



LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

# 2020 Annual Report

## A Year of Tragedy and Violence

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Dear Friends of Legal Aid:

2020 has been a trying year for all of us. But it has been particularly horrific for many of our Black friends and neighbors. COVID-19 has killed Black Americans at a [higher rate than any other group](#), and the murders of George Floyd and many others at the hands of police has once again demonstrated the impact of state violence on Black lives. Perhaps this should come as no surprise in a nation that has so systematically violated the rights of Black Americans over the years – through incarceration, eviction, police brutality, the denial of equal education and healthcare, and the indignity of personal discrimination – but the fact that it is not surprising makes it no less unjust.

When the pandemic reached the District earlier this year, our client community was hit the hardest. Well over 95% of the clients Legal Aid serves are Black or people of color. [Nearly 90% of the DC residents who died of COVID-19 so far are Black \(74%\) or Hispanic \(13%\)](#). And as stay-at-home orders were issued and schools and work places shut down across the city, our neighbors struggled to both stay safe and make ends meet. Unemployment claims skyrocketed, domestic violence surged, and housing and food insecurity rose sharply. Requests for legal help to Legal Aid increased dramatically this year. Never has Legal Aid faced such profound challenges.

That is why I am extraordinarily proud, and extraordinarily humbled, by the work our staff has done this year, and by the unprecedented support of thousands of people and organizations for our work.

Legal Aid attorneys helped [stop the Trump Administration](#) from kicking 700,000 Americans off food stamps; [helped shape pandemic relief legislation](#) at the DC Council that will prevent evictions and foreclosures in the District until March 2021 (and defended that moratorium against a relentless attack by DC landlords); helped work with the Courts to ensure that litigants had fair and safe access; and helped thousands of individual clients [get their unemployment benefits](#), [reunite with their children](#), [reach safety from domestic violence](#), [keep their homes](#), and so much more. Legal Aid staff often did this at great personal sacrifice, adjusting to remote work while caring for their own children and loved ones.



Nicole Dooley, Staff Attorney in our Public Benefits Law Unit, who worked on our case that helped vacate a Trump Administration rule that would have kicked 700,000 Americans off food stamps.

And just as they have for decades, Legal Aid’s client community made their own voices heard, in and out of court, whether it was our [newly formed Community Advisory Council](#) advocating at the DC Council, or clients bringing their stories to [MSNBC](#), the [Washington Post](#), and the [New York Times](#).

It was your support in this time of crisis, when so many organizations were forced to cut back, that enabled Legal Aid to expand our impact.

All told, hundreds of thousands of DC residents and Americans nationwide benefited this year because of your generosity and we are proud to be able to share in this report the result of this work alongside the stories of individual clients, whose lives you touched.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dantzic'.

David Dantzic  
President, Board of Trustees  
Latham & Watkins

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Angel'.

Eric Angel  
Executive Director  
Legal Aid

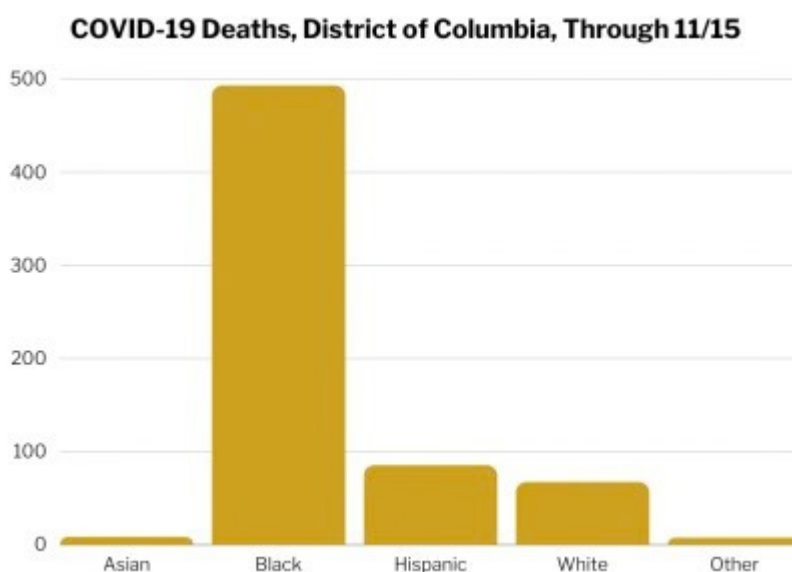
P.S. We are so appreciative for our clients who, after fighting difficult legal challenges, agreed to be photographed for this report. All photography occurred outside and was done in a socially-distant manner. In addition, we are grateful to [Alison DeSilva](#), who contributed her outstanding photography pro bono to this virtual annual report.



## The COVID Divide

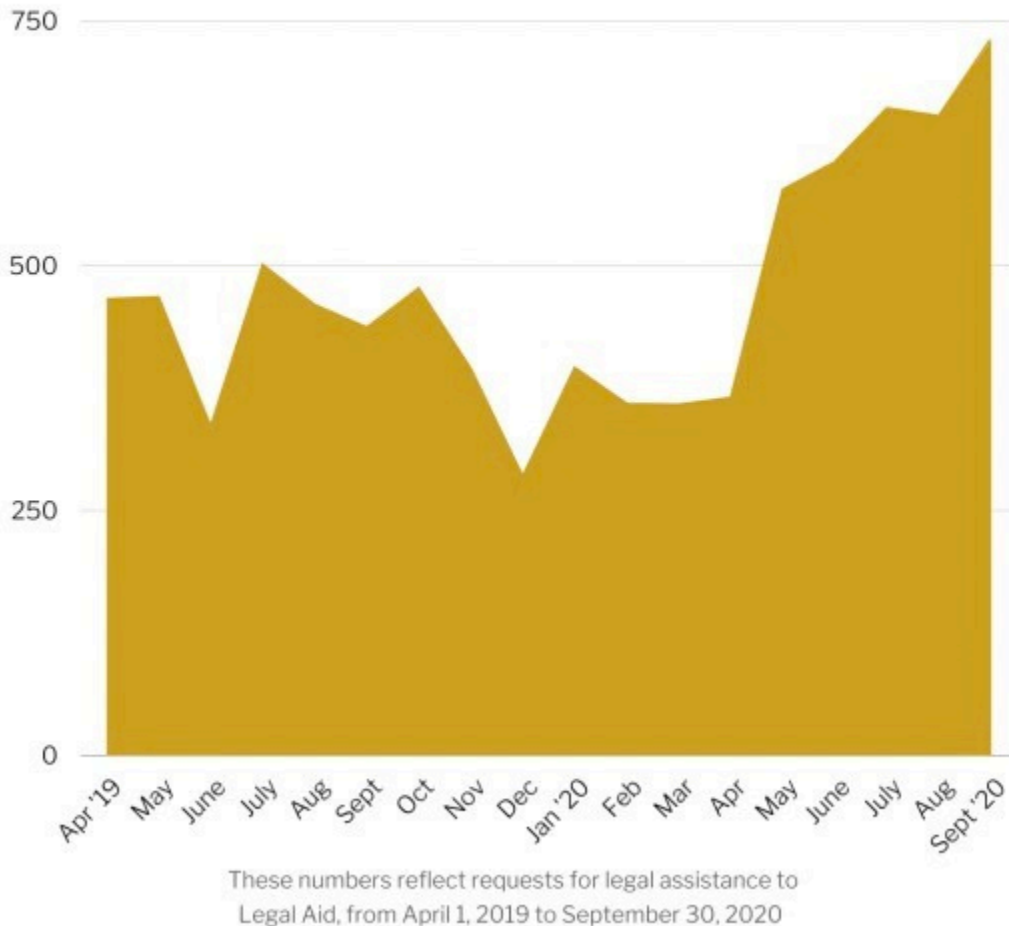
Even before the pandemic, [the District was home to some of the worst racial and income disparities in the nation](#). Deep-rooted institutional racism has meant that Black residents consistently make up the largest share of residents living in poverty in the District. And though median household income in DC has steadily increased over the past decade for white households, [the median income for Black households did not](#).

These substantial racial, wealth, and health disparities in the District have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Residents of color – who make up the majority of our client community – have been disproportionately impacted as they are more likely to have underlying health conditions, more likely to have essential jobs that do not allow them to work from home, and less likely to have access to essential resources (such as food, child care, and safe housing).



To date, the number of COVID-19 infections and deaths among Black and Hispanic/Latino DC residents far outnumber those of non-Hispanic white residents. Looking at where the majority of Legal Aid clients live, the number of infections and deaths in Wards 7 and 8 – which have the highest concentration of poverty in the District and where more than 90% of residents are Black – are also far higher than other wards. The increase in inquiries for help that Legal Aid has fielded this year is evidence of this disproportionate impact.

