



BUILDING
LIVES,
REBUILDING
SYSTEMS

LEGAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH JUSTICE

2 0 2 1
ANNUAL
REPORT

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If we've learned anything from this health crisis, it's that our communities need health justice now. Over the last 12 months, we've seen how COVID-19 has exposed the fragility, inefficiency, and inequities of our health and social systems. Now, more than ever, Legal Council is committed to rebuilding our systems so that they work well for everyone, regardless of race, income level, or background.

Despite the challenges created by the pandemic, our communities still saw great advances towards health justice:

- Immigrant families no longer have to avoid life-saving care and benefits like Medicaid out of fear of risking their immigration status, after the nationwide public charge rule was vacated following our successful two-year battle in the courts.
- Illinois ended criminal penalties for those living with HIV. For decades, people living with HIV faced the threat of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration even if they did not transmit HIV to another person. Legal Council along with other advocates successfully pushed for its repeal.

- Chicagoans who are homeless can access free advocacy from Legal Council more easily through a new partnership with the Harold Washington Library Center. Clients served in this partnership access life-changing income through Social Security, which helps them to manage their health.

- Nearly 1,600 Illinoisans and their families received life-changing care and services from Legal Council in 2021, including access to affordable health coverage and prescriptions, public benefits, housing assistance, and special education services.

Thank you for your support in connecting our communities to the resources we all need in order to reach our full potential. Because of your support, Legal Council will continue our work to build better lives, and rebuild our systems.

Sincerely,

Tom Yates
Executive Director



FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

More than thirty years since Legal Council's founding during the height of the HIV epidemic, the health justice movement is still going strong. The pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges our communities face, and Legal Council remains committed to ensuring our clients and all Illinoisans can live healthy lives. We reflect on the victories made this past year while looking to the future and beyond COVID-19.

With that in mind, our priorities in the upcoming years include:

- Improving the health and well-being of Illinoisans and their families by dismantling systemic barriers that keep people from being healthy.
- Expanding our free educational and legal services to Chicago communities that have long been ignored and intentionally blocked from our health, social, and financial systems.
- Defending and protecting access to affordable health coverage and comprehensive public benefits.

- Protecting access to quality education for all students in Illinois.

Our supporters make this work possible. The road ahead is long, but so long as there is health inequity, Legal Council will be there to fight alongside our communities. Thank you for joining us in this movement and for investing in our clients and communities.

Sincerely,

Philip Tortorich
Board President



OUR MISSION

Legal Council for Health Justice uses the power of the law to secure dignity, opportunity, and well-being for people facing barriers due to illness or disability.

OUR VISION

Everyone deserves a fair chance to lead a life of dignity and opportunity.

DECRIMINALIZING HIV IN ILLINOIS

After years of advocacy, Illinois voted to end the state's longstanding and dangerous Criminal Transmission of HIV Law, which criminalized and further stigmatized people living with HIV for decades. The tireless effort and leadership of the Illinois HIV Action Alliance, a coalition for which Legal Council is a leading member, made this change possible.

Previously, people living with HIV in Illinois faced the threat of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration even if they did not transmit HIV to another person. A person could be prosecuted if they were aware of their positive HIV status and engaged in condomless intercourse without being able to later prove that they disclosed their status to their partner. On top of prosecution, often people living with HIV faced longer sentences simply because of their HIV status.

The repeal of this ineffective and antiquated law is a huge victory for people living with HIV in Illinois, particularly for people of color and for LGBTQ people—communities the law disproportionately targeted. With the end of criminal penalties for those living with HIV also comes the end of added stigma that harmed public health by disincentivizing people from being tested for HIV.

Legal Council is encouraged by the progress Illinois has made in ensuring justice for people living with HIV, and by the continued momentum in pushing for the changes we still must make to achieve health justice for all.

VICTORY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



All Chicago Public Schools (CPS) students with disabilities will now have access to free breakfast and lunch thanks to a lawsuit filed in August 2019 by Legal Council and Disability Rights Advocates against CPS. The lawsuit challenged CPS's policy of denying free breakfast and lunch to CPS students whose disabilities required them to attend non-CPS schools.

In June 2021, a judge preliminarily approved a settlement in the case. Under the settlement terms, CPS updated its policy so that all students will receive free breakfast and lunch, or will be reimbursed with a stipend by the school.

