



NYLAG

# UPLIFTING COMMUNITIES IN JUSTICE

ANNUAL REPORT 2023





NYLAG fought alongside me, through so many ups and downs. With attorneys who knew the ins and outs of the legal system at my side, I had the confidence to keep going. They refused to give up.

**NYLAG CLIENT**



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## FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

### DEAR SUPPORTER,

This year, I marked my first full year as NYLAG's president and CEO. This milestone fills me with immense gratitude, both for our incredible team and for the support of people like you who share our commitment to social, racial, and economic justice.

This gratitude exists alongside a recognition of how extraordinarily challenging 2023 has been for New Yorkers. In our city, the wealthiest in the world, asylum-seekers were forced to sleep on our streets, homelessness rose to rates not seen in almost 100 years, families were wrongfully denied benefits, and tenants faced skyrocketing rents and evictions. For countless people in need of the most essential forms of dignity and support, this year uncovered failings within the institutions and systems entrusted with their protection. NYLAG is here to hold these systems accountable.

We have never drawn back during difficult times. This year, NYLAG's amazing team of over 350 advocates stepped up every day to ensure our neighbors have legal advocates by their side during these crises, just as we have for over three decades.

We partner with New Yorkers during some of the most stressful times of their lives with legal expertise, but we know our clients are the experts in their own lives. Their voices are at the center of all the work we do, the policies we advocate for, and the city we are working to build.

While we have seen heartbreak and injustice this year, I am hopeful because I know our work is in the hands of a team of dedicated, expert advocates, who never back down for their clients. I am also inspired by your commitment and the generosity of all of NYLAG's funders, partners, and friends. Thank you for standing with us so that all New Yorkers can achieve justice.



**LISA RIVERA**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO

### DEAR FRIENDS OF NYLAG,

Overlapping humanitarian crises within the immigration system, shelter, and housing, and rising costs of living left thousands of our neighbors on the brink in 2023.

With these latest injustices, NYLAG mobilized, innovated, and fought like we have during numerous emergencies over the last 30 years to:

- ▶ Ensure recent migrants to NYC received the essential legal support they needed to work, build foundations, and live safely in NYC;
- ▶ Demand dignified, safe shelter for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, including asylum-seekers;
- ▶ Defend thousands of New Yorkers against eviction and the threat of homelessness;
- ▶ Secure life-saving benefits for people experiencing poverty so they can buy food and pay rent;

We do not do this work alone. Our partners, supporters, and people like you are the reason we can impact the lives of 129,000 adults and children. Without you, NYLAG simply could not have this kind of impact. With a gift to NYLAG, you can help to ensure that even more of our fellow New Yorkers have life-changing legal assistance when they cannot afford an attorney.

Thank you.



**JOE POLIZZOTTO**  
CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS



# WE ARE NYLAG

Using the power of the law, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) fights for economic, racial, and social justice by advocating for people experiencing poverty or in crisis. We know our clients are experts in their own lives and we center their voices to help them achieve justice, safety, and stability.

Our team of over 350 advocates serve New Yorkers through comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. Everyone, regardless of race, income level, ability, or life circumstance, should have support during a legal crisis. We are here so they don't have to fight alone.

IN 2023, WE:



**130,443**

Impacted the lives of 130,443 adults and children



**\$288M**

Saved \$288M for our clients



**380**

Served our community at over 380 sites across New York City



For New Yorkers experiencing poverty and marginalization, especially in our BIPOC communities, our services are not optional: they are the difference between a secure home and homelessness, between having food on their tables and going hungry, between building a life free of violence and being forced back into danger, and much more.

**LISA RIVERA**  
NYLAG PRESIDENT AND CEO





# EMPOWERING IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

## IMMIGRANTS FACED AN UNPRECEDENTED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS. WE STAYED BY THEIR SIDES.

Since 1990, NYLAG has provided legal services to immigrant New Yorkers. But last year was different. After asylum seekers from Central and South America were used as political props and bussed to our city in record numbers, we mobilized to fill in the gaps of a broken immigration system.