## Requests for Help, Last 18 Months



Clients like [Cynthia Spencer](#), who lost her job at the start of the pandemic and struggled to obtain Unemployment benefits; [Denise Humphries](#), a single mother of three who, since the pandemic, has not been able to make over-time pay which she relied on to make ends meet; and [Naomi and Julio Garcia](#) (below) are just a few among the hundreds of Legal Aid clients who have been deeply impacted by the pandemic. Their stories are shared throughout this report.

*Naomi and Julio Garcia's story shows how Legal Aid's approach to representation helps families navigate multiple systems and overlapping legal issues in a time of crisis. Like so many others, Ms. Garcia and her son Julio were deeply impacted by the pandemic. When Julio lost his job, Ms. Garcia, who participates in the Housing Choice Voucher Program (a rental assistance program that subsidizes the rent of lower-income families), was entitled to a rent adjustment which reflected the loss in the family's income. Despite persistent efforts to report the income loss to the DC Housing Authority (DCHA), the Garcias got no response.*

*Legal Aid Housing Attorney Eleni Christidis was able to obtain complete retroactive relief for the Garcia family. Then Eleni and Skadden Loaned Associate Jim Perry also assisted Julio with his unemployment claim. Drawing on the teamwork and expertise of their colleagues in Legal Aid's Housing Law and Public Benefits Units, Eleni and Jim were able to make sure the Garcia family obtained the full benefits to which they were entitled and preserve their affordable housing*

*\*Names changed for confidentiality*

# Responding to the Pandemic

## Responding to the Pandemic

When the public health emergency was declared in the District, Legal Aid immediately leapt into action. In addition to the threat of COVID-19 itself, we knew that our client community would be hit hardest in other ways. We knew that access to healthcare, income support, and the preservation of housing, wages, and assets would be vital to an equitable recovery for low-income residents and residents of color. Our goal: to help mitigate the pandemic's impact on our most vulnerable neighbors.

- Even before a public health emergency was declared in DC in mid-March, Legal Aid worked behind the scenes with the U.S. Marshalls, DC Superior Court, and the DC Council to halt evictions in the District, and to stay all non-emergency hearings.
- Starting on March 16, we transitioned our entire program to remote work, ensuring that we could respond to individuals in need of legal assistance while protecting the safety of our clients, staff, and volunteers. We also created several new hotlines to provide legal advice across our practice areas, including for tenants unsure what would happen to them if they could no longer pay rent.
- We helped shape several progressively more aggressive emergency relief bills in DC that expanded access to healthcare, provided new unemployment benefits programs targeting those previously ineligible for unemployment benefits, strengthened moratoria on evictions, foreclosure, and debt collection actions, and more.
- We stayed in close contact with current and former clients throughout the pandemic, both to address new and continuing legal issues, and to help them access new benefits programs, including federal stimulus funds that were predictably most difficult to access for Americans who needed them most.

### COVID-19 NOTICE:

LEGAL AID'S OFFICES ARE CLOSED

**IF YOU HAVE A LEGAL PROBLEM,  
PLEASE CALL (202) 628-1161  
OR CLICK HERE**

### COVID-19 NOTICIA:

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**SI TIENE UN PROBLEMA LEGAL, POR  
FAVOR LLAME AL (202) 628-1161  
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Legal Aid shut down our Anacostia, Courthouse, and Northwest offices on Friday, March 13. By Monday morning, we had transitioned to fully remote, available to assist clients by phone and online.

Legal Aid worked closely with the DC Council, the DC Courts, partner organizations, and our own [Community Advisory Council](#) to address these issues. Early on, we successfully advocated for the suspension of all evictions and foreclosures in the District; increased access to healthcare for immigrants through the DC Healthcare Alliance program; and won an injunction (along with several state attorneys general) that ensured that nearly 700,000 Americans would not lose their food stamps.

Though the pandemic has made reaching the communities we serve exponentially more difficult, ensuring that our services remain accessible to the District's underserved communities was of the utmost importance. In addition to our policy and systemic advocacy efforts, Legal Aid made use of our phone and online intake services, and established new practice-specific hotlines to ensure new clients could reach us. We also worked hard to disseminate accurate information, share critical resources, help clients access safety-net benefits, and provide ongoing targeted legal assistance to existing clients, like Cristina Myers-Michel.

## Cristina Myers-Michel



Cristina Myers-Michel, outside her Washington DC home. She survived cancer, but faced over \$6,000 in medical bills when the District failed to screen her for health coverage.

In December 2019, we began working with Cristina Myers-Michel, who had been trying to apply for critical health coverage through the District government. Without this health coverage, Ms. Myers-Michel was unable to pay for the health costs not covered by her Medicare coverage (which only pays 80% of doctor's visits and has other restrictions).

The District government was supposed to act on its own to screen Ms. Myers-Michel for this health coverage. However, the District failed to do so, and, despite extensive efforts by Ms. Myers-Michel and her daughter Arlena over the course of many months, Ms. Myers-Michel was still not fully insured when she came to Legal Aid. This was particularly devastating for Ms. Myers-Michel, who had recently lost her husband to illness, and who herself was undergoing chemotherapy to treat a cancer diagnosis. As a result of the District's failure to provide the needed health coverage, she was incurring thousands of dollars in medical bills to obtain the needed treatment for her cancer. She had even had to miss rounds of chemotherapy treatment due to the exorbitant cost.

*"During these unprecedented and difficult times, this non-profit organization took up my mother's case in early January of 2020 and did not give up until it yielded a satisfactory result in September of 2020."*

*ARLENA MYERS-MICHEL*

After coming to Legal Aid, Ms. Myers-Michel began working with Public Benefits Attorney Chelsea Sharon and paralegal Lisa Meehan. Chelsea and Lisa were able to get Ms. Myers-Michel enrolled in both Medicaid and QMB. When the pandemic hit, Chelsea represented Ms. Myers-Michel in a virtual hearing and secured this coverage retroactive to the date her Medicare had started. As a result, Ms. Myers-Michel's thousands of dollars of debt was extinguished.



Ms. Myers-Michel (left) with her daughter Arlena and two granddaughters.

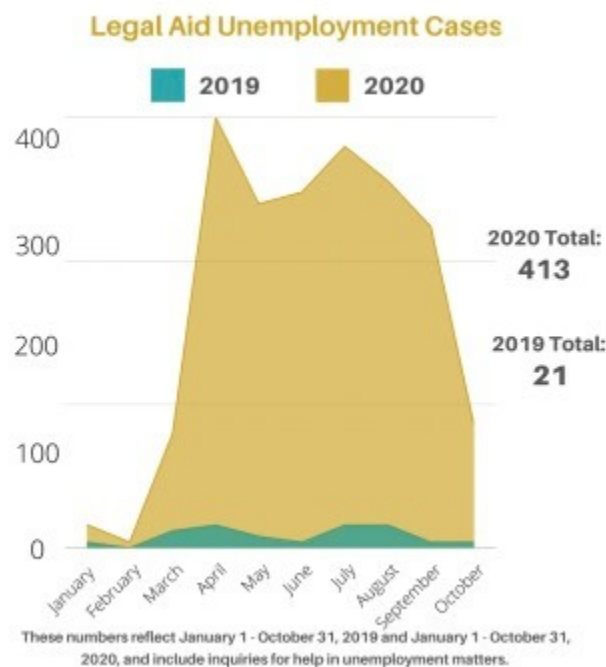
*"They treated us with professionalism and dignity from the beginning. They listened and empathized with us."*

*ARLENA MYERS-MICHEL*

# Navigating a System Unprepared for Historic Unemployment

## Navigating a System Unprepared for Historic Unemployment

More than 150,000 people have filed for Unemployment Benefits in DC since March, overwhelming a system that struggles to handle even a typical year's caseload. Among the problems with applying for unemployment at the beginning of the pandemic: you needed to use Internet Explorer on a desktop computer; you needed to fill the form out in English; and it was nearly impossible to contact the agency by phone. More than 400 recently-unemployed workers reached out to Legal Aid for help.



Within a week of the public health emergency being declared, [Legal Aid responded swiftly with a multi-pronged approach](#), leveraging our partnerships and resources to ensure that we could address the unemployment crisis. We hope that our efforts – some of which are described below – will serve as a model for legal services providers in other jurisdictions:

- Virtually overnight, expanded our internal unemployment team from one attorney to 15 staff members
- [Forged partnerships with law firms](#) and law schools
- Coordinated a new coalition of workers' rights advocates in the District
- Significantly expanded our community outreach efforts, partnering with the AFL-CIO and community organizations to educate fellow attorneys and the public on the expansion of UI programs during the pandemic

- Advocated before the DC Council and the Department of Employment Services to support needed emergency legislation and enact improvements to the unemployment system



SPECIAL ISSUE: FIGHTING FOR FIRM FOOTING WHILE THE GROUND KEEPS SHIFTING



## Responding to Catastrophic Job Loss during COVID-19: Mobilizing Resources for Unemployment Insurance Legal Matters

*By Drake Hagner, Senior Staff Attorney<sup>1</sup>  
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia*

Drake Hagner, a Supervising Attorney in the Public Benefits Law Unit, published a case study about Legal Aid's Unemployment Insurance practice during the pandemic to help serve as a model for other providers.

