



# IN TIMES OF CRISIS, ACT

RESPONDING TO COVID-19: ANNUAL REPORT 2020

## NYLAG

New York — Legal Assistance Group

## A WORD FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND BOARD CHAIR

### DEAR SUPPORTER,

COVID-19 changed our world. None of us could have imagined the year we would have navigating a global pandemic. The world around us rapidly changed, and, by necessity, we had to adapt to new ways of working.

While this crisis has affected everyone, our clients—those experiencing poverty or with low-income and predominantly people of color—were and continue to be disproportionately affected. Many lost jobs, have urgent housing concerns, and have difficulty accessing benefits and health care. The pandemic laid bare the structural inequalities communities of color face each day.

### NYLAG responded quickly to the COVID-19 crisis:

- Creating two COVID legal hotlines, one for NYC residents and one for patients in NY hospitals
- Overhauling our domestic violence work to address the most urgent cases where danger was immediately present
- Advocating for necessary policy changes such as new laws to protect tenants and safer conditions for those experiencing homelessness
- Drafting and advocating for an Executive Order to protect children of frontline workers

While 2020 was supposed to usher in the celebration of our 30th anniversary, instead we used our 30 years of experience responding to crises—9/11, Superstorm Sandy, and the 2008 economic recession—as a blueprint for how to scale up quickly and provide expert assistance. We've never been prouder of the NYLAG community of staff, volunteers, and supporters in their commitment to meet dire, urgent needs.

We don't yet know what the months ahead will look like for our community, New York, or even the world, but we do know that, with your support, we will get through this and be here stronger than ever. To those who have supported us this past year, we thank you for standing by us and with us. [A donation to NYLAG is a lifeline to someone deeply affected by the fallout of this pandemic.](#) Your support means so much.

Warmly,



**Beth Goldman**  
President & Attorney-in-Charge



**Jill L. Rosenberg**  
Chair, Board of Directors





## OVERVIEW

# YEAR IN REVIEW: AT-A-GLANCE.

**“I NEVER THOUGHT IN MY LIFETIME THAT I WOULD NEED LEGAL ADVICE AND NOT HAVE THE FUNDS TO PAY FOR IT MYSELF. WHEN THIS COVID-19 NIGHTMARE BEGAN AND I LOST MY JOB, I WAS PANIC-STRICKEN. A FRIEND REFERRED ME TO NYLAG AND SINCE OUR FIRST SESSION, YOU HAVE BEEN MY ANGEL.”**

**NYLAG CLIENT**

**89,160**

adults and children  
impacted by NYLAG's  
services

**4,800**

people helped by our two  
COVID-19 hotlines

**3,250**

tenants represented by  
NYLAG who were facing  
eviction, displacement, and  
homelessness

**4,570**

public benefits cases  
handled so that seniors,  
families, and children could  
access food and resources  
to survive

### NYLAG'S DEDICATED TEAM

- ▶ 196 attorneys\*
- ▶ 69 paralegals\*
- ▶ 12 financial counselors\*
- ▶ 2,100 pro bono attorneys & volunteers
- ▶ 29 languages spoken by staff\*



All stats are FY20 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020) unless otherwise noted.  
\* As of June 2020

## TWO NYLAG COVID-19 HOTLINES PROVIDE A LIFELINE.

In April 2020, NYLAG created the NY COVID-19 Legal Resource Hotline for NYC residents and a separate dedicated hotline for patients in hospitals and medical facilities.



Received **4,800** calls as of September 2020



NYLAG assisted with **legal issues**, including unemployment, tenants' rights, immigration visa extensions, advanced planning, public benefits, and special education



Starting in August 2020, global law firm Shearman & Sterling **expanded the capacity** of our NY COVID-19 Legal Resource Hotline



NYLAG's Sirrah Harris, like many working parents, worked from home with two young children while managing our hotline.

### Q&A WITH SIRRAH HARRIS, NYLAG'S SUPERVISING ATTORNEY OVERSEEING THE NY COVID-19 LEGAL RESOURCE HOTLINE

#### WHO IS CALLING THE HOTLINE?

Many desperate callers reach NYLAG after feeling they are at the end of their rope. It's the first time they've been able to connect with a real person to get real help, and the first time they've felt hope in quite some time.