27,118

The 27,118 immigrants we served came from 196 different countries. Almost 32% were children.

### BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO EMPOWER ASYLUM SEEKERS



Standing up for your rights shouldn't require a law degree. NYLAG co-created an innovative partnership, the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP), to equip asylum seekers with legal knowledge to navigate cases themselves, with full representation available for those who need it. PSPP's powerful model creates equity within legal advocacy and empowers immigrant communities to understand the law and fight for justice.



### THIS IS NOT A MIGRANT CRISIS, IT'S A POLICY CRISIS: DEMANDING THAT NYC BE THE SAFE HAVEN IMMIGRANTS NEED

New York's legal and shelter system were, and continue to be, overloaded and unprepared to serve newly arrived migrants and asylum-seekers. NYLAG testified before the NYC Council Committee on Immigration, advocating for a greater investment of resources into immigration attorneys across the city, pro se application assistance clinics, and non-profit legal service organizations facing a crisis with recruitment, training, and space for new attorneys.



THESE ARE REAL HEADLINES. SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE TO READ MORE.

### NYLAG WAS A LEADING VOICE ON SYSTEMIC DYSFUNCTION THAT HARMED IMMIGRANTS

Egregious violations in NYC's courts—immigrants being denied entry into the court building and then ordered deported, hearing dates scheduled a decade from now, and abuse by guards—revealed a disturbing pattern. NYLAG was one of the sole voices spotlighting this dysfunction in the press and demand letters to the highest governing bodies.

We used our expertise and access, in the halls of City government and in the press, to uplift the needs of immigrant communities, shed light on the shortcomings of the immigration system, and give expert recommendations from our decades of experience serving communities on-the-ground.



“

The current ‘crisis’ stems from the intersection of various federal policies which have closed our borders to most asylum seekers for the last three years while failing to put in place strategies or resources to safely, effectively, and humanely anticipate the influx of vulnerable migrants who cannot be subjected to rapid expulsion.

**JODI ZIESEMER**  
DIRECTOR OF NYLAG'S IMMIGRANT PROTECTION  
UNIT TESTIFYING TO THE NEW YORK CITY  
COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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# WE REFUSED TO LET THE SHELTER RIGHTS OF NEW YORKERS BE CHIPPED AWAY

Anyone without a place to sleep in New York City – including immigrants seeking safety and prosperous futures – have a legal right to safe, dignified shelter. When migrants were blamed for shortcomings in the system and this right was eroded, we demanded policies that centered their humanity.

## CONFRONTING RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN MIGRANT SHELTERS

Asylum seekers arriving from the southern border were funneled into a new shelter system where they were denied adequate food, access to medical care, and pathways to transition into permanent housing. NYLAG shed light on these egregious violations and called for legislative action.

“

On their journeys, (asylum seekers) have experienced horrors too numerous to count...Once arriving, they are often re-traumatized by their treatment at the shelters....

**DEBORAH BERKMAN**  
SUPERVISING ATTORNEY FOR NYLAG’S SHELTER ADVOCACY INITIATIVE, TESTIFYING TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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## PREVENTING FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN FROM SLEEPING ON STREETS AND SUBWAYS

After nearly two years of advocacy by NYLAG and Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP, the NYC Department of Homeless Services closed an administrative loophole that forced families with children to sleep on streets, subways, and emergency rooms even if they had no other housing options.

“

I feel good (and) my body feels good. I’m sleeping better, and I’m thinking better.

**NYLAG CLIENT AFTER ACCESSING SHELTER**

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## ADVOCATING FOR SAFE SHELTER OPTIONS FOR UNHOUSED NEW YORKERS: JOHN’S STORY

In a previous life, John\* was an electrician. When his partner passed away, he was evicted from his home and entered New York City’s public shelter system. Sleeping in a room full of strangers – some of whom physically threatened him numerous times – was not just distasteful to him, it was impossible.

Sleeping in Penn Station felt safer. NYLAG helped John obtain a single room in a shelter where he felt safe. He quickly became eligible for a rental subsidy and for assistance locating an apartment. A few months later, he was able to move into his own apartment, where he’s lived happily since April.