We focused our efforts on serving lower-wage workers who faced barriers in pursuing their claims such as lack of access to technology, having limited or no English proficiency, and having difficulty navigating complex and continuously changing regulatory schemes.

Through this combination of direct legal assistance and advocacy, we have helped thousands of DC residents struggling financially get the unemployment benefits they deserve and paid for through payroll taxes.

**"I am going to be adamant about modernizing our UI system and making sure we have a system that is accessible and modern and can be used by our workers in the century they live in, not the last century"**

**COUNCILMEMBER ELISSA SILVERMAN**

*During a hearing on the administration of unemployment benefits in which Legal Aid and other services providers testified.*

## Cynthia Spencer



Cynthia Spencer is among **more than 150,000 DC workers** who have filed for unemployment benefits since March. Like her, thousands of applicants have encountered numerous barriers and delays to pursuing their claims.

In March, Cynthia Spencer lost her job due to the pandemic. She applied for Unemployment Benefits with the Department of Employment Services (DOES) but was denied. When she reached out to DOES to find out why, she hit a wall.

“I held on the phone for hours, wanting to know why I was denied. I had to appeal the decision within 15 days, but I did not know how to file an appeal. I do not have access to a computer, and the library in my area was closed.”

CYNTHIA SPENCER

Fortunately, Ms. Spencer already had a relationship with Legal Aid. Since 2012 we have represented Ms. Spencer in multiple cases involving housing, Social Security disability insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare Part D, and she is now a key part of Legal Aid’s [Community Advisory Council](#), so she knew exactly where to turn. Andrew Patterson, a Senior Staff Attorney in our Public Benefits Unit, jumped in to help Ms. Spencer. After reviewing her case, he told Ms. Spencer that she, in fact, did not qualify for regular Unemployment Benefits, but asked if she had applied for a new COVID-19 related unemployment program called Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program (PUA), which she did not even know existed.

Her denial letter from DOES never mentioned PUA as an option. With Legal Aid’s help, she applied for PUA and was approved (with retroactive benefits) in May. Ms. Spencer had help, but thousands of other applicants did not.

*"If it wasn't for Legal Aid Society, I don't know where I would be."*

CYNTHIA SPENCER

## Amplifying the Voices of our Client Community

In September, Ms. Spencer, along with Legal Aid and five other clients, [testified before the DC Council about the performance of DOES](#) during which they provided powerful testimony and identified extensive issues with the agency's processing of unemployment claims.

These issues included delays, technological difficulties, unclear information and more. Legal Aid also testified and proposed recommendations to address these issues such as translating documents and ensuring that individuals have the ability to submit their applications by mobile phone.

Adela Perez-Guzman, another Legal Aid client who testified at the hearing, said that she too had to wait several weeks to hear back from DOES, but more importantly, she had trouble accessing forms and customer service in her language (Spanish), which DOES is supposed to provide as required by District and federal laws.

Legal Aid client Adela Perez-Guzman testified at the DC Council about the challenges she faced in accessing unemployment benefits during the pandemic.

*"It caused a lot of stress while I was waiting to hear back and to receive benefits. In the end, it worked out. But the truth is that for some time my husband and I did not know how we were going to pay for food or rent for us and our family."*

ADELA PEREZ-GUZMAN

Throughout the year, Legal Aid worked closely with our clients and our Community Advisory Council on efforts like this to highlight and address systemic issues that affect thousands of DC residents.

# Protecting the Safety Net

## Protecting the Safety Net

One way that systemic racism and inequality impact Legal Aid's client community is how government programs treat those they are meant to serve. Americans of means need only check a box or two on their tax forms to receive thousands of dollars in tax deductions for owning a home. Yet people who use programs meant to help them put food on the table or obtain health insurance are often assumed to be committing fraud or treated with skepticism or scorn. Legal Aid sees time and time again how low-income clients who are eligible for, and in dire need of, government assistance have to comply with complicated rules and unresponsive government agencies in order to obtain the benefits to which they are lawfully entitled.

Ensuring that District residents have access to safety-net benefits has been more critical than ever this year. [Legal Aid's Public Benefits Unit](#) continued its work to make benefits such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid available to those who need it as government agencies went to mostly virtual operations. Additionally, Legal Aid also focused on ensuring that our client community obtained the Economic Impact (or stimulus) Payments authorized by Congress in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act.

Unsurprisingly, individuals in our client community – those who need this assistance the most because of the dual disparate impacts of the pandemic itself and the resulting economic devastation – faced myriad challenges in obtaining to receiving their payments. These challenges include:

- **Eligibility.** Some of our clients were ineligible because of their immigration status and others because they were adults who were claimed as dependents by someone else on their taxes.
- **Accessibility.** Many individuals in our client community who did not automatically receive stimulus payments had to use an online filing tool to register to receive payments. Some clients had difficulty accessing and using the online filing tool due to technology constraints.
- **Confusion about Processes and Deadlines.** The Internal Revenue Service rolled out this program quickly. Because of that, however, the rules governing the processes and deadlines for obtaining stimulus payments were constantly in flux, making it difficult for our clients and their advocates to keep up to date.
- **Garnishment for Child Support.** Some of our clients had their stimulus payments garnished to repay child support obligations. Although this garnishment was legal (as opposed to garnishment for other debts, which was prohibited), it still produced confusion for our clients.

Recognizing this critical need, Legal Aid worked to educate legal services providers, inform our clients, and provide resources for our client community at large to ensure that those who qualified for stimulus payments could access them.

## Carol Owens\*

During the pandemic, Public Benefits Attorneys Aida Fitzgerald and Curt Campbell have been representing Ms. Owens and her daughter Angela in a wide range of benefits matters. We continue assist her with rental and housing conditions cases that have arisen during the public health emergency.

*\*Names changed for confidentiality.*



### Keeping Food on the Table

As part of a cruel attempt to dismantle key portions of the safety net, late in 2019 the Trump Administration sought to circumvent Congress and institute a new rule that would have kicked nearly 700,000 Americans off the Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps. The rule, set to go into effect on April 1, 2020, would have prevented so-called “able-bodied adults without dependents” (ABAWDs) from receiving SNAP benefits for 33 of 36 months unless they met certain (often in our view irrational and unrealistic) work requirements.

Legal Aid, along with our pro bono partners at Alston & Bird, [sued the Administration](#) in January on behalf of two individual clients, Damon Smith and Geneva Tann, and non-profit Bread for the City to stop the rule from going into effect. The lawsuit was consolidated with a case brought by almost two dozen state and local attorneys general. Inexplicably, even as the pandemic was bearing down on the nation, the Administration refused to back down.

Fortunately, [on March 13](#) (the same day Legal Aid shut its doors and switched to remote operations) Chief Judge Beryl Howell of the United States District Court for the District of Columbia issued a preliminary injunction to halt the implementation of the rule.

“Especially now, as a global pandemic poses widespread health risks, guaranteeing that government officials at both the federal and state levels have flexibility to address the nutritional needs of residents and ensure their well-being through programs like SNAP, is essential.”

*Chief Judge Beryl Howell, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia*

BREAKING: A federal judge has just blocked the Trump Administration's attempt to change a rule that would have kicked nearly 700,000 Americans off of food stamps, in a case brought by Legal Aid, [@AGKarlRacine](#), [@NewYorkStateAG](#), [@XavierBecerra](#) and a dozen other state AGs!

— LegalAidDC (@LegalAidDC) [March 14, 2020](#)

In October, Chief Judge Howell [vacated the rule](#), stating that it “radically and abruptly alters decades of regulatory practice, leaving States scrambling and exponentially increasing food insecurity for tens of thousands of Americans.”

This victory could not have come at a more important time as tens of thousands of DC residents are struggling to put food on the table. Though DC residents continue to face problems accessing the SNAP program. In February, for example, just before the pandemic hit, DC resident **Lenora Reid** submitted multiple food stamps applications. However, these applications were not processed, and she went without food stamps for months during the pandemic. Fortunately, we were able to intervene and get her application processed accurately, as well as getting her all the back benefits which she had been unlawfully denied.

## Major Settlement Involving Wrongly Confiscated Tax Refunds

In October 2020, Legal Aid reached a major settlement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) in a federal class action matter challenging the agency’s practice of seizing tax refunds based on alleged decades-old benefits overpayments, some of which went back to the 1970s. SSA typically had no documentation to support their claims of overpayments. In some cases, the benefits in question were paid to a relative of the taxpayers whose funds were seized, and not to taxpayers themselves.