#### WHAT ARE THEY CALLING ABOUT?

They are navigating unemployment benefits or have questions about their protections at work. They have legal questions related to the illness or death of a loved one. Often, they can no longer afford their rent and are scared of being evicted.

#### HOW WAS IT WORKING FROM HOME DUE TO COVID?

I have two young kids. I'm balancing diapers, messy crafts, and homeschooling with overseeing NYLAG's NY COVID-19 Legal Resource Hotline. It's not easy, but it's meaningful. I am glad to do my part to help those impacted by the negative effects of the pandemic.



A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black tank top and a striped orange and white face mask, is holding a baby. The baby is wearing a blue shirt and a white headband. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and a fence.

**“YOU DIDN’T JUST SOLVE A CASE, **YOU HELPED A SINGLE MOM IN EXTREME NEED** AND REASSURED ME THAT THERE’S DEFINITELY JUSTICE IN THE U.S. NO MATTER WHAT YOUR BACKGROUND IS. THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR PUTTING UP WITH ME.”**

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**NYLAG CLIENT**

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WERE ISOLATED WITH THEIR ABUSERS AND FROM LIFE-SAVING SERVICES. NYLAG STEPPED IN.

As advocates, we knew domestic violence was on the rise during COVID-19 given increasing isolation and economic instability. Seeking assistance to escape the abuse was nearly impossible for victims sheltering in place with their abusers.

After NY went into lockdown, the family courts were open only for matters deemed “essential,” such as abuse/neglect filings or orders to keep abusive partners or family members away. The courts were largely inaccessible, however, to individuals trying to navigate the system on their own because of language and technology barriers, as well as the absence of court staff to assist during the pandemic.

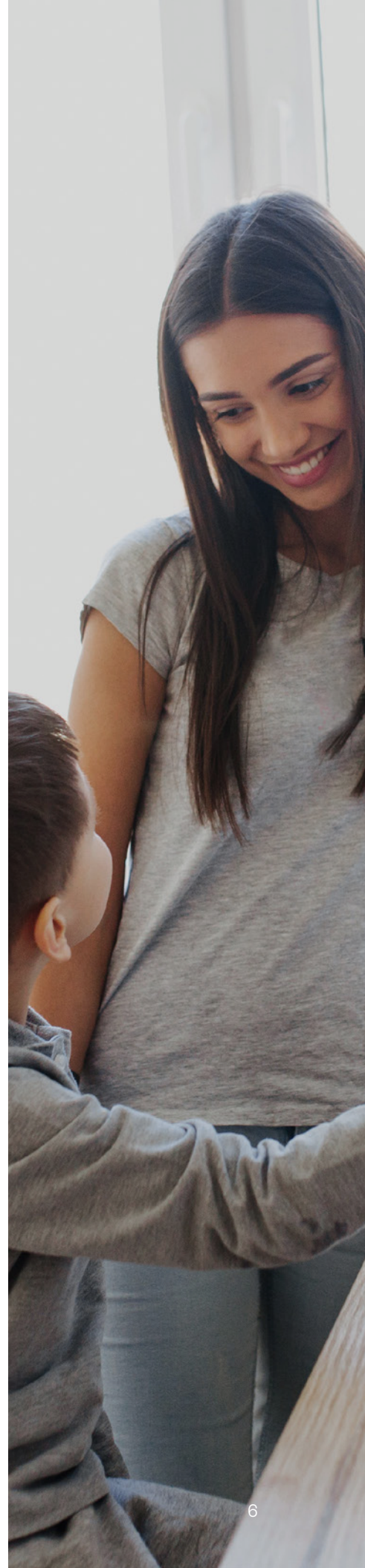


**220 family offense petitions were filed by NYLAG from April-September 2020. Every case we have filed has resulted in the issuance of a temporary order of protection.**

### WE AT NYLAG STEPPED IN AND RAMPED UP ASSISTANCE FOR ABUSE SURVIVORS NEEDING ORDERS OF PROTECTION:

- NYLAG sought out direct referrals from partner agencies to find survivors who needed to file family offense petitions to obtain orders of protection
- NYLAG trained legal summer interns to interview, draft, and file family offense petition to reach more survivors in need
- NYLAG trained and mentored pro bono attorneys to expand our capacity to do this work, piloting a program with partner law firm DLA Piper

As a result of this early intervention, NYLAG has also been able to assess the non-legal needs of survivors and their children. This includes safety planning and linking survivors with vital resources, such as lock changes, counseling, shelter, and other services to help achieve safety and stability.