\*To protect the individual’s identity, a pseudonym was used.





## WE WERE THERE FOR LGBTQ+ IMMIGRANTS IN NEED OF A SAFE HAVEN IN NYC

Among the thousands of asylum-seekers risking their lives to find safety in our country are countless LGBTQ+ people fleeing homophobia, transphobia, and violence targeting their identities.

With decades of experience providing immigration services tailored to the unique legal and cultural needs of LGBTQ+ immigrants, NYLAG responded immediately, providing a combination of culturally competent legal services, community outreach and education, professional trainings, and policy advocacy.

**860**

Last year, NYLAG worked with over 860 LGBTQ+ clients on a range of legal issues, ranging from name changes to estate planning.



“

## CHRISTIAN'S STORY

For me, being LGBTQ in Paraguay meant being harmed, harassed, and bullied. My life was even threatened. I decided to risk it all to try to build a home in New York City. NYLAG fought alongside me, through so many ups and downs. With attorneys who knew the ins and outs of the legal system at my side, I had the confidence to keep going. They refused to give up. And in February of this year, I was finally granted asylum. I want to say a few words to my NYLAG attorneys: I don't know what would have happened to me if it wasn't for you. You changed my whole life.

**CHRISTIAN**  
NYLAG CLIENT

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## PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO HOUSING AMID SKYROCKETING RENT COSTS

With rising rents, exploitative landlords, and increased costs of living, more and more New Yorkers faced the devastating threat of eviction and foreclosures, especially communities of color, single-parent households, and people with disabilities.

Evictions and foreclosures destabilize families and children, break up communities, and often lead to long-term homelessness and economic hardship. NYLAG is a leading defender of tenants' and housing rights in NYC, keeping thousands of people in their homes and helping to protect the futures of countless families.

**10,374**

NYLAG represented 10,374 people in the face of eviction, foreclosure, displacement, or homelessness, resulting in thousands staying in their homes.



## CALLING ON THE CITY TO PROTECT TENANTS' RIGHTS

NYC's Right to Counsel law (RTC) guarantees that any eligible tenant facing eviction has access to a lawyer. With a lawyer by their side, 84% of tenants win their cases. But with chronic underfunding of this vital work, cases are pushed through housing court and tenants are forced to represent themselves. We demanded increased funding for Right to Counsel in the City budget, joining our partners in a resounding call to protect tenants' rights.

## NYC'S ONLY CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES TEAM DEDICATED TO JUSTICE FOR PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS

Public housing tenants are often forced to live in dangerous conditions - among mold, lead paint, and vermin - and come up against appalling delays to repairs and systemic neglect.

In response, NYLAG houses the Public Housing Justice Project, NYC's only team dedicated exclusively to providing free civil legal services to public housing tenants, defending them from eviction, helping them obtain repairs, and advocating for policy changes to protect their rights.

NYLAG IS A **LEADING DEFENDER** OF  
TENANTS' AND HOUSING RIGHTS IN NYC,  
KEEPING THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN  
THEIR HOMES AND HELPING TO **PROTECT**  
THE FUTURES OF COUNTLESS FAMILIES.



A budget is a reflection of values. The City needs to invest more, not less, in initiatives that uplift and invest in communities that need it most. Now is NOT the time to pull back.

**LISA RIVERA**

NYLAG PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
TESTIFYING BEFORE THE NEW  
YORK CITY COUNCIL DURING  
EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARINGS





# PROMOTING DIGNITY, WELL-BEING, AND BRIGHT FUTURES FOR ALL



## NAVIGATING COMPLEX HEALTH SYSTEMS

Medicare and Medicaid are a lifeline for people experiencing poverty, but navigating the system and paying out-of-pocket costs are hurdles that lead many to go without the care they desperately need. NYLAG won over \$2.2M in ongoing Managed Long Term Care services for New Yorkers, ensuring older adults and people with disabilities can remain in their homes.