In 2015, Legal Aid, together with Alston & Bird, had filed a lawsuit alleging that the SSA had confiscated the plaintiffs’ tax refunds without notice, in violation of federal law, and without the due process required under the Constitution. SSA sought to avoid a decision on the merits of the case by refunding the seized funds to the three named plaintiffs, waiving their overpayments, and then moving to dismiss the action. The trial court agreed to dismiss the case, but Legal Aid appealed, seeking to resolve the underlying issue that SSA should not be able to confiscate tax refunds in order to pursue decades-old alleged debts for which the agency had no documentation.

During the course of the litigation, SSA issued an internal notice ending its practice of confiscating tax returns to repay itself for decades-old debts. SSA then offered repayments for the tax return money previously taken, resulting in repayments of more than \$10 million to more than 13,000 taxpayers. But even this remedy was incomplete because SSA took the position that all of the plaintiffs, whether they received repayments or not, still owed the decades-old debts.

In the settlement, SSA agreed to notify roughly 30,000 class members of the right to apply for a “waiver” of their alleged debt, meaning that, if the application is granted, the supposed debt will cease to exist. Most such requests should be granted because of the relatively small amounts of the debts (many under \$1,000) and because of their extreme age.

*"It never seemed fair that the government withheld my tax refund just because it thought I was overpaid Social Security benefits more than 30 years ago. It seemed especially wrong that the government never told me that I owed it anything before taking my money."*

TINA HEARD

*One of the three named plaintiffs*

The appellate briefing and settlement negotiations were led by [Jonathan Levy](#), Director of the [Barbara McDowell Appellate Advocacy Project](#). Established in 2004 with seed money from the DC Bar Foundation, which continues to provide generous support, Legal Aid's Appellate Project has become a "model of excellence" that the National Legal Aid and Defender Association has urged other legal services programs to emulate. The Project was named for its founding Director, [Barbara McDowell](#), after her untimely death.

# Reuniting Families

## Reuniting Families

A pandemic is no excuse to keep a family apart. In fact, it's a time when keeping families together is more important than ever. Unfortunately, some see a crisis as an opportunity to do just the opposite.

**Francesca Martin's** (name changed for confidentiality) two children were scheduled (per a DC custody order) to stay with their father over spring break in another state. When DC's spring break came early due to COVID-19, Ms. Martin agreed to move the visit up, but at the end of the visit, the children's father refused to give her children back and threatened violence against her. The father was also not giving one of the children her daily prescription medications. The police in the father's state couldn't enforce the DC custody order.

Legal Aid helped Ms. Martin file an emergency motion for contempt of the custody order and attended a virtual emergency hearing the same day. The court agreed that the children's father was in contempt and ordered him to return the children the coming weekend. The father complied with the order, and the children are now safe in DC with Ms. Martin.

Legal Aid is relieved that Ms. Martin and her children are safe, but our [Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit](#) remains vigilant. Ms. Martin is one of hundreds of parents who now find themselves and their families in unprecedented circumstances. Amidst this uncertainty, our team remains as committed as ever to advocating for the safety and stability of our clients and their families.

## A Father United with His Daughters

**Damion Burriss** initially came to Legal Aid in early 2018 when he was seeking custody of his older daughter, Skylar. Mr. Burriss was just a teenager when Skylar was born, and his grandmother took custody of her for several years. Now a bit older and more stable, Mr. Burriss and Skylar's mother went to court to get custody of their daughter back. With Legal Aid's advice, Mr. Burriss was successful, and he and Skylar's mother agreed to share custody equally.



*Damion Burriss and his youngest daughter Reign.*

In late 2018, Mr. Burriss came back to Legal Aid with a new issue, and met with attorney Jamie Sparano. Mr. Burriss had a brief relationship earlier that year with a woman he had known since childhood. She got pregnant and told him she was terminating the pregnancy. She blocked his number and stopped contacting him. Later, Mr. Burriss learned that the woman had not terminated her pregnancy and had given birth to a daughter, Reign. He also learned that Reign's biological mother had arranged for a private adoption and that Reign was living with prospective adoptive parents in New York.

Mr. Burriss went to court to contest the adoption, but the case moved slowly and adoption law isn't very father-friendly. Finally, when Reign was about 6 months old, the prospective adoptive parents agreed to drop their case and Mr. Burriss got to meet his daughter and bring her home. But he still had an uphill battle. He had to bring Reign's biological mother back to court to establish paternity, get himself added to Reign's birth certificate, and fight for sole custody.

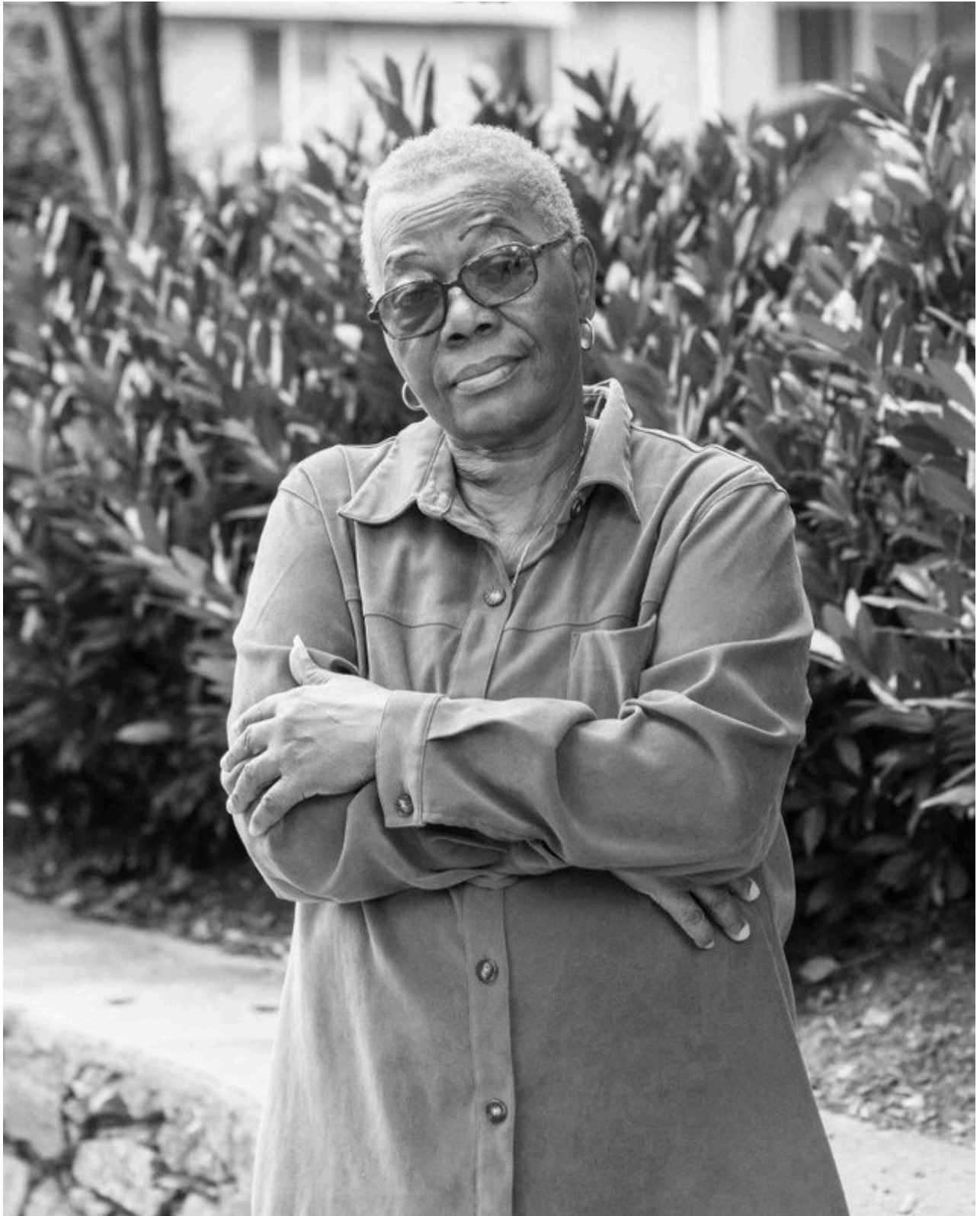
Reign's biological mother only showed up to one hearing. In her absence, the Court agreed to hold a default hearing. Mr. Burriss testified about how hard he fought for his daughter, and all of the things he did to give her a happy and safe home. He spoke about how his seven-year-old daughter, Skylar, loves playing with Reign's hair, and how they have dance parties in their living room. The judge granted Mr. Burriss sole physical custody and sole legal custody in February just before the pandemic.