## NYLAG CO-DRAFTS EXECUTIVE ORDER FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN OF FRONTLINE WORKERS AFFECTED BY COVID-19.

NYLAG's expertise on Standby Guardianship led us to draft, together with pro bono partner Greenberg Traurig, LLP, an Executive Order to modify the Surrogate's Court Procedure Act. This order, ultimately signed by Governor Cuomo, ensures that any parent, legal caretaker who works or volunteers in a health care facility, or anyone who reasonably believes they may be exposed to COVID-19 may designate a standby guardian for their child should something happen to them.

**BY CREATING A PLAN...  
THE CHILD WILL BE WITH  
SOMEONE THEY KNOW  
AND TRUST.**



### Q&A WITH RANDYE RETKIN, DIRECTOR OF NYLAG'S LEGALHEALTH DIVISION

#### WHY IS THIS ORDER IMPORTANT?

It offers some comfort to parents who, by designating a Standby Guardian, can feel secure that if something were to happen, their child(ren) would be properly cared

for by a person of their choosing. **By creating a plan, a parent reduces the risk the child will go into foster care. Instead, the child will be with someone they already know and trust.**

#### HOW IS NYLAG REACHING THOSE ON THE FRONTLINES?

Many frontline workers battling the coronavirus—janitors, receptionists, aides—cannot afford an attorney to help with legal planning should the unthinkable happen. We worked closely with hospitals to inform staff and to offer our services. Also, many clients are in need of such planning.

#### HOW DID THIS ALL COME ABOUT?

NYLAG has a history of pivoting when needs emerge. Just two years ago, we drafted the expanded Standby Guardianship law to support immigrants who are living in constant fear about what will happen to their children if they are separated from them because of immigration enforcement. The Standby Guardianship law was originally created during the height of the AIDS crisis.

## NYLAG'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



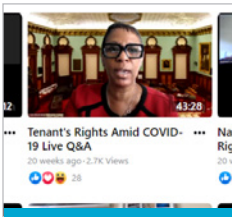
### NYLAG STEPS IN TO PROTECT PEOPLE IN HOMELESS SHELTERS

Our vigorous advocacy on behalf of people in shelters resulted in an agreement by the NYC Department of Homeless Service to move vulnerable adults in the adult shelter system who are not yet ill to isolation beds as a preventative measure.



### NYLAG MAKES HEALTHCARE PROXY WITNESSING EASIER

NYLAG played a critical role in an Executive Order issued by Governor Cuomo that temporarily allowed remote witnessing of health care proxies. The order assists New Yorkers in completing advance directives to guide medical care in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.



### NYLAG ADVOCATES FOR TENANTS DURING EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE

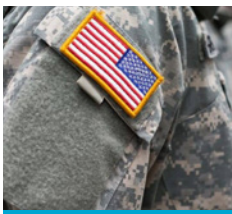
Since the start of the pandemic, there have been many complicated and confusing changes in regard to tenants' rights and options. We were steadfast in our commitment to ensuring tenants had the most accurate information and answering their legal questions through virtual Q&As, hotlines, and various online events with community leaders. We also represented clients in many virtual hearings in housing court on numerous post-eviction orders to prevent evictions.



### NYLAG HELPS TO RELEASE IMMIGRANTS IN ICE DETENTION WHO WERE INFECTED WITH COVID-19 OR HAVE MEDICAL VULNERABILITIES

NYLAG undertook rigorous advocacy efforts to seek release of detained immigrants with COVID-19 or at risk because of medical vulnerabilities, including by filing habeas petitions in courts in NY and NJ and other emergency applications.