## SECURING PUBLIC BENEFITS AND STABILITY

Over 35,000 families faced hunger and hardship when NYC fell out of compliance with state and federal processing requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and cash assistance. NYLAG, along with Legal Aid Society and Dechert, LLP, secured a ruling to end delays to these life-saving benefits. NYLAG also secured \$5.6 million in ongoing yearly public benefits for our neighbors.



## ADVOCATING FOR SURVIVORS' SAFETY AND SELF DETERMINATION

New Yorkers experiencing violence and abuse in their relationships need advocates who are sensitive to their experiences, their cultures, and the unique barriers and challenges they face in the legal system. NYLAG's trauma-informed, diverse team supported over 2,300 survivors of intimate partner violence, guiding them through their legal options to secure lives free from violence.



## SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO AN EDUCATION

The education rights of all children should be protected and valued, but for many NYC students with disabilities, they are often denied. NYLAG ensures that children with disabilities receive the educational support, services, and programs that they need to learn and are entitled to under the law.

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Sam was a 10-year-old boy who was diagnosed with nonverbal autism and communication delays. Unable to communicate his needs, he would damage property and self-harm to try to express himself. NYLAG stepped in and secured a placement for Sam at a school that could provide the kind of instruction he needed to learn to communicate. After a few months at the school, Sam said, “I love you,” to his mother for the first time.

JESSICA SELECKY | NYLAG DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION UNIT

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## BRINGING LEGAL SERVICES TO A NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR YOU

When we say we are here to serve New Yorkers, we mean it. Our innovative Mobile Legal Help Center van travels around the five boroughs and into 150+ communities that have been cut-off from legal services because of location, disability, isolation, and more.



## PROTECTING WORKERS AND CONSUMERS

In addition to helping over 4,000 victims of deceptive lending and debt collection practices, NYLAG assisted NYC taxi drivers in recovering from predatory taxi medallion loans that too often led to devastating financial ruin. With crucial pro bono support from Paul, Weiss LLP, NYLAG saved medallion owners \$260 million.



## HELPING UKRAINIAN REFUGEES TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES IN NYC

With an escalating humanitarian emergency following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NYLAG harnessed our years of experience serving immigrants from the former Soviet Union, mobilizing our language capacity, deep immigration expertise, and community partnerships to serve Ukrainian nationals with urgent immigration needs.

## DEMANDING CHANGE FROM UNJUST SYSTEMS

We bring lawsuits that correct institutional failures and protect the rights of thousands, including:

- ▶ Advocating on behalf of students whose educations were uprooted after the closure of ASA College, a fraudulent for-profit school.
- ▶ Stopping unlawful debt collection practices where 3,000+ New Yorkers' wages were garnished, and their bank accounts restrained.
- ▶ Continuing litigation on behalf of 3,000+ victims of a fraudulent process-serving agency and debt-collection law firm.
- ▶ Suing the Department of Homeland Security to obtain critical documents about surveillance of protests and to protect the free speech of immigrant protesters, after a protester was violently arrested by an ICE officer at a Black Lives Matter protest in NYC.



# TAKING THE TIME TO TRANSFORM LIVES

NYLAG engages skilled volunteers – retired and current attorneys, law graduates, students, and others – who broaden our reach and enable us to serve more New Yorkers in need of legal assistance.



2,300

PRO BONO ATTORNEYS AND VOLUNTEERS



91,000

HOURS DONATED



\$53.5M

VALUE OF TIME DONATED



A&O Shearman  
AIG Risk Management, Inc.  
Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP  
Apple Bank  
ArentFox Schiff LLP  
Arnold & Porter  
Ashurst LLP  
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Blank Rome LLP  
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Covington & Burling LLP  
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Crowell & Moring LLP  
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DLA Piper LLP (US)  
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Ingram Yuzek Gainen Carroll & Bertolotti  
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Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP  
Paul Hastings LLP

Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP  
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# THANK YOU FOR ENSURING FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In addition to the hundreds of individuals, law firms, and companies who contributed to ensure New Yorkers’ rights weren’t denied solely because they couldn’t afford an attorney, we’d like to thank the following organizations for their partnership and investment in our communities.