## Harmony Burns-Gibson

Since 2011, Legal Aid has helped **Harmony Burns-Gibson**(name changed for confidentiality) with different cases, including housing, family law, immigration and public benefits. Ms. Burns-Gibson is a breast cancer survivor and we have assisted her every fall over the past nine years with an analysis of Medicare Part D Prescription plans. In 2017, we learned that Ms. Burns-Gibson had assumed care for her granddaughter, Dorothy, that summer.









Dorothy travelled to the U.S. from Nigeria after her parents died in a bus accident. Legal Aid attorney [Carolyn Rumer](#) helped Ms. Burns-Gibson obtain health insurance for Dorothy through the Immigrant Children's Program. In February 2020, we represented Ms. Burns-Gibson in a custody hearing to obtain full custody of Dorothy and the necessary findings to pursue a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) case. We will be representing Dorothy in the SIJS case so she can obtain full legal status.

"I have never been able to talk to a lawyer and feel safe or feel free the way I talk to Carolyn. When I talk to her I feel safe and feel free to share things."

*HARMONY BURNS-GIBSON*

# Heading Off an Eviction Avalanche

## Heading Off an Eviction Avalanche

### LEGAL AID TENANT HOTLINE



In mid-March, Legal Aid launched a tenant hotline. As of the end of November 2020, we have received nearly

**1500 calls**

The pandemic and resulting economic crisis have disproportionately destabilized the lives of low-income DC residents. In particular, housing security, which was already a top concern for this vulnerable population pre-pandemic, has been exacerbated. Two recent studies estimate that [more than 50,000 families in DC currently are at risk of eviction](#) and up to 30,000 families are likely to face an eviction lawsuit in the coming months, dramatically increasing the need for our services.

[In mid-March 2020, the DC Superior Court system shut down and all pending eviction cases were put on hold.](#) At the same time, emergency legislation passed by the DC Council stopped all actual evictions. Within days, Legal Aid established a tenant hotline and transitioned to telephone and online intake to ensure that our services remained accessible.

MORE THAN

**530**

**TENANTS**

have received advice, brief services, and representation since mid-March.

Since launching our new tenant hotline, we have spoken to many hundreds of tenants at risk of eviction.



In May, Legal Aid and others successfully advocated with the Council to [expand and extend protections from the initial emergency legislation](#), which included prohibiting landlords from filing any new eviction cases during the public health emergency and for 60 days after. As of now, no new eviction cases may be filed in DC until March 2, 2021. DC landlords continue to contest the legislation, and Legal Aid and other legal services providers are leading the fight in Court.

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As the filing moratorium comes to an end next year, we anticipate that tens of thousands of new cases will be filed. The need for legal representation will be high and extremely vital.

### Impact of Emergency Legislation



**No evictions until  
January 1, 2021**



**No eviction lawsuits until  
March 2, 2021**



**No reporting to  
credit agencies**



**Payment plans required**

Data from our Housing Right to Counsel Project has shown that, compared to unrepresented tenants, represented tenants are sixteen times more likely to raise a meritorious defense, eight times less likely to have a judgment entered, and four times less likely to have an eviction order issued. In short, having an attorney can make a world of difference, as it did for our clients Alysia Webber and Denise Humphries.



Ms. Webber was living at Belmont Crossing, a former Sanford Capital property that had come under new management. Sanford Capital, a notorious DC landlord [with whom Legal Aid has dealt on many occasions](#), is known for mismanaging its properties to the point of effectively forcing tenants to leave or live in squalor. The new property manager inherited a property in disrepair but failed to communicate with the tenants about making rent payments and failed to perform badly-needed repairs and routine maintenance.

Legal Aid Housing Attorney Eleni Christidis represented Ms. Webber in her nonpayment of rent case. At trial, the testimony of a government housing inspector, Legal Assistant Karla Talley, and Ms. Webber herself made it clear that Ms. Webber and her child had endured unhealthy conditions for more than a year which the landlord had done virtually nothing to improve. After weighing all the evidence, the judge awarded Ms. Webber a 50% overall reduction of her rent. Ms. Webber was able to pay the remaining amount of rent and avoid eviction.

## Denise Humphries

Ms. Humphries, a single mother of three children Antoinya, 13, Mykiesha, 12, and Zachary, 8, withheld her rent because of poor housing conditions. When her landlord sued her for nonpayment of rent, she sought help. Ms. Humphries connected with Legal Aid in June 2018 as part of Legal Aid's Right to Housing Counsel Project. Ms. Humphries was represented by Housing attorney Faiza Majeed.

Faiza worked with Ms. Humphries over the next year and helped her obtain a highly favorable settlement, which included much-needed repairs and a waiver of rent that she should not have had to pay given the conditions of her home. Faiza also helped Ms. Humphries negotiate a lower monthly rent because her landlord, who is a site-based section 8 provider, was not deducting child care expenses, as required by law.



“I appreciate Legal Aid’s help very much. Communication is always there and y’all listen.”

DENISE HUMPHRIES

## Recognizing a Career of Service

**Beth Mellen**, a Supervising Attorney in the Housing Law Unit and the Director of Legal Aid’s Eviction Defense Project, was honored in November by the DC Bar Foundation with the **Jerrold Scoutt Prize** for her skills as “a fierce courtroom advocate, a compassionate client advisor, a dedicated mentor to younger lawyers, a skilled manager, and an accomplished leader of housing policy reform.” During Beth’s fifteen years as a Legal Aid attorney, she has been a dedicated advocate for housing rights across the District. Her knowledge of local and federal housing law, combined with her advocacy skills, has preserved safe, affordable housing for hundreds of residents in DC.

Beth has been working tirelessly on all fronts during the pandemic to help keep tenants safe. She has been a leader advocating with the DC Council to ensure that tenants are protected from eviction and homelessness, she is working with the Court to help ensure that remote processes are fair and transparent, and she has been at the forefront of the tenant advocacy communities’ creation of the Landlord and Tenant Legal Assistance Network, a single point of entry where tenants can reach all of the District’s legal services providers. There is no question that tenants in the District are safer from the virus, and its resulting health and economic effects, because of Beth’s relentless advocacy.

**Amanda Korber**

Supervising Attorney, Housing Law Unit

In her acceptance speech, Beth paid tribute to her family, and especially her late mother, who had schizophrenia and whose descent into poverty – losing her marriage, custody of her children, jobs, and housing – inspired Beth to become a public interest attorney. Beth also talked about how her mother was able to regain her stability and independence by the last ten years of her life, in large part as a result of being able to connect with community-based organizations, social workers, case managers, and legal services lawyers.

*"I saw, in real life, what an incredible impact a housing voucher can have. Stable housing made a world of difference."*

*BETH MELLEN*

In her speech, Beth also acknowledged and thanked her clients "for everything they've taught me these last 15 years."

Beth Mellen's acceptance speech for the 2020 Scoutt Prize. Photo: Beth (left) with client Alicia Smith, who is now a member of Legal Aid's Community Advisory Council.

*"My favorite moments are always those I spend with my clients and members of my client community."*

*BETH MELLEN*

# Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors

## Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors

Domestic violence survivors found themselves in even more precarious situations this year. Financial strain is already known to increase the incidence of domestic violence, and as shelter-in-place orders were issued earlier this year, many survivors found themselves trapped at home with their abusers. With surging job losses, housing and food insecurity, and social isolation, abusers had [more opportunities than ever to exert control over their victims](#).

Anna Jones (name changed for confidentiality), who worked with Legal Aid to escape her abuser in 2017, shared her story with us this year.

Requests for help in domestic violence matters began flooding in. The District's domestic violence hotline experienced an average of more than 50 calls per day – much higher than the normal call volume – from survivors seeking help with court orders and emergency services. The pandemic has had a devastating impact on domestic violence survivors like Maria Lopez\* whose struggle to get herself and her children to safety, was hampered by the outbreak.

**Maria Lopez** was seeking a divorce from her abusive husband. For Ms. Lopez, this was the "final step in moving forward with her life." In January 2020, she connected with Legal Aid through a referral from the Victim Legal Network. She had previously obtained a Civil Protective Order (CPO) against her husband – he was not only abusive towards her but also towards their eldest child. One of the reasons why she did not file for a divorce sooner, she said, was because she didn't speak, read, or write in English, and had trouble writing and reading in Spanish.

A Legal Aid attorney assisted Ms. Lopez in filing for an absolute divorce, but because of the pandemic, her initial hearing (which was scheduled for late March 2020) was vacated and rescheduled twice.

In April 2020, the unthinkable happened. Ms. Lopez contracted COVID-19 and had to be placed on a ventilator. Ms. Lopez's husband continued to harass her while she was hospitalized and made demands to see her. Ms. Lopez remained in the hospital for several weeks. Legal Aid legal assistants remained in constant contact with the hospital, so we could remain updated on the status of her health and try to keep her safe. Ultimately, Ms. Lopez was discharged from the hospital, but she continues to suffer from the effects of COVID-19.

