

# STANDING UP FOR NYC COMMUNITIES

LEGAL SERVICES NYC 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# LEGAL SERVICES NYC

OUR STAFF OF NEARLY 700 HELPED MORE THAN  
THAN 108,000 VULNERABLE NEW YORKERS

Legal Services NYC was founded in 1968 as part of the War on Poverty, an expansive set of initiatives introduced in the 1960s under President Lyndon B. Johnson. What started as a loose confederation of neighborhood-based legal services programs has grown into **THE NATION'S LARGEST CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDER**. Our citywide force of more than 600 staff helps more than 115,000 low-income New Yorkers annually.

**FOR LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS FACING A LIFE CRISIS, LEGAL HELP IS OFTEN THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOL IN RESOLVING IT.** Roughly 1.6 million city residents are currently living below the poverty line—a mere \$25,000 for a family of four. They are often made more vulnerable by discrimination, immigration status, age, or disabilities.

**FOR THE LAST 50 YEARS,** our dedicated staff has challenged systemic injustices and made real, tangible improvements in the lives of communities across the city. This work includes preventing evictions and preserving housing; demanding access to high-quality education, health care, and economic security; ensuring safety and stability for survivors of domestic violence and immigrants; and fighting for the dignity and respect of all New Yorkers, including LGBTQ communities, New Yorkers with disabilities, and people of color.

**WITH DEEP ROOTS IN COMMUNITIES IN ALL FIVE BOROUGH, LEGAL SERVICES NYC HAS HANDLED MORE THAN TWO MILLION CASES SINCE OUR FOUNDED.** We are proud of what we have accomplished and look forward to continuing to expand the scope of our work with the generous support of our individuals, partners, and communities across the city.

# A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## DEAR SUPPORTERS,

With the country at large facing an economic and political crossroads, New York City's working class families are facing the brunt of the resulting cultural, financial and legal challenges.

**NEW ARRIVALS CONTINUE TO COME TO THE CITY, SEEKING SAFETY, SHELTER AND A BETTER LIFE FOR THEIR FAMILIES, WHILE TENANTS CONTINUE TO PUSH BACK ON ONGOING EFFORTS BY MAJOR LANDLORDS TO OUST THEM FROM THEIR HOMES.**

Whether seeking an education or a place to live, many New Yorkers must confront unjust discrimination, byzantine rules and a clogged court system.

In response, Legal Services NYC is upping its game, growing our workforce of lawyers and advocates to its highest level ever to help as many people as possible find a path toward peace, justice and a level playing field.

**WE HAVE HELPED LEAD MAJOR CAMPAIGNS AIMED AT FUNDAMENTALLY MAKING THIS CITY A FAIRER PLACE.** Our leaders have pushed the mayoral administration to increase funding for more lawyers in the Right-To-Counsel program and fulfill the city's promise to provide all defendants in housing


court with an attorney. Our staff has led advocacy in government, media and with boots on the ground to bring about the rights to shelter and stability for newly arrived immigrants.

New settlements secured by our advocates are making crucial, systemic change, ensuring that millions of student loan borrowers will receive their much needed tax refunds and fighting racism and transphobia in the New York City courts system.

**THIS IS MY LAST NOTE TO OUR SUPPORTERS AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LSNYC, A ROLE THAT HAS BEEN THE HONOR OF MY LIFE.** Even with the relentless challenges facing our clients, I can say that my career at this wonderful organization is ending on a high note—a string of victories and a sense of momentum that will continue to bring about positive change in this city.

I have perfect confidence that our new leader, Shervon Small, will be a determined, relentless and vocal champion for our clients, and that our dedicated staff will continue to fight the good fight with compassion, good humor and world-class legal counsel.

Thank you, our supporters, for standing alongside this special organization. Together, we will continue fighting until every New Yorker gets the justice they deserve.