### NYLAG ADVANCES VA POLICIES TO SAFEGUARD VULNERABLE VETERANS



Thanks in part to NYLAG's advocacy with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the VA extended financial, benefits, and claims relief to veterans impacted by

COVID. The VA has adopted numerous new policies addressing the issues highlighted by NYLAG, including extensions of claim deadlines and suspension of any debt-collection activity.

### NYLAG LAUNCHES ONLINE COVID-19 RESOURCE CENTER:

- **Housing** up-to-date information on court procedures, policies, and COVID-related benefits.
- **Creating** unique legal resources on tenants' rights, employee protections, foreclosure prevention, advance planning, financial counseling, and other issue areas.
- **Hosting** live video Q&As on housing issues, immigration, public benefits, domestic violence, foreclosure, homeless services, among others.



## IMPROVING INDIVIDUAL LIVES AND CREATING SYSTEMIC CHANGE.

Not only did NYLAG help those affected by COVID-19, we continued the core of our work to help individuals, children, and families in crisis get the legal and financial help they need.

### CONSUMER PROTECTION

Fighting against unfair financial practices, saving our clients **\$4M**.

### EMPLOYMENT LAW

Handling **710** calls from individuals seeking help with issues from denials of Unemployment Insurance benefits to sick and family leave due to COVID-19.\*

### EVELYN FRANK LEGAL RESOURCES

Helping **2,500** seniors and people with disabilities access healthcare and home care services.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW

Empowering survivors to achieve safety, helping **3,100** clients with orders of protection, divorce, and custody issues.

### FINANCIAL COUNSELING

Navigating through financial crises and building long-term financial stability, helping **4,270** people.

### FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

Preserving affordable homeownership, preventing **750** foreclosures.

### HOLOCAUST COMPENSATION

Working with **190** survivors access compensation and restitution funds.

### IMMIGRANT PROTECTION

Standing with immigrants, handling **18,400** cases—from asylum claims to deportation defense— affecting **38,200** people.

### LEGALHEALTH

Complementing healthcare with legal care in **36** hospitals and medical facilities.

### LEGAL HAND

Addressing problems before they escalate into legal proceedings, serving **4,750** people.

### LGBTQ LAW

Addressing the unique legal needs of the LGBTQ community, working with **500** people.

### MEDIATION

Offering dispute resolution without lengthy litigation; **81%** of couples who have mediated with NYLAG have either reached an agreement or reconciled.

### MOBILE LEGAL HELP CENTER

Bringing free legal services to isolated communities (virtually during COVID), holding **168** site visits with **45** partners.

### PRO SE CLINIC

Serving **1,220** unrepresented litigants in the Southern District of New York.

### PUBLIC BENEFITS

Assisting **5,220** people, including seniors and children, with obtaining vital benefits.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION

Securing vital education services for **330** children with special needs.

### SPECIAL LITIGATION

Combating injustice through impact litigation and class actions that include **8,900,000** class members.

### TENANTS' RIGHTS

Defending the rights of **3,250** tenants facing eviction, displacement, and homelessness.

### VETERANS' RIGHTS

Advocating for **1,460** veterans, whose service spans from WWII to those who recently returned home.

All stats are FY20 (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020) unless otherwise noted. \*The calls are from NYLAG's NY Covid-19 legal resource hotline from April-October 2020.



## NYLAG FIGHTS FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM — PARTNERS WITH TLC DRIVER RESOURCE CENTER.

Many taxi owner-drivers, the majority of whom are immigrants, had their dreams derailed by inflated taxi medallion prices, which left taxi owner-drivers in insurmountable debt and poverty. Sadly, it even led to an increase in suicide in this population.

As part of the Taxi and Limousine Commission's (TLC) new Driver Resource Center that launched in May, NYLAG is working with the NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to offer free legal services to taxi medallion owner-drivers in need of legal assistance.

### COVID-19 MADE NYLAG'S INTERVENTION EVEN MORE URGENT:

In an instant, medallion owner-drivers who made their living transporting individuals to their destinations saw their livelihoods heavily impacted due to COVID-19. Taxi drivers were deemed essential and allowed to continue operating, but only one in four drivers were still on the road following the issuance of a citywide state of emergency in March. Meanwhile, drivers continued to have to pay high fees relating to their work, such as auto insurance, garage fees, brokerage fees, and maintenance fees on vehicles, despite the decline in trips.

