf>.

²⁹ Examples include Michigan Legal Help, <https://michiganlegalhelp.org/> and Illinois Legal Help Online, <https://www.illinoislegalaid.org/>.

APPENDIX E: RETAINING HIGH QUALITY, EXPERIENCED LAWYERS

The high quality of these services is dependent on the professionals who deliver them. A hallmark of the Initiative is DCBF's investment in professional training and support to Initiative-funded organizations and their staff.

Since the Initiative's inception, the *D.C. Poverty Lawyer Loan Repayment Assistance Program* ("D.C. LRAP") has served as a critical tool for recruiting and maintaining a high quality, diverse corps of legal services lawyers. These professionals support residents facing a wide range of civil legal problems and other inequities in our legal system, yet their salaries lag below market and far behind their government and private sector peers. Currently, 98 legal services attorneys who live in the District and work at 26 legal services organizations, receive loan repayment support. This is critical when legal services salaries in D.C. are currently significantly below-market (an average of \$73,378 among enrolled participants at all experience levels) compared with their government or private sector peers (with entry-level salaries for first-year associates at private law firms averaging at \$200,000³⁰).

DCBF also supports these lawyers through trainings and technical assistance. DCBF sponsors multiple trainings each year and subsidizes the tuition fee for Initiative-funded organizational staff to attend select legal skills trainings offered by other organizations in the District.

³⁰ NALP's 2023 Associate Salary Survey report shows that the overall median first-year associate base salary as of January 1, 2023, was \$200,000 compared to \$64,000 for legal services attorneys, whose salaries even fall well below their public service peers. National Association of Law Placement, *Salaries and Compensation Research*, available at <https://www.nalp.org/salariescompensation>.

APPENDIX F: THE INITIATIVE’S ROLE IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY NEED

Despite the District’s significant investment in the Initiative over time, the community need for these critical, free legal services continues to outpace available resources. The District’s investments have allowed DCBF to expand necessary interventions to get closer to meeting the demand for legal help and address persistent gaps in legal services delivery. There is no doubt that even an appropriation at funding level to FY25 will leave thousands of District residents needing help unserved.

The Commission’s *Delivering Justice* report³¹ described the civil justice crisis facing the District before the pandemic. Initiative-funded organizations report that requests for help continue to increase, with vulnerable populations like District elders, those living with disabilities, and the immigrant population particularly susceptible to legal risk. Even cases that have not grown in number have demanded greater capacity to service them, with hearing preparation and participation taking longer and matters becoming more complex due to the number of statutory and practice-based changes since the pandemic. Our post-pandemic world has created a new ‘normal’ whereby legal services providers are serving clients simultaneously in both remote and in-person environments.

Here are some snapshots of needs identified by Initiative-funded organizations:

- *The need for representation in our courts and tribunals is great.* The most recently available data shows that rates of litigants in civil proceedings appearing in court without a lawyer are as high as 75-97% in D.C. Courts and at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings.³²
- *Eviction remains at crisis level.*
 - More than 81,000 District rental households are “housing-cost burdened” because they spend thirty percent or more of income on rent; 40,000 are “severely” housing-cost burdened because they spend half or more of their income on rent. (The number of *all* household types that are housing-cost burdened is more than 105,000, with 50,000 considered “severely” housing-cost burdened.)³³
 - Twelve percent of District residents (or 82,452) are experiencing housing insecurity, meaning housing unaffordability, inadequate housing, or frequent and unwanted moves – with that burden largely falling on families, children, and youth; Black and Latino residents, and Ward 7 and 8 residents.³⁴
 - In its 2024 publication of the annual *Out of Reach* report, the National Low Income Housing Coalition ranked the District of Columbia as the sixth most expensive jurisdiction in the nation regarding rental housing wages, with the fair market rent for a 2-bedroom apartment in D.C. at \$2,045, and monthly income necessary to afford this rent without experiencing rental cost burden at \$6,816.³⁵ In contrast, the median household income among CLCPP clients served is \$1,515 per month.³⁶

³¹ D.C. Access to Justice Commission, *Delivering Justice*, *supra* note 20.

³² *Id.* A summary of representation rates in D.C. Courts and the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings is available at https://dcaccesstojustice.org/reports_extra.html.

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates (published Sept 2024) available at <https://data.census.gov/table?q=B25140&g=160XX00US1150000>.

³⁴ Claudia D.Solari, Lydia Lo, Alavi Rashid, Lynden Bond, Urban Institute, [Housing Insecurity in the District of Columbia](#) (November 16, 2023).

³⁵ Out of Reach: District of Columbia | National Low Income Housing Coalition, available at <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/dc>.

³⁶ NPC Research, *Biannual Progress Report to the Council of the District of Columbia and the Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants, Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program (CLCPP)* (October 2024).