Once Ms. Lopez was physically able, she and her Legal Aid attorney resumed her divorce case. When the initial hearing was finally scheduled, her husband appeared at that hearing and agreed to the divorce. Their divorce was – at last – finalized that same day.

## Petition Assistance Project

Since the start of the Petition Assistance Project in mid-May, we have provided



In response to the surge in domestic violence and court closures in the District, in May Legal Aid collaborated with two other domestic violence programs to begin the Petition Assistance Project, which aims to assist domestic violence survivors in filing petitions for protection and other related pleadings with the court. Through this project, Legal Aid attorneys staff a virtual courthouse project three days a week to assist domestic violence survivors with filing petitions for civil protection orders online while DC Superior Court remains closed to the public. Attorneys also assist survivors with supplementing or amending existing petitions, filing motions to extend and/or modify existing CPOs, and filing motions for contempt where abusers fail to follow an existing order. This project has allowed Legal Aid Attorneys to connect with survivors to ensure they can access the court system during these unprecedented times and to provide advice and representation where needed.

## Recognizing a Domestic Violence Advocate



Trisha Monroe, Supervising Attorney in the Domestic Violence/Family Law Project

In October, DC SAFE [honored](#) our very own [Trisha Monroe](#), Supervising Attorney in the Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit, with [the COVID-19 Hero Award](#), in recognition of her “outstanding partnership, flexibility, and commitment to survivors during the pandemic.”

Trisha joined Legal Aid in 2006. Her policy and court reform work, as well as her vast case load over the years, has aided thousands of survivors of domestic violence.

*“You will not find a more passionate or effective advocate for domestic violence survivors than Trisha.”*

*Eric Angel, Executive Director of Legal Aid*

## Arlene and Ta’maira Petty



Arlene and her niece Ta’maira Petty connected with [Charlene \(“Charlie”\) Whitman-Barr](#), a staff attorney in Legal Aid’s Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit, at the DVICE last year. They were both filing for Civil Protection Orders (CPOs) against Ta’maira’s mom, Arlene’s sister.

Ta’maira’s mom had been verbally and physically abusive towards her for years and had also made several threats against Arlene. Ta’maira finally went to go live with her aunt but her mom would not leave her alone and the emotional abuse continued.

*“I know for a fact that we would not have won that case if we didn’t have Charlie.”*

ARLENE PETTY

Ta’maira’s mom filed a CPO in Maryland against Arlene on the same day, but ultimately Arlene was granted temporary custody of Ta’maira, who was 17 at the time (which would last until Ta’maira turned 18). Through another hearing, the Judge ultimately awarded Arlene custody and granted both her and Ta’maira’s CPOs against Ta’maira’s mom. After this representation, Arlene reached out to Legal Aid again because she was having issues getting TANF and SNAP benefits for Ta’maira in DC. That is when Carolyn Rumer, an attorney in both our Public Benefits and Domestic Violence/Family Law Unit, stepped in to help. Carolyn represented her in a fair hearing to get six months of back benefits and prospective benefits, providing a much-needed safety net for Ta’maira.

# Protecting Consumers

## Protecting Consumers

The pandemic has brought on widespread economic disruption, caused unprecedented job loss, and forced individuals and families living in or on the edge of poverty to make choices between paying the rent or mortgage and putting food on the table. With tens of thousands of DC residents unemployed and struggling to pay for basic necessities, low-income consumers are falling deeper into debt, simply unable to make payments on consumer loans, medical bills, credit cards, and other consumer debt. Homeowners who were already struggling to make ends meet are falling further behind on their mortgages. The pandemic is fueling a growing debt and housing crisis and widening racial and economic disparities.

Our [Consumer Law Unit](#) has been working to stem the tide of these impacts in individual and systemic ways. We successfully advocated with the DC Council for critical consumer protection legislation including a [broad moratorium on home foreclosures](#), and [legislation protecting consumers from debt collection lawsuits and garnishment of funds](#) (including stimulus check payments) during the District's public health emergency. We have collaborated with community partners to conduct large-scale outreach to our client community, set up a debt collection defense hotline to provide coordinated access to free legal assistance, and have been staffing a virtual court-based project to provide access to legal services to homeowners with remote foreclosure hearings.



### CONSUMER LAW

MORE THAN  
**400**  
PEOPLE HELPED  
IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2020

**265**  
IN DEBT COLLECTION  
MATTERS

**143**  
IN FORECLOSURE  
MATTERS

### COVID-19 RESPONSE

We successfully advocated for DC emergency legislation protecting thousands of debtors and homeowners during the public health emergency and for 60 days after.

- April 2020: DC Council enacts legislation that prohibits debt collectors from garnishing wages and seizing money – including critical COVID-19 stimulus payments – from DC consumers.
- May 2020: Council also enacts emergency legislation to protect homeowners in danger of foreclosure including halting foreclosures.

These moratoriums have been extended through March 1, 2021.

## **James Wallace**

James Wallace (name changed for confidentiality) was being sued on a credit card debt. Mr. Wallace, a two-time cancer survivor, had many ongoing health issues that prevented him from working and keeping up with his financial obligations. He seeks medical treatment several times a month for immunodeficiency virus, memory loss, and sleep apnea, amongst other illnesses.

Legal Aid's Consumer Law Attorney, Zenia Laws, represented Mr. Wallace in his debt collection lawsuit. Due to the public health emergency and legislative protections advocated for by Legal Aid and our partners, the case was on a temporary hold – but it continued to loom over him as a source of stress. Fortunately, Zenia was able to convince the debt collector to dismiss its lawsuit because of Mr. Wallace's medical and financial hardships, giving him peace of mind and more space to focus on his health during an incredibly challenging year.

## **Diana Tyler**

Diana Tyler (name changed for confidentiality) first contacted Legal Aid several years ago when she learned that her home of more than three decades was about to be sold at a foreclosure auction. Legal Aid attorney Zack Hill filed an emergency motion, and the mortgage company eventually agreed to cancel the auction. With the help of Legal Aid, Ms. Tyler then did a thorough review of her financial situation and made the difficult but necessary decision to sell her house.



Because she sold her house with the help of a real estate agent, rather than going through foreclosure where it likely would have been sold at a significantly depressed value, Ms. Tyler was able to exercise control over the timing and process and recover the substantial equity she had built in her home over the years. She subsequently used that money to buy a condo, which she was able to pay off, eliminating the financial burden of having a mortgage.

Last year, however, a debt collector's aggressive collection tactics put Ms. Tyler in a new financial bind when approximately \$1600 was suddenly garnished from her bank account based on a years-old credit card debt.

*"I worked all my life. I was always a worker. I think I could've ended up being homeless, I really do."*

DIANA TYLER

Ms. Tyler's money is supposed to be protected from garnishment, as it all comes from Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), but she was left with almost nothing in her account and the prospect of not being able to afford groceries or pay her bills. Zack again served as Ms. Tyler's attorney, advocating for the prompt release of her funds. His efforts were successful, and Ms. Tyler was soon able to access all of her money and received a refund of the related processing fees the bank had charged in connection with the garnishment.

# Forming a Community Advisory Council

## Forming a Community Advisory Council

In 2018, Legal Aid created the Community Advisory Council (CAC), comprised of former Legal Aid clients, with the goal of engaging members of the community to provide feedback and guidance on our work. The CAC now has 11 members, including the six members we were able to photograph above: Tangela Hicks, Cynthia Spencer, Carol Holley (top row, left to right), Alicia Smith, James Reed, and Linda Kenmore (bottom row, left to right).

Members of the CAC are thought leaders with respect to issues facing our client community. CAC members meet with Legal Aid quarterly to share their ideas and develop clear and effective action plans to organize and advocate for the court and government to better meet the needs of the community.

“I was in a position where I could actually fall behind and lose my place and everything. So Legal Aid helped me get that situated. After my experience, I started telling people, if they had some problems just go through Legal Aid.”

CAROL HOLLEY



To date, the CAC have met with the Chair of the Human Services Committee for the DC Council to discuss areas needing improvement at Economic Security Administration (ESA) service centers which have long had issues in processing vital safety-net benefits to DC residents. CAC members have also worked with Legal Aid to provide testimony at the DC Council on ESA services, and housing, and unemployment issues.

Currently, members are continuing to work on major outreach initiatives including a virtual town hall and the potential creation of an electronic newsletter to keep community members abreast of issues likely important to them.

When asked why they were inspired to join the CAC, we heard one refrain over and over again. These individuals received life-changing help from Legal Aid – help that they didn't even know existed. They wanted to give back to Legal Aid and they wanted to give back to their community by ensuring that others know about Legal Aid and know how to access those services.



“

I think the CAC members, regardless of what we went through, we're some strong individuals.

We've all got a story.