Raun J. Rasmussen  
Executive Director



# WHO WE SERVE

NEW YORKERS HELPED  
ACROSS ALL 5 BOROUGHES



# WHAT WE DO

Through our offices in all five boroughs, Legal Services NYC (LSNYC) fights for the rights of the low income members of our communities. We coordinate our services across practice areas to address legal problems faced by historically poor and persecuted populations, including immigrants, veterans, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, people living with HIV/AIDS, and people with disabilities. Our multifaceted work includes:

## PROTECTING HOUSING & PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

### 58,570 NEW YORKERS HELPED

LSNYC prevents thousands of evictions and foreclosures every year. We force landlords to repair unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions and protect tenants against harassment. Our advocacy preserves affordable housing and prevents the displacement of poor families caused by gentrification.

## SAFEGUARDING INCOME & FIGHTING CONSUMER FRAUD

### 25,752 NEW YORKERS HELPED

We ensure access to benefits for people with disabilities, veterans, the elderly, and others. We put a stop to employers' practices that deprive workers of compensation, and fraudsters' schemes that often target low-income individuals and families.

## HELPING IMMIGRANTS & STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

### 21,704 NEW YORKERS HELPED

Every year, we help thousands of immigrants and their families gain asylum and get on a path to citizenship. Our attorneys and social workers also secure safe and stable environments for victims of domestic violence and their children.

## SECURING ACCESS TO EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE

### 2,369 NEW YORKERS HELPED

Our work to protect students' rights includes stopping inappropriate school discipline, and ensuring students with special needs get the services they need. LSNYC helps uninsured New Yorkers access public health benefits, and safeguards patients' housing, finances, and health care coverage.



**653 STAFF MEMBERS** served approximately 49,000 cases that benefited 108,000 vulnerable New Yorkers



**\$56,700,000** in cash benefits, settlements, and savings to our clients



**\$275,800,000** in NYC taxpayer savings



**5,100 VOLUNTEERS** at scores of law firms and companies donated more than 81,000 pro bono hours helping New Yorkers



**584,000 NEW YORKERS** who now understand their rights through our trainings, workshops and community educational events



**60,000 HOTLINE CALLS** answered by staff fluent in 10 languages


# LSNYC FIGHTS FOR INCREASED FUNDING FOR RIGHT TO COUNSEL AND TENANT RIGHTS PROGRAMS

LSNYC and coalition partners engaged in a “FairFunding Campaign,” calling for \$300 million in increased funding from the City for civil and criminal defense work to ensure LSNYC staff and programs are fairly funded. LSNYC also pushed for \$351 million in additional funding for the City’s Right to Counsel program as well as \$125 million to fairly fund baseline contracts, including for the Tenant

Rights Coalition. Although eviction filings continue to grow, the City is only funding providers to represent half of all eligible tenants (roughly 35,000 of 71,000 cases predicted this year). Increased funding would allow LSNYC to hire more staff, fund salary increases to address attrition and attract new hires; and bridge funding shortfalls.



**“EVERY NEW YORKER DESERVES A FIGHTING CHANCE, ESPECIALLY LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS WHO ARE JUST ONE STEP AWAY FROM EXTREME POVERTY, HOMELESSNESS, FOOD INSTABILITY, DEPORTATION, AND LIFE-THREATENING HEALTH ISSUES. BUT WITHOUT ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS AND PUBLIC DEFENDERS, THESE COMMUNITIES DON’T STAND A CHANCE.. NEW YORK CITY MUST DO THE RIGHT THING AND MEET THE FUNDING NEEDS OF ITS FIRST-LINE DEFENDERS SO THAT EVERY NEW YORKER CAN ACCESS THE LEGAL SERVICES AND RESOURCES THEY NEED TO THRIVE.”**



# LSNYC PUSHES FOR RIGHT TO SHELTER, STABILITY FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

With the influx of newly arrived immigrants in New York city this year, LSNYC is pushing for the Right to Shelter, speaking truth to power that “access to safe shelter is a fundamental human right” and required by the Constitution of the State of New York.