NYLAG advocates have worked tirelessly to assist taxi-owner drivers in debt with bringing the loans down to affordable amounts during this difficult and hopeless time. We will keep fighting hard for them.



**440** - The number of medallion owner-drivers that NYLAG helped in just four months of the Resource Center's opening.



## THE UNFORGETTABLE STORIES BEHIND THE 89,160 PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES WE IMPACTED.

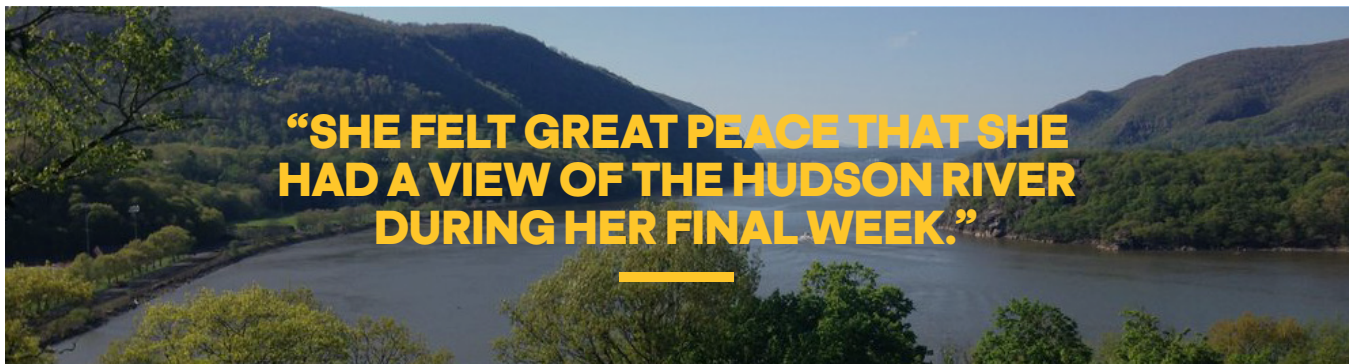
### STANDING UP FOR A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR WRONGFULLY TERMINATED FROM HER JOB

NYLAG represented “Lisa,” a supermarket employee who took two sick days to care for herself after her longtime abuser attacked her physically and had her falsely arrested on charges that were later dismissed. As a longtime victim of domestic violence who had orders of protection in place, she explained her situation to her employer upon her return to work and presented relevant paperwork. The employer told her that she probably did something wrong to warrant the abuse and, within days, fired her. NYLAG filed a complaint in federal court alleging wage and hour violations and violations of State and City human rights laws that include victims of domestic violence victims as a protected group. We also filed a complaint at the Department of Consumer Affairs for violations of the NYC Earned Safe and Sick Time Act. With NYLAG’s help, Lisa obtained a settlement awarding her more than two years of salary at a time when she is unemployed and particularly in need.

### WHY TRAUMA-INFORMED LAWYERING IS SO IMPORTANT

NYLAG met “Jamal” at Mt. Sinai hospital in 2019, where he raised initial questions about seeking asylum. Jamal was terrified to return to his country but hesitated to share the specifics necessary to present an asylum claim. As experts in working with trauma survivors, we knew we needed to be patient and build trust until Jamal felt ready to share his painful story. And so, we waited. The details of Jamal’s story unfolded slowly over the course of many meetings and several months. We learned that Jamal survived years of horrific abuse in his home country because of his sexual orientation and race, culminating in a violent assault that had left him battling clinical depression. He was desperate to stay in New York, the first place he’d ever felt safe. As a result of the work by NYLAG and Jamal’s unwavering strength—Jamal was granted asylum. He is now working towards becoming a social worker to help other survivors of abuse.