We were able to keep it together and still be able to help people that we know need the help and still try to get them the information for Legal Aid so they can get the resources they need.

”

TANGELA HICKS

# Partnering with DC Law Firms

## Partnering with DC Law Firms

Legal Aid is fortunate to have a robust pro bono network supporting our mission. This year was no exception as attorneys across the city stepped up to address urgent needs for our client community. To date, we have referred out 129 cases to more than 40 firms this year – including a large number of Unemployment Insurance and housing conditions cases.

### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROJECT WITH ARNOLD & PORTER

Legal Aid was [inundated with Unemployment Insurance \(UI\) cases](#) this year due to the economic impact of COVID-19. Fortunately, we were able to refer out more than 40 cases to a dedicated team of lawyers at Arnold & Porter. The UI pro bono leadership team was led by the firm's Pro Bono Committee Chair [Dan Cantor](#), [Rebecca Gordon](#) and [Roberta Horton](#), and supported by attorneys like [Sandra Rizzo](#) who was especially committed to representing unemployed workers.

#### MEMBERS OF THE ARNOLD & PORTER UI TEAM



**Rebecca Gordon**



**Dan Cantor**



**Sandra Rizzo**



**Roberta Horton**

---

Early on in the pandemic, Arnold & Porter independently launched a [nationwide pro bono initiative](#) in conjunction with the [James Beard Foundation](#) to help restaurant and hospitality workers who lost work as a result of COVID-19. More than 100 Arnold & Porter attorneys have been involved with this effort nationwide.

In the District, where [the restaurant and hospitality industry employed 80,000 workers](#) pre-pandemic, including many low-wage workers, Arnold & Porter approached Legal Aid about forming a pro bono partnership to help unemployed workers. The firm offered to accept clients referred from Legal Aid, and Legal Aid agreed to provide substantive law training and ongoing mentoring and technical assistance to the firm's UI team.

Many clients needed help with navigating the DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) bureaucracy when their pending claims languished amid tens of thousands of claims. Others needed representation in appeals hearings at the DC Office of Administrative Hearings.

*"The collaboration with and expert mentoring provided by Legal Aid has allowed us to train and involve a large team of Arnold & Porter lawyers in providing assistance to unemployed workers."*

DAN CANTOR

The pro bono partnership has been highly effective due to the Arnold & Porter leadership team's significant involvement. From day one, the leadership team took it upon themselves to dig in and learn the nuts and bolts of the District's UI system, as well as the additional federal benefits that were made available as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dan, Rebecca, and Roberta personally represented low-wage workers in addition to supervising other dedicated attorneys and managing the project as a whole.

Some of the workers Legal Aid referred to Arnold & Porter included a banquet server at a local hotel, a bartender at a nearby restaurant, a sales clerk at a large retail store, a taxi cab driver, and a parking attendant at a downtown garage. Some workers were single parents or supported elderly family members. At least one client was homeless, living out of his car while waiting for back-benefits in order to secure a safe place to live. These are just a few of the clients who received critical assistance from Arnold & Porter:

- A 72-year-old worker who supplemented his limited retirement benefits with part-time work but lost that job due to COVID-19. He filed a claim for UI benefits, but his benefits were denied after he allegedly failed to respond to an email from the DC Department of Employment Services (DOES) requesting more information on his unemployment claim. The client never received the email in question. Arnold & Porter helped him provide DOES with the needed information in order to turn on his benefits and then successfully represented him at a hearing to reverse the denial of back benefits and ensure that he received all of the benefits to which he was entitled.
- A fast food restaurant worker who had been awarded UI benefits when his hours were reduced due to a pandemic-related loss in income, which made him eligible for UI. Unfortunately, his employer appealed the award of benefits and claimed the reduction in hours were not pandemic related and asserted an alternative theory that could have denied his benefits. Arnold & Porter represented him in his administrative hearing, where, due to the skillful lawyers, the employer eventually conceded on the record that the reduction in hours was related to the pandemic — thus ensuring that the client continues to receive the benefits for which he is eligible.

We are grateful to Arnold & Porter's UI team and all the attorneys who took on UI cases through this unique partnership. In a year filled with heightened stress, anxiety, and fear for our client community, these attorneys were able to step in and offer much-needed assistance and relief.

"It was incredibly rewarding to help jobless workers access desperately needed benefits during the COVID-19 public health crisis. We were not going to sit on the sidelines during this historical economic crisis."

REBECCA GORDON

## HOUSING CONDITIONS

DC residents may have been safe from evictions temporarily thanks to moratoria put in place by the DC Council, but we saw an influx of housing conditions cases as a result of the pandemic. As DC tenants and their families necessarily are spending much more time in their homes, for many, this has meant being subject to unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions such as collapsing ceilings, rodent infestation, severe leaks and water damage, broken appliances, plumbing issues and/or electrical problems.

In July, Legal Aid Staff Attorney Eleni Christidis led a webinar for pro bono counsel on handling cases on the Housing Conditions Calendar – a docket dedicated solely to cases brought by tenants against their landlords to force their landlords to make needed repairs and remedy unsafe housing conditions. Over 50 participants attended the live webinar. To date, 18 housing conditions cases have been referred out in 2020, including:

- A team of attorneys from Robbins, Russell, Englert, Orseck, Untereiner & Sauber represented a tenant who filed a housing conditions case against her landlord to force the landlord to make needed repairs and remedy conditions. The tenant and her children were living with mice infestation and frequent sewage backups in their apartment. Once the Robbins Russell team got involved, the landlord arranged for extermination services and completed other needed repairs. The tenant was satisfied with the repairs, and the case was dismissed.
- Perkins Coie attorneys represented their client, a senior citizen who lives alone, in a housing conditions case that the tenant filed against her landlord. The tenant's primary concern was the presence of mold and mildew in her apartment resulting from prior water damage that was exacerbating her pre-existing health condition. The air quality in her bedroom was so poor that the tenant was sleeping in her living room. There were other conditions that needed repair, as well. The case proceeded for five months during the pandemic until the landlord finally made all necessary remediations and repairs.

# Supporters & Financials

## Supporters & Financials

More than 5,000 individuals and organizations supported Legal Aid's work this year, including through a record-smashing Making Justice Real Campaign that raised nearly \$3.1 million, and leadership support from the DC Bar Foundation (especially through the DC Council's Access to Justice Grants Program and the Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program). Thank you to all who contributed!

### 2020 Top Firms

#### 300+ ATTORNEYS

**Latham & Watkins** \$218,110 **WilmerHale** \$176,510  
**Williams & Connolly** \$167,229 **Steptoe** \$79,873  
**Crowell** \$61,207

#### 250-299 attorneys

**Sidley** \$164,096 **Skadden** \$81,104 **Jones Day** \$49,532  
**Akin Gump** \$19,527

#### 200-249 ATTORNEYS

**Kirkland & Ellis** \$90,619 **Mayer Brown** \$73,907 **King & Spalding** \$40,178  
**Wiley Rein** \$25,041 **Arent Fox** \$16,313

#### 150-199 ATTORNEYS

**Pillsbury** \$39,530 **Dentons** \$33,768 **Hunton Andrews Kurth** \$27,526  
**Cooley** \$25,940 **K&L Gates** \$22,264

#### 100-149 Attorneys

**Orrick** \$78,083 **Kelley Drye** \$65,826 **Alston & Bird** \$57,617  
**Blank Rome** \$50,198 **Baker Botts** \$37,782

#### 75-99 Attorneys

**Fried Frank** \$85,906 **Paul Weiss** \$60,695 **Simpson Thacher** \$43,723  
**Dechert** \$40,829 **Miller & Chevalier** \$40,000

#### 50-74 attorneys

**Zuckerman Spaeder** \$38,404 **Weil** \$21,270 **Vinson & Elkins** \$16,436  
**Epstein Becker & Green** \$14,050 **Hughes Hubbard & Reed** \$12,002

#### 25-49 attorneys

**Wilkinson Stekloff** \$59,690 **Debevoise & Plimpton** \$39,822  
**Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner** \$34,574 **Gilbert** \$25,269  
**Womble Bond Dickinson** \$21,027

#### 1-24 attorneys

**Munger, Tolles & Olson**  
\$12,138

**Clyde & Co**  
\$7,985

**Stroock**  
\$3,670

# Making Justice Real Campaign

## Making Justice Real Campaign

Since 1990, the DC legal community has come together each summer to raise funds to support Legal Aid's mission. This year, the Making Justice Real Campaign raised nearly \$3.1 million, enough to cover more than one-third of the organization's annual budget. We are extraordinarily grateful to Honorary Co-Chairs Carter Phillips and Virginia Seitz of Sidley, our committee of associate Co-Chairs, the hundreds of attorneys who led campaigns at their firms, and the more than 5,000 people who donated.