Staff have been harnessing the power of the media to reinforce the message, peering in Politico, Prism, Gothamist and other publications. Meanwhile, LSNYC’s immigration advocates continue to assist existing and newly arrived immigrants through multiple Know Your Rights clinics, Pro Bono TPS and asylum clinics, applications for public assistance, and a myriad of other direct legal assistance to help immigrants obtain work authorization and get on a path to citizenship.

**“NEW YORK CITY, LIKE MANY CITIES, IS EXPERIENCING THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL DISPLACEMENT, CLIMATE-CHANGE-DRIVEN MIGRATION, AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY. WE CANNOT CLOSE OUR EYES TO THE REALITY THAT THE WORLD IS CHANGING AND INSTEAD PURSUE SHORT-TERM MEASURES, OR RESORT TO CRUEL OR INHUMANE TACTICS. INSTEAD, WE MUST RISE TOGETHER TO MEET THE MOMENT AND CREATE SUSTAINABLE, LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS. EVERY PERSON, ADULT OR CHILD, DESERVES DIGNITY AND RESPECT, NO MATTER HOW OR WHEN THEY ARRIVED AT THE CITY WE ALL CALL HOME.”**

- Christine Clark, Chief of Litigation and Advocacy



# LSNYC LAUNCHES NEW MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIP IN THE BRONX

LSNYC's Bronx office launched a new medical legal partnership (MLP) with Urban Health Plan (UHP)—their first with a community health provider in the South Bronx. The initiative provides targeted civil legal services to UHP patients that address key social

determinants of health, such as housing repair issues, immigration needs, economic stability, and access to public health insurance—help they would have to seek out individually from many different organizations if not for this impactful partnership.

**“THIS CRITICAL PARTNERSHIP ALLOWS US TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OUTCOMES AND OVERALL WELL-BEING OF BRONX RESIDENTS BY OFFERING LEGAL HELP TO ADDRESS OTHER ISSUES IN THEIR LIVES. THIS PARTNERSHIP IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE HOLISTIC APPROACH WE TAKE TO PROVIDING HELP TO BRONX COMMUNITIES. WE ARE THRILLED THAT OUR PARTNER UHP SHARES OUR VISION AND APPROACH.”**

**- Marie Vaz, Bronx Supervising Attorney**



# LSNYC FORCES CHASE BANK TO RETURN \$20,000 IN STOLEN FUNDS

**LIKE MANY LOW-INCOME CLIENTS, JAMES VESEY'S CLAIMS OF THEFT/FRAUD WERE REPEATEDLY IGNORED BY CHASE BANK, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD PROOF HE DID NOT WITHDRAW THE \$20,000 STOLEN FROM HIS ACCOUNT.**



As a result, Mr. Vesey was unable to pay his rent, was facing eviction, and even contemplated suicide not knowing how he would support himself. But thanks to LSNYC's tireless advocacy, including repeated phone calls, letters, follow up emails, and finally orchestrating a call from a reporter to the bank, Chase finally returned Mr. Vesey's money. This case demonstrates how a holistic approach and working across practice areas (in this case, housing and consumer) can help identify legal and non-legal solutions for clients who may not have strong defenses or affirmative litigation options. Unfortunately, Mr. Vesey passed away days later, but his advocacy efforts shine a much-needed spotlight on how big banks mistreat low-income customers.

**"IT IS SUCH A WIDESPREAD PROBLEM, NOT JUST IN IDENTITY THEFT, BUT GENERALLY, IN TERMS OF BANKS NOT PROVIDING APPROPRIATE CUSTOMER SERVICE TO PEOPLE AND THE IMPACTS IT HAS ON THEIR CLIENTS' LIVES.**

- Mary McCune, LSNYC Consumer Advocate

# LSNYC STEPS UP TO PROCESS CITY FHEPS APPLICATIONS

Homebase, the City program that administers CityFHEPs housing vouchers, is failing. Applications go nowhere. Recertifications lapse. Families lose their homes. Homebase providers are severely under-resourced and understaffed.

To relieve some of that pressure, LSNYC stepped up this year to process our client's CityFHEPs vouchers internally to ensure they get voucher payments on time and can stay in their homes.