"Not only will free breakfast and lunch (or reimbursement for the meals) be assured going forward, CPS will reimburse nearly 400 families affected by this problem over the last three years," said Julie Brennan, Legal Council's Children & Families Program Director.

The named plaintiff in the class action—the guardian of a student with several disabilities who has been unable to access CPS's nutritional programs ever since CPS transferred her to a non-public school—filed the case in order to end the discriminatory policy and recoup the money that she and other parents have been forced to spend on meals.

PROTECTING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Immigrant families in Illinois no longer have to choose between their immigration status and their health, now that the 2019 public charge rule has been vacated. The Trump public charge rule, which effectively denied millions of immigrant families health care and economic support, ended this year when the Biden-Harris Administration determined it would no longer defend the 2019 rule following a final decision from the U.S. District Court in Chicago that found that the 2019 rule was illegally issued.

Legal Council, and co-counsel at the Shriver Center on Poverty Law, and Sidley Austin LLP, filed the lawsuit in 2019 on behalf of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) to block implementation of the Trump Administration's public charge rule. The case was brought with co-plaintiff Cook County, Illinois, represented by the Cook County State's Attorney and Goldberg Kohn.

The 2019 public charge rule has had a massive "chilling effect" on immigrant communities across the nation since 2018. Immigrant families who were eligible for public benefits—including those who would not be subject to the public charge rule—didn't enroll in those programs for fear of jeopardizing their immigration status. This rule has had an especially harmful impact over the last two years, as many families declined health coverage and care during a pandemic.

"Wise public policy should encourage all people to access public services, not engender confusion and fear," said Legal Council's Carrie Chapman. "Trump's rule has had devastating effects on public health in communities of color and may continue to cast a shadow over immigrant communities for years to come. We welcome the Biden-Harris Administration's steps and encourage the Administration to continue to work as diligently to mitigate these harms as the previous administration worked to create them."

Although this cruel and dangerous rule is no longer in effect, the work continues. We recognize it will take time and intention to rebuild trust with immigrant communities so that they feel safe and empowered to enroll in the public benefits they need to keep their families healthy. Moreover, the Texas Attorney General's Office and other state Attorneys General are seeking to bring the 2019 rule back, arguing that the Biden administration cannot change the rule. The case is pending in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.



LAWYERS AT THE LIBRARY

Imagine a community hub open to all—where anyone of any background can access the internet, resources and information, water fountains, clean bathrooms, a warm place in the winter, or shelter from the rain, all for free. If you're imagining a public library, you're exactly right.

Libraries are essential spaces in our communities where anyone can enter without paying a fee, and where everyone is entitled to the same services. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, libraries have become even more important as so many other community spaces have shut down or gone remote. And for Illinoisans who are homeless, libraries have long been safe havens both before and during the pandemic.

Now, what if the community hub you imagined also offers free services from advocates who can help you manage your health, access shelter or housing, and get a stable income? Thanks to a new partnership with the Harold Washington Library Center, our clients in Chicago don't need to imagine.

Surveys of Harold Washington Library patrons show close to 75% of library visitors on any given day are homeless.

This year our advocates launched a new partnership with the Harold Washington Library in downtown Chicago, joining our partners at Thresholds and Heartland Alliance in providing resources and services to people who are homeless.

In a normal day our advocates spend three hours at the library, meeting with 15 individuals per day who need help getting a stable income, finding affordable care, and overcoming other barriers to managing their health. By meeting people where they are, these partnerships remove one less hoop for people to jump through in order to get care.

"The launch of this incredible partnership couldn't have been more timely," said Kate Miller, Senior Legal Advocate at Legal Council and the lead on our Harold Washington Library Center partnership. "Much of the work we do connecting people to life-changing benefits and income involves a lot of in-person meetings. If you don't have access to the internet or a phone, this can be daunting. Not only that but due to COVID-19 protocols, walking into an office to apply for benefits, health care, or housing isn't possible or is restricted. Meeting in the library helps to reduce the number of steps our clients take to get the care and support they need."

This new partnership follows a national effort to place social workers in libraries where services are easier to access in communities. The Harold Washington Library Center offers services from a number of organizations along with Legal Council's assistance, including: Chicago Loop Alliance, Heartland Alliance, Inner Voice, Streetplus, Thresholds, and the Night Ministry, an organization Legal Council introduced to the library. Additionally, social workers are available in a number of other public libraries in the city and suburbs.