### HELPING A SENIOR LIVE HER LAST DAYS WITH DIGNITY



During the height of the COVID-19 crisis, NYLAG assisted “Latricia” with a complicated remote financial and medical Power of Attorney (POA) that required hours of work and navigating many channels at the hospital caring for her. Latricia wanted her friend to help with transferring out of a hospital in Westchester to a care facility that was in her hometown. However, the hospital would not allow the friend to facilitate the transfer without a POA because the friend was not a family member. With the POA, Latricia was quickly and smoothly transferred to her hometown to live out her final days surrounded by loved ones and in an environment that brought her peace.

**“THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR HELP ADVISING ME ON OUR CLIENT’S CASE. I HONESTLY TEARED UP OPENING THE LETTER AND SEEING WE WON ASYLUM FOR OUR CLIENT - WHICH MIGHT BE A FIRST FOR ME IN PRIVATE PRACTICE.”**

**NYLAG PRO BONO ATTORNEY THANKING HIS NYLAG MENTOR**

## **TAKING THE TIME TO TRANSFORM LIVES.**

NYLAG strategically engages skilled volunteers—retired and current attorneys, law graduates, students, and others—who broaden our reach and strengthen our impact during COVID-19 and beyond.



**2,100**  
pro bono attorneys  
and volunteers



**74,530**  
hours donated



**\$25M**  
value of time



## DONORS

# YOUR SUPPORT HELPS TO ENSURE FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE. THANK YOU.

### **WE THANK OUR LAW FIRMS AND CORPORATE PARTNERS WHO GENEROUSLY GAVE THEIR TIME AND TALENT, AND/OR SUPPORTED NYLAG FINANCIALLY:**

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- ▶ Winston & Strawn LLP

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AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS:**

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- ▶ Center for New York City Neighborhoods (CNYCN)
- ▶ Claims Conference
- ▶ Community Service Society
- ▶ DAV Charitable Trust
- ▶ David Berg Foundation
- ▶ Day One
- ▶ Equal Justice America
- ▶ Equal Justice Works
- ▶ Equal Justice Works Americorps
- ▶ Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation
- ▶ Footsteps
- ▶ Fordham Preparatory School
- ▶ Goodwill Industries of New York & New Jersey



- ▶ Grand Street Guild Housing Development Fund Company
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- ▶ Venable Foundation
- ▶ Vera Institute of Justice
- ▶ Y.C. Ho/Helen and Michael Chiang Foundation
- ▶ Yale University

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- ▶ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Violence Against Women
- ▶ U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York

### **IOLA**

- ▶ IOLA Fund of New York

## **NEW YORK CITY**

- ▶ NYC Department of Youth & Community Development
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals
- ▶ NYC Human Resources Administration
- ▶ NYC Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
- ▶ NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
- ▶ NYC Office of Financial Empowerment

## **NEW YORK STATE**

- ▶ NYS Attorney General
- ▶ NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services
- ▶ NYS Office for New Americans
- ▶ NYS Office for the Aging
- ▶ NYS Office of Temporary & Disability Assistance
- ▶ NYS Office of Victim Services
- ▶ Office of Court Administration

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- ▶ Community Care of Brooklyn
- ▶ James J. Peters VA Medical Center
- ▶ Maimonides Medical Center
- ▶ Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center
- ▶ MJHS Health System
- ▶ Montefiore Medical Center
- ▶ Mount Sinai Health System
- ▶ Mount Sinai Morningside
- ▶ NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia University Irving Medical Center
- ▶ Northport VA Medical Center
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Coney Island
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Gotham Health, Gouverneur
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Harlem
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi

- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals, Post-Acute Care - Immigration
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Kings County
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Metropolitan
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/North Central Bronx
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Queens
- ▶ NYC Health + Hospitals/Woodhull
- ▶ NYU Langone Health
- ▶ NYU Langone Medical Center - Laura and Isaac Perlmutter Cancer Center
- ▶ MSK Ralph Lauren Center
- ▶ VA NY Harbor Healthcare System
- ▶ NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell
- ▶ WMCHealth/Westchester Medical Center - Valhalla Campus

**WE THANK THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WHO SUPPORTED NYLAG WITH A GIFT OF \$500 OR MORE LAST YEAR:**

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## YOUR DOLLAR AT WORK.