**"OUR SAFETY NET ISN'T WORKING AND WE NEED IT TO WORK. TENANTS SENDING RENEWAL APPLICATIONS TO THE CITY ROUTINELY GETTING BOUNCE-BACK EMAILS. THE VERY REAL CONSEQUENCE IS THAT LOW INCOME INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES ARE STRUGGLING TO JUST GET IN THE FRONT DOOR TO START THE PROCESS OF APPLYING, MUCH LESS GETTING THE ACTUAL APPLICATION IN SINCE THAT FIRST INTAKE IS JUST REALLY AN INTAKE.**

- Jack Newton, Director of the Public Benefits Unit at Legal Services NYC

# VICTORY: LSNYC SETTLEMENT HELPS PROTECT MILLIONS OF STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS' TAX REFUNDS

THANKS TO A LSNYC SETTLEMENT, MILLIONS OF STUDENT LOAN BORROWERS IN DEFAULT WILL NOW HAVE THE OPTION TO PROTECT THEIR TAX REFUNDS, WAGES, AND SOCIAL SECURITY CHECKS FROM GARNISHMENT.

In the settlement, the U.S. government agreed to update collection notices sent to defaulted borrowers to inform them of their right to consolidate their debt into an affordable payment plan; much better than steering them into costly, alternative plans that expose them to offsets as they have in the past, in addition, the government returned money taken

from plaintiffs in the suit. The new notices go into effect immediately. With the nation still waiting for a national student debt relief plan, these changes will keep much needed tax refund money in the pockets of low-income borrowers, and require the government to be honest about the different options borrowers have to repay loans on their own terms.

**“I’M THANKFUL TO LEGAL SERVICES NYC AND HAPPY TO GET THE MONEY BACK. IT WAS A BIG RELIEF AND WILL HELP US PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, INCLUDING MAKING SURE OUR KIDS CAN HAVE A CHRISTMAS THIS YEAR.”**

- Saibou Sidibe



# LSNYC HELPS BRONX TENANTS WIN \$400,000 IN RENT ABATEMENTS, CONTINUES FIGHT FOR REPAIRS

**LSNYC'S TENANT RIGHTS COALITION HELPED RENT-STABILIZED TENANTS IN FOUR EMERALD EQUITY-OWNED BUILDINGS WIN MORE THAN \$400,000 IN RENT ABATEMENTS FOR THE LANDLORD'S REPEATED FAILURE TO MAKE REPAIRS IN A SETTLEMENT.**

The settlement also sets out a schedule for the landlord to finally make repairs—including providing adequate heating and hot water, exterminate cockroaches, mice, rats, and other pests, removal of mold, addressing plumbing issues, repairing leaky roof, providing janitorial services across building, and fixing the elevators and intercom systems—within 30 days of the settlement or face stiff civil penalties.

**“WHEN I HEARD ABOUT THE SETTLEMENT AND THAT WE OFFICIALLY SETTLED, I FELT LIKE A WEIGHT HAD BEEN LIFTED FROM ME. BAD LANDLORDS KILL TENANTS MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY, AND WE HAVE BEEN UNDER THIS BURDEN FOR SO LONG - I FEEL FREE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A LONG TIME. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE TENANTS ALL OVER THE CITY KEEP FIGHTING, BECAUSE THIS IS WHAT WE CAN WIN WHAT YOU ORGANIZE AND FIGHT.**

**- Mercedes Escoto, 1187 Anderson Tenant Leader**





## LSNYC LAUNCHES HEALING CENTERED PILOT PROGRAM IN THE BRONX

LSNYC, in conjunction with the Healing Centered Schools Working Group, launched a new pilot program in 12 schools in the Bronx's District 9 that fosters healing centered approaches to education. The program aims at developing a school culture that allows students and staff to overcome trauma-related obstacles to teaching and learning and will begin with the formation of Transformation Teams that will develop and implement a Healing-Centered Plan.