Q&A: HEALTH JUSTICE ON THE SOUTH SIDE

This year, Legal Council saw advancements in its new community-led partnership with residents of Chicago's far south side and Christian Community Health Center. Legal Council's new community

organizer Ben Handy and Powell Fellow Nooreen Reza discuss our expansion of free legal aid to south side communities below.

Q: Can you share some background about this new partnership with Christian Community Health Center?

Ben Handy: Our new medical-legal partnership with Christian Community Health Center (CCHC) will provide free legal services to an area covering nine zip codes along the far south side and near south suburbs with the goal of improving health and wellness to people with limited access to attorney assistance.

Nooreen Reza: Many people go without access to legal aid in south side and suburban neighborhoods; we want to make an intervention in the cycles of poverty and marginalization that are exacerbated by lack of access to legal services. At the same time, through our partnership, we aim to ensure that we do so in a way that is respectful of and responsive to community needs.

Q: This new partnership has been described as a "community-driven partnership." Can you explain what a community-driven partnership looks like and why Legal Council chose to implement this model?

Ben: For too long, the legal sector has paid only minimal lip service to community outreach, rather than sharing legal power in authentic ways. We've taken a different approach by directly engaging with local residents to gain insights that will help us tailor our free legal services to meet actual needs on the ground. We began building a network of 450 healthcare providers and community organizations to assess the needs and resources available to far south sides and near south suburbanites. In addition to engaging with community residents to identify needs, our staff will work alongside medical and social service providers at CCHC, and meet with patients in the same building where they receive care.

Nooreen: Community-driven means that the voices of people living in the communities served by CCHC will take a central role in directing how the medical-legal partnership is structured and how it will function in the long term. We hope to have community members take leadership roles in the governance of the partnership, for example. We believe that residents have a great deal of expertise that comes from lived experience, and as a legal aid provider we should honor and elevate their expertise in our work.

Q: How is this partnership different from existing legal aid practices or partnerships?

Nooreen: Many traditional legal aid services, while still providing essential and valuable services to the communities they serve, do not often make efforts at an organizational level to include their clients as collaborators in their advocacy. This partnership is different in that respect. For instance, we are working with an evaluator to create a series of focus groups and community surveys aiming to give community members and stakeholders a critical perspective in shaping the design of the partnership.

Q: What problems or barriers are prevalent in these communities?

Nooreen: Our community organizer, Ben Handy, did amazing research into prevalent health issues in the communities to provide us with baseline knowledge before learning more from members themselves through our surveys and focus groups. Through that research, he found that residents who participated in community health needs assessments run by hospital systems often ranked chronic illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, and mental health as primary concerns. Residents also identified that increased economic opportunity and access to resources like healthy food would help to combat these problems, showing that broader systemic inequality is well-recognized as having a negative impact on health in the community.



STRENGTHENING SPECIAL EDUCATION LAWS

Legal Council's special education advocates advanced the legal rights and protections available for Chicago and Illinois students this year. In collaboration with partner organizations and elected officials, Legal Council helped pass three important special education bills:

- **House Bill 2748:** This bill applies to students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) who turned 22 and "aged out" of their programs while their schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of those students whose schools were closed to in-person instruction for at least three months now have the option to return to their schools for a final year of transition services and to develop a plan for moving forward. This final year of education is absolutely necessary for transition into adult life, and we are glad to see the state recognize this need.

- **House Bill 2425:** This bill extends the statute of limitations for students affected by Chicago Public Schools' illegal policies in the 2016-2018 school years to file state complaints against the school district. Many

students entitled to special education plans had their services illegally delayed or denied in this period, and students and their families now have until September 2022 to file complaints for further educational services.

- **House Bill 3950:** This bill requires all students with IEPs to be informed about their districts' Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs at all of their IEP meetings beginning at age 14 and a half. The IEP team, including the student and their parents/guardians, will determine whether a particular CTE program would be valuable in helping them achieve their goals. This bill ensures that all students are connected to meaningful and appropriate opportunities for their development. HB3950 also requires community colleges to develop programming for students with disabilities to participate in dual credit or non-credit courses. Students whose academic skills would prevent them from being admitted to any courses currently offered by the community college will now have the ability to share in the college experience.