## FOUNDATION, NONPROFIT, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Altman Foundation  
America Works of New York, Inc.  
Anonymous  
Arab-American Family Support Center  
Borchard Foundation Center on Law & Aging  
Booth Ferris Foundation  
Butler Foundation

Cardinal McCloskey Community Services  
Capital One  
Center for Justice Innovation  
Center for New York City Neighborhoods  
City Relief  
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Day One  
Dorot  
Equal Justice America  
Equal Justice Works  
Fan Fox & Leslie R. Samuels Foundation  
Fedcap  
Footsteps  
Goodwill Industries of New York & New Jersey  
Henry & Lucy Moses Fund  
Henry Street Settlement  
Immigration Advice and Rights Centre  
Immigrant Justice Corps

Isaac H. Tuttle Foundation  
Jewish Community Center of Greater Coney Island  
John Jay College  
Justice Catalyst  
Leon Levy Foundation  
Long Island Community Foundation  
Marcy Gringlas & Joel Greenberg, Seed the Dream Foundation  
Nash Family Foundation  
New York Community Trust  
New York Immigration Coalition  
Research Foundation of CUNY  
Robin Hood  
Safe Horizon  
Sanctuary for Families  
St. John’s Law School  
UJA-Federation of New York  
Venable Foundation  
Weill Cornell Medicine (NYC Elder Abuse Center)  
Y.C. Ho/Helen and Michael Chiang Foundation  
Yale Law School

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS

### FEDERAL

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

### NEW YORK CITY

NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection/Office of Financial Empowerment  
NYC Department of Veterans Services  
NYC Health + Hospitals  
NYC Human Resources Administration  
NYC Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice/ NYC Mayor’s Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence  
NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs  
NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission

### NEW YORK STATE

IOLA Fund of New York  
NYS Attorney General  
NYS Department of State  
NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services

NYS Department of Health  
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

## COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER AND HOSPITAL PARTNERS

Blythedale Children’s Hospital  
CancerCare  
Community Care of Brooklyn  
Maimonides Medical Center  
Memorial Sloan Kettering  
MJHS Institute for Innovation  
Montefiore Medical Center  
Mt. Sinai Medical Legal Partnership  
NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital  
NYU Langone Hospitals  
One Brooklyn Health System  
Westchester Medical Center





# FINANCIALS: YOUR DOLLAR AT WORK

## 2023, UNAUDITED

### REVENUES

Government	\$	35,823,295
Foundations	\$	4,411,026
Hospitals and Corporations	\$	4,246,177
Individuals	\$	392,869
Special Events	\$	1,511,180
Court Awarded & Earned Fees	\$	511,571
Miscellaneous	\$	72,287
<b>TOTAL REVENUES BEFORE IN-KIND LEGAL SERVICES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>46,968,405</b>
In-Kind	\$	39,301,848
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>86,270,253</b>