- There have been over 7,700 calls to the Landlord Tenant Legal Assistance Network in 2023 and the first half of 2024.
- *Domestic violence remains a chronic, growing area of need.*
 - One in four women in the District have experienced domestic violence, and cases have continued to rise in 2023, not letting up on the surge providers saw during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic as households faced increased economic strain and stay-at-home orders.
 - One domestic violence provider handled 25% more clients in 2023 than the same period in 2022, with 2024 seeing similar increases in need.
 - D.C. SAFE – the source of a majority of referrals for civil protection orders received by Initiative-funded organizations – experienced 35,464 calls to their Crisis Response Line and made 16,635 unique referrals in fiscal year 2024.³⁷
 - Emerging needs among domestic violence survivors include enforcement of gun relinquishment requirements for respondents in civil protection orders and anti-stalking protections.
 - One organization co-counseled with 600+ volunteer attorneys (for an equivalent of over 48,000 donated hours of legal services worth \$18 million) to better meet client needs.
- *Economic stressors persist.*
 - An Initiative-funded organization reported that half of its clients fully or partially lost employment because of the pandemic, exacerbating their already existing economic vulnerability.
 - For those who are employed, Initiative-funded organizations ensure that employer legal requirements like wage protection and provisions related to domestic workers are met.
 - One organization reported a 15% increase in requests for consumer debt legal help over the previous year. More District residents were also seeking help with bankruptcy. In Wards 7 and 8, 50% of people have some form of delinquent debt.³⁸
 - Credit defaults, which are typically a predictor of debt collection volume, are at a 14-year high,³⁹ and filed cases now have more complex litigation needs to ensure current protections are honored.
 - Projects at funded organizations offer financial literacy programs to District residents to protect income and asset security, particularly District youth. This is critical, as the most recent Nation’s Report Card on Financial Literacy gave D.C. an “F,” placing it in the lowest 20 percent of the country (primarily because financial literacy is not readily available in traditional educational settings).⁴⁰
 - A January 2025 report found that 167 foreclosures were filed in the District in March 2024, a 17% increase from the prior month, with the District having a foreclosure rate higher than all 50 states.⁴¹

³⁷ DC Safe, *DC Safe FY24 by the Numbers*, available at <https://www.dcsafe.org/financials-reports>.

³⁸ Miranda Santillo, Mingli Zhong, Oriya Cohen, Urban Institute, [*Washington, DC, Has Glaring Financial Health Inequities. So Do Most American Cities*](#) (October 6, 2022).

³⁹ Adriana Morga, [*Here’s what you need to know about credit card defaults*](#), Associated Press (January 9, 2025).

⁴⁰ American Public Education Foundation, [*The Nation’s Report Card of Financial Literacy*](#) (2023-2024).

⁴¹ SoFi Learn, [*Foreclosure Rates in all 50 States in March 2024*](#) (January 9, 2025).

- *Family conflict often requires legal intervention.*
 - In D.C.'s Family Court, 83-93% of litigants lack counsel.
 - The Initiative-funded Family Law Assistance Network has fielded close to 4,400 calls from District residents seeking this type of assistance since its inception in March 2020, with a trend of year-over-year increases. For example, with just one month to go in 2024, FLAN had already served 152% more people than the prior year (from 951 to 1,433).
- *Probate-related needs continue.*
 - A report issued jointly by the Council for Court Excellence and the D.C. Access to Justice Commission calls on the legal and philanthropic community to expand support for legal services in probate and estate administration among other reforms.⁴² This includes end-of-life planning to ensure the economic viability of intergenerational families.
 - FY25 funding facilitated the creation of a new coordinated effort, the Probate Legal Assistant Network, which has streamlined access to these critical services.
 - One organization's 'Legal Information Help Line' received 1,619 calls regarding probate or life planning issues over a two-year period. In 2022, four of every ten resources accessed on LawHelp.org/DC were related to probate.
- *District residents require help navigating critical government programs and benefits.*
 - More clients with disabilities are seeking help with supported decision-making and recovering stolen benefits.
 - There is a consistent and growing need for legal help in securing appropriate special education services and education access for students at-risk and with disabilities, especially older youth – and ensuring that these students have access to the District's range of school choice options.
 - With Medicaid recertification and Medicaid-funded services under renewed scrutiny, District residents with health needs require help addressing errors and litigating factual disputes on the necessity of services. Litigants appealing public benefits decisions at the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings are unrepresented 86% of the time.
 - District residents are facing increasing challenges in securing and maintaining access to Social Security benefits.

These are just a few reasons why Initiative-funded organizations report an increasing and more complex level of community need for civil legal help, and underscores the need to approve our FY26 budget request of \$32M.

⁴² [Council for Court Excellence and D.C. Access to Justice Commission, *Strengthening Probate Administration in the District of Columbia* \(February 2022\).](#)