### 2020, UNAUDITED

#### REVENUE

▶ Government	\$ 25,876,796
▶ Foundations	\$ 3,837,929
▶ Hospitals and Corporations	\$ 2,867,069
▶ Individuals	\$ 605,726
▶ Court Awarded & Earned Fees	\$ 561,151
▶ Miscellaneous	\$ 303,188
<b>TOTAL REVENUES BEFORE IN-KIND LEGAL SERVICES</b>	<b>\$ 34,051,860</b>
▶ In-kind	\$ 25,791,705
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$ 59,843,565</b>

#### EXPENSES

##### ▶ TOTAL EXPENSES BEFORE IN-KIND LEGAL SERVICES

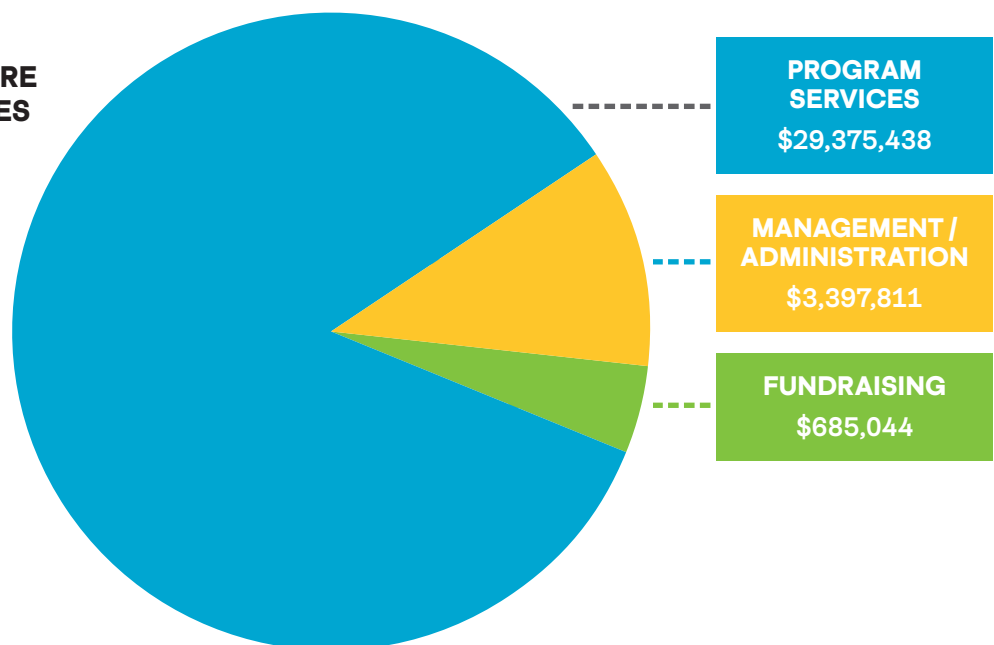
\$ 33,458,293

##### ▶ IN-KIND

\$ 25,791,705

##### ▶ TOTAL EXPENSES

\$ 59,249,998



SUPPORT US



**“NYLAG HAS GIVEN ME HOPE THAT MY CHILD  
CAN POSSIBLY BECOME AT LEAST PARTLY  
INDEPENDENT ONE DAY.”**

**A SINGLE FATHER TO NYLAG AFTER WE HELPED HIS CHILD  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS GET THE CARE HE NEEDED**

## HOW YOU CAN HELP.

Together, we can advance justice, promote change, and improve the lives of children and adults experiencing poverty. There are a variety of ways you can support NYLAG’s work:

### **ONLINE:**

Visit [nylag.org/donate](https://nylag.org/donate)

### **BY CHECK:**

Checks may be made payable to New York Legal Assistance Group and sent to:

New York Legal Assistance Group  
C/O Philanthropy Department  
7 Hanover Square  
New York, NY 10004

### **MORE WAYS TO GIVE:**

To make a gift by wire transfer, a planned gift, a matching gift, or stock gift please email [donate@nylag.org](mailto:donate@nylag.org).





## THANK YOU FOR MAKING OUR WORK POSSIBLE.

Because of your support, last year NYLAG was able to help **89,160** people move closer to economic stability and safety.

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