# EXPENSES SUB-TOTALS AND TOTALS:

### EXPENSES BEFORE IN-KIND LEGAL SERVICES:

\$46,916,130

### IN-KIND

\$39,301,848

### TOTAL EXPENSES

\$86,217,978

### PROGRAM SERVICES

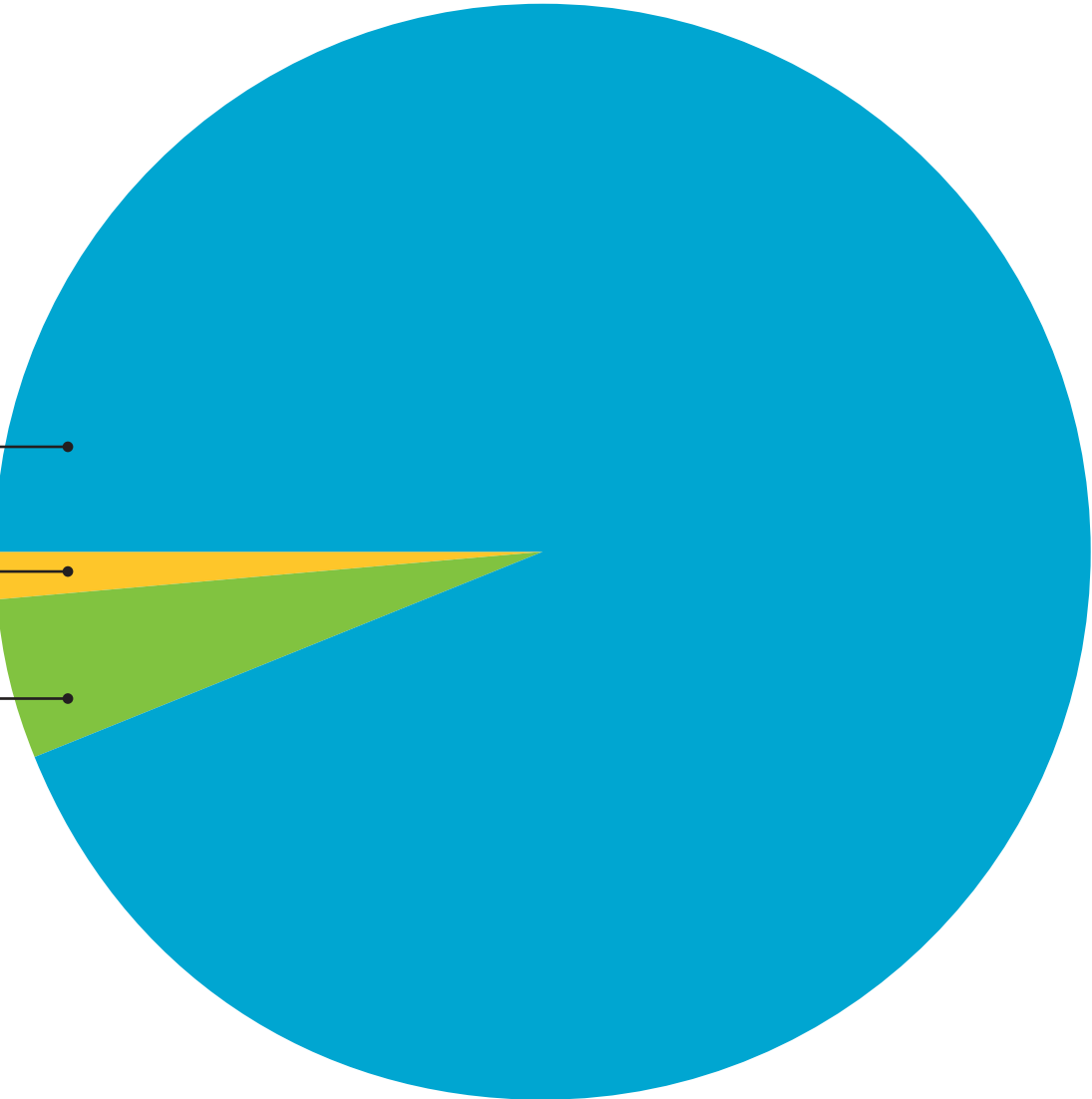
\$81,057,204

### FUNDRAISING

\$938,323

### MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

\$4,222,452





# 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-now](https://nylag.org/donate-now)

## BY CHECK

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

New York Legal Assistance Group  
C/O Development Department  
100 Pearl Street, 19th Floor  
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).

## GET INVOLVED

To learn about pro bono, internship, and volunteer opportunities, visit [nylag.org/pro-bono](https://nylag.org/pro-bono).



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My humble and sincere thanks for everything this wonderful organization and your entire team does to assist people like myself and others who are in need.

**NYLAG CLIENT AND MEDICAID RECIPIENT**

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**“IT WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME  
TO TRY TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE SYSTEM  
WITHOUT YOUR ASSISTANCE. I CANNOT  
EXPRESS HOW THANKFUL I AM!”**

**NYLAG CLIENT**



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**NYLAG**  
New York Legal Assistance Group