**“HEALING-CENTERED SCHOOLS ARE MORE NECESSARY NOW THAN EVER, WITH EVERY STUDENT AND STAFF MEMBER DEALING WITH THE COLLECTIVE TRAUMA OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE FIGHT FOR RACIAL JUSTICE. I DOUBT THERE IS ANYONE WHO HAS NOT SEEN IMAGES OF BLACK AND BROWN PEOPLE BEING BRUTALIZED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT. SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS NEED TO SUPPORT CHILDREN IN COMING TOGETHER TO HEAL.”**

**- Nelson Mar, LSNYC Education Advocate**

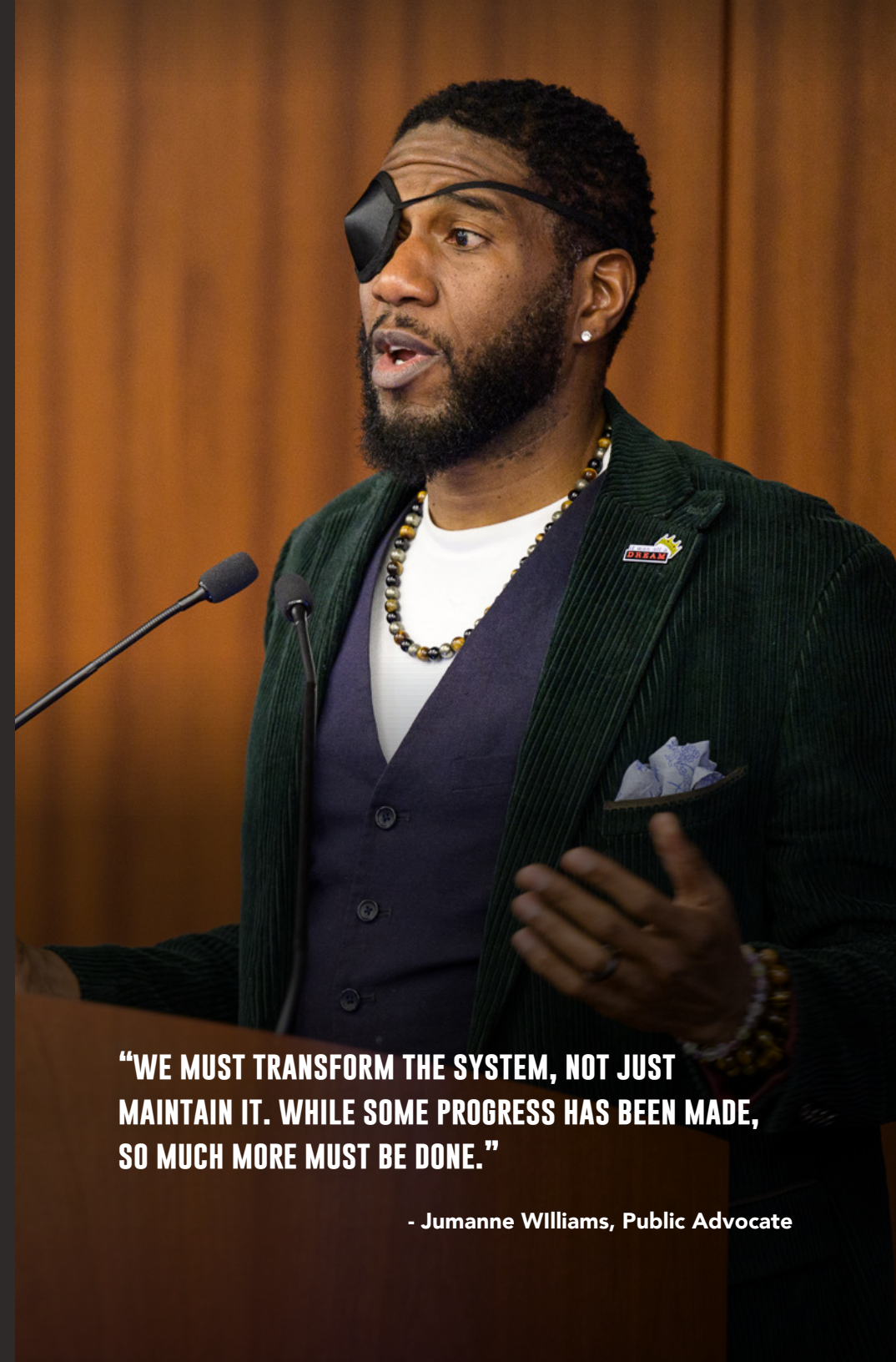
# LSNYC TACKLES RACISM, UNEQUAL TREATMENT IN NY COURTS