"There is no more desperate situation confronting Legal Aid than what we face in DC these days. There are many residents in this City facing dire circumstances and who lack the ability to access legal services that can prevent catastrophes in their lives. It is a fundamental part of our professional responsibility to do what we can to ensure equal access to justice."

*CARTER PHILLIPS, HONORARY CO-CHAIR*

The Campaign raised over \$3 million for the first time (the previous record was \$2.48 million, set in 2019), and two institutional donors stepped up to make the first two \$100,000 donations in the Campaign's history: Sidley and Chemonics International. Given the rising need in our client community, this unprecedented wave of support could not have come at a better time. We are pleased to share the firms who placed in the Top Five of their respective size categories.



2020 Campaign Honorary Co-Chairs Carter Phillips and Virginia Seitz of Sidley.

# Leadership Cabinet

## Leadership Cabinet

### Annual Law Firm, Corporate, and Foundation Gift Recognition Program

The Leadership Cabinet recognizes our most generous organizational supporters (9/1/2018 to 8/31/2019).

#### Platinum Patron: \$75,000 & Above

Chemonics International District of Columbia Bar Foundation Kirkland & Ellis Latham & Watkins Sidley Austin LLP Skadden

#### Gold Patron: \$50,000-\$74,999

Blank Rome Covington & Burling Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation Skadden Fellowship Foundation WilmerHale

#### Silver Patron: \$30,000-\$49,999

Akin Gump Alston & Bird Arnold & Porter Bailey & Glasser Davis Polk & Wardwell Dentons Gilbert Mayer Brown Morrison & Foerster Paul Weiss Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP The Steptoe Foundation Ujala Foundation Williams & Connolly Yale Law School Zuckerman Spaeder

#### Bronze Patron: \$20,000-\$29,999

Arent Fox The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Fried Frank Hogan Lovells Jenner & Block Kelley Drye Munger, Tolles & Olson Orrick Ropes & Gray Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP The Bernard & Anne Spitzer Charitable Trust Venable Wells Fargo Foundation

#### Patron: \$10,000-\$19,999

Allen & Overy Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP Buckley Capital Group Companies Global Cooley Crowell & Moring Davis & Harman Debevoise & Plimpton DLA Piper Epstein Becker & Green Ernst & Young Georgetown Foundation Ivins, Phillips & Barker Jones Day Katten King & Spalding Miller & Chevalier Chartered Morgan Lewis Northrop Grumman Corporation O'Melveny & Myers Sterne Kessler Sullivan & Cromwell The Share Fund Weil Wiley Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation

#### Supporters: \$5,000-\$9,999

ACA Compliance Group Adventist HealthCare Amazon.com, Inc. American Express Company Arendt & Medernach SA William E. & Mary E. Ayer Charitable Fund Boies, Schiller & Flexner Caplin & Drysdale, Chartered The Carlyle Group Citi Private Bank Law Firm Group Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton Cohen & Gresser Cohen Milstein Sellers &

Toll PLLC Cornerstone Research Edgeworth Economics FTI Consulting Hughes Hubbard & Reed Hunton Andrews Kurth Katz, Marshall & Banks KPMG Polly Levee Charitable for R. Krancer Lowenstein Sandler Major, Lindsey & Africa Marriott International, Inc. MedStar Health Paul Hastings Perkins Coie Robbins, Russell, Englert, Orseck, Untereiner & Sauber Wilkinson Stekloff Willkie Farr & Gallagher Women's Bar Association Foundation

Special thanks as well to our government supporters: the DC Council, the DC Office of Victims Services & Justice Grants, the DC Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking, and the Executive Office of the Mayor.

# Servant of Justice Awards

## Servant of Justice Awards

Legal Aid's 2020 Servant of Justice Awards Dinner, planned for April, was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We plan to honor our 2020 Servant of Justice honorees, John Heintz of Blank Rome and Avis Buchanan of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia, at a virtual event this coming April. We are extremely grateful for the law firms, corporate partners, and individuals who converted their sponsorships to direct donations. In part because of this, Legal Aid was not forced to cut staff or services as our client community has borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact in DC.

### Honorees

Since 1990, the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia has presented the Servant of Justice Award to individuals or organizations who have demonstrated faithful dedication and remarkable achievement in ensuring that all persons have equal and meaningful access to justice.

**John Heintz**



John Heintz is a litigator and partner in Blank Rome’s policyholder-only insurance recovery practice. Mr. Heintz, who is well regarded across the insurance market for his significant experience handling complex coverage litigation, has made pro bono work a central part of his career for 40 years. In *Wai v. Allstate*, for example, he helped win a ruling on “insurance redlining” at the DC Circuit that commercial insurance companies could not force landlords to purchase costlier insurance policies just because they rented homes to people with disabilities. Later he and his colleagues won a ruling that fair housing organizations had stated a disparate impact claim under the FHA for redlining in the homeowners insurance market in *National Fair Housing Alliance v. Prudential*. He served as a fellow at the Neighborhood Legal Services Program in the 1970s, and has served on Legal Aid’s Board of Trustees since 2009. At Blank Rome, he has taken on several pro bono cases in partnership with Legal Aid, and mentored associates on dozens more.

**Avis Buchanan**



Avis E. Buchanan has served as Director of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia (PDS) since 2004. She previously served at PDS in the roles of deputy director, staff attorney, and intern investigator. She also worked at the Washington Lawyer’s Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs as an attorney and later as director of its equal employment opportunity project. Ms. Buchanan has dedicated her career to criminal defense, and litigating individual and class action employment and public accommodations cases. She is the recipient of numerous awards, most recently the 2018 Celebration of Service Award from Rising for Justice, the 2016 Thurgood Marshall Award from the DC Bar, and the 2014 President’s Award for Public Service from the Washington Council of Lawyers.

# Individual Donors

## Individual Donors

Thank you to the nearly 6,000 individuals who supported Legal Aid between September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020.

## 2020 Servant of Justice Awards Supporters

### Champion of Justice

\$75,000 & Up

KIRKLAND & ELLIS

LATHAM & WATKINS LLP

SIDLEY

### Leader of Justice

\$50,000-\$74,999

COVINGTON

Steptoe



SERVES  
PRO BONO



### Defender of Justice

\$30,000-\$49,999

Akin Gump  
STRAUSS HAUER & FELD LLP

ALSTON & BIRD

Arnold & Porter

BAILEY GLASSER

BLANK ROME

大成 DENTONS

Davis Polk

GILBERT LLP

MAYER  
BROWN

Paul Weiss

pillsbury

### Guardian of Justice

\$20,000-\$29,999

Arent Fox

Jenner

Munger, Tolles & Olson

Venable

## Advocate of Justice

\$12,500-\$19,999

Allen & Overy  
Buckley  
Cooley  
Crowell & Moring  
Cushman & Wakefield  
Debevoise & Plimpton  
DLA Piper  
Katten  
King & Spalding

Morrison & Foerster  
O'Melveny & Myers  
Ropes & Gray  
Simpson Thacher & Bartlett  
Sullivan & Cromwell  
Weil  
Wiley Rein  
Williams & Connolly  
Zuckerman Spaeder

## Steward of Justice

\$7,500-\$12,499

ACA Compliance  
Amazon.com, Inc.  
American Express  
Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner  
Boies Schiller Flexner  
Citi Private Bank  
Cleary Gottlieb  
Cohen & Gresser  
Cohen Milstein  
Cornerstone Research

Edgeworth Economics  
Epstein Becker & Green  
Ernst & Young  
Hogan Lovells  
Hunton Andrews Kurth  
Jones Day  
Katz, Marshall & Banks  
Martin & Arlene Klepper  
Lowenstein Sandler

MedStar Health  
Morgan Lewis  
Thomas Papson & Toby Singer  
Paul Hastings  
Perkins Coie  
Robbins Russell  
Barbara and Charles Rossotti  
Sterne Kessler  
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP  
Wilson Sonsini Foundation

## Corporate Honor Roll



# Financials

## Financials

### Financial Statement (1/1/2019 to 12/31/2019)

|                                                                    |                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Revenue</b>                                                     |                    |
| Adjusted Grants and Contributions                                  | \$6,585,699        |
| Contributed Services                                               | \$28,881,923       |
| Special Events                                                     | \$1,121,408        |
| Investment Income                                                  | \$283,810          |
| Total Revenue                                                      | \$36,872,840       |
| Contributions to Endowments                                        | \$190,609          |
| <b>Total Revenue Less Endowment Gifts and Contributed Services</b> | <b>\$7,800,308</b> |
|                                                                    |                    |
| <b>Expenses</b>                                                    |                    |
| Program Services                                                   | \$35,147,45        |
| Management and General                                             | 8 \$653,045        |
| Fundraising                                                        | \$677,158          |
| <b>Total Expenses Less Contributed Services</b>                    | <b>\$7,595,738</b> |

### Breakdown of Expenses