**LSNYC HOSTED A SYMPOSIUM TO OFFER A SAFE SPACE FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS, ACTIVISTS, ATTORNEYS, AND OTHERS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND DISCUSS HOW WE CAN TACKLE SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE COURTS.**

Former DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson issued a report reviewing racial equity in New York courts, but missing were the voices from, actual litigants were never directly interviewed — a critical voice in creating meaningful change in our courts to address racist structures, policies and behaviors. LSNYC assembled this symposium to lift up community-based organizations and voices and bring them into the fold.

LSNYC also put a spotlight on disparate treatment of trans clients in NY courts, who experienced additional layers of scrutiny by NYC court clerks when filing name change petitions, including asking trans asylum seekers to obtain original birth certificates from the countries they are fleeing, refusing to accept applications with notary stamps expired the same day, and other unnecessary reasons to stall applications.

LSNYC shared these experiences with Law360 which published an article.



**“WE MUST TRANSFORM THE SYSTEM, NOT JUST MAINTAIN IT. WHILE SOME PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE, SO MUCH MORE MUST BE DONE.”**

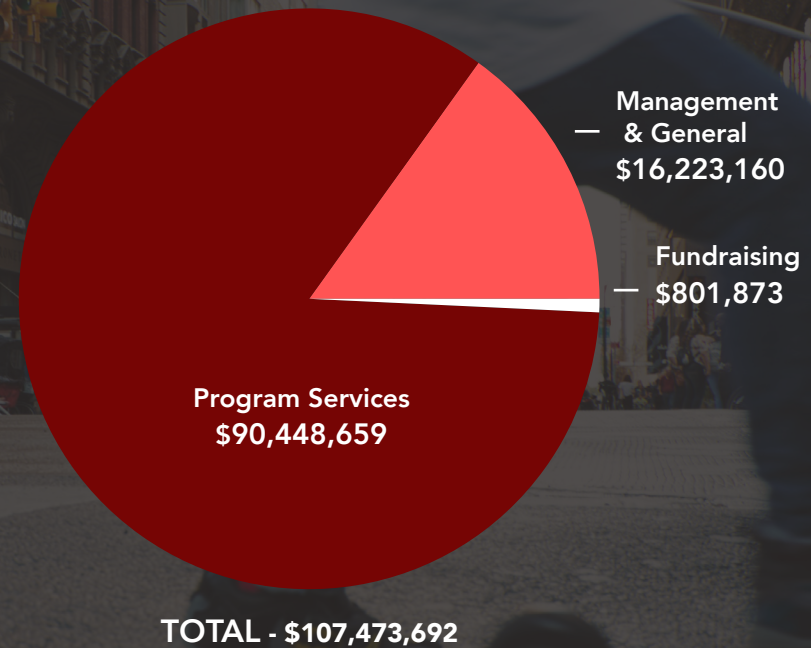
- Jumanne Williams, Public Advocate

# FINANCIALS

## REVENUE

Legal Services Corporation and Other Federal Contracts	\$17,696,350
Interest on Lawyers Accounts	\$6,470,144
New York State Contracts	\$25,419,568
New York City Contracts	\$53,509,973
Events and Individual Donors	\$1,833,496
Private Grants and Contributions	\$4,041,054
Foundations	\$797,763
Attorney Fees	\$853,783
Interest	\$20,990
Other Income	\$250
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$110,643,370</b>
<b>DONATED PRO BONO SERVICES</b>	<b>\$71,368,543</b>

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