HOME AND HOSPITAL INSTRUCTION PROGRAM

When a Chicago Public Schools (CPS) student is unable to attend school as a result of a medical condition, the district offers continuous instruction through its Home and Hospital Instruction Program (HHIP). The program's intent is to ensure students master the same learning material as their classmates and continue to progress on their special education goals if they have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

However, this year Legal Council joined with Equip for Equality and Legal Aid Chicago to file a complaint to the Illinois State Board of Education about CPS's illegal administration of this program. Following this advocacy, the Illinois State Board of Education conducted a thorough investigation of these allegations and found that CPS violated the rights of students with disabilities. Violations included:

- 1) CPS arbitrarily limited the number of hours of instruction provided to students with disabilities unable to attend school to a maximum of five hours per week.

- 2) CPS prevented the IEP team from deciding the unique nature of services students with disabilities in the HHIP received.

- 3) CPS failed to provide any related services to students with disabilities in the HHIP.

- 4) CPS failed to make up missed home instruction hours due to student illness or teacher cancellations.

The State Board ordered the district to take corrective actions to ensure that the IEP team considers the students' need for home instruction; to provide necessary related services in the homebound setting as determined by the IEP team; and to provide services that were missed due to the illness of the student or absence of the teacher. Additionally, CPS must provide training to special education administrators, school homebound coordinators, and school nurses about these requirements and to revise the necessary guidance about HHIP.

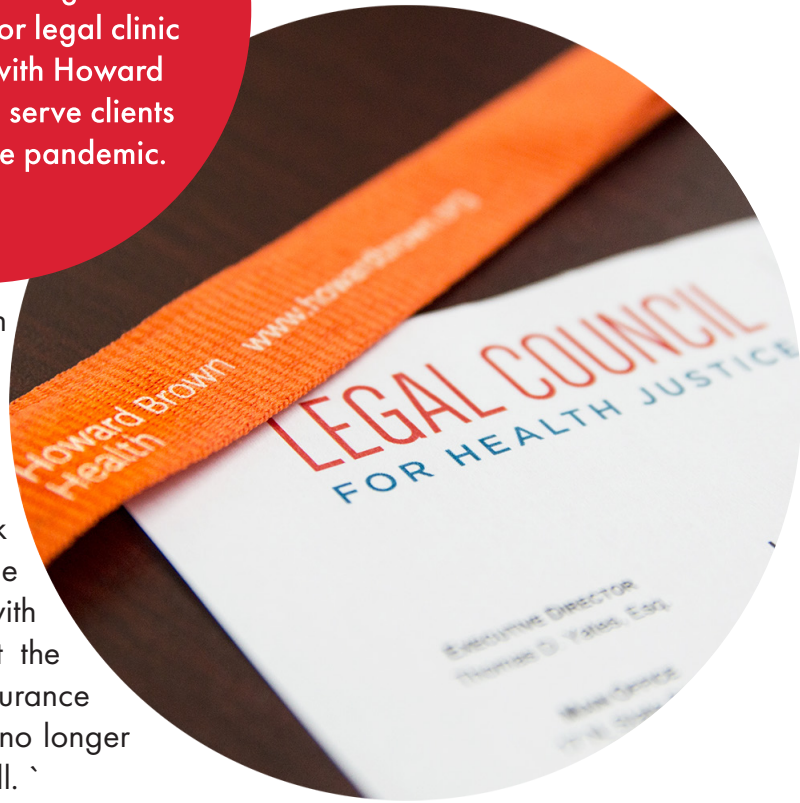


PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

This year, Legal Council convened a behavioral health staff working group. This group works to advance Legal Council as a leading advocate for reimagined, fully-funded, trauma-informed behavioral health and mental health services for Illinoisans, particularly those living in poverty. Group members provide learning and training opportunities related to behavioral and mental health to staff; support legislation and policy solutions for improving care and access to those services; and collaborate with other groups working to enhance trauma-informed behavioral and mental health services to our communities.



Never say our advocates aren't creative! In the fall of 2020, staff on Legal Council's HIV Program hosted an outdoor legal clinic in partnership with Howard Brown Health to serve clients safely during the pandemic.



Health Justice for Sean

Sean, a young adult who was diagnosed with AIDS and hospitalized for two weeks, called Legal Council, terrified of medical debt. Because he works part time, his income makes him eligible for Medicaid. He was thrilled to hear that Medicaid has a three-month look-back period that makes his hospitalization eligible to be covered by the program. We assisted with his Medicaid application and requested that the hospitalization costs be covered. He will have insurance and access to affordable medications, and he no longer needs to worry about the \$200,000 hospital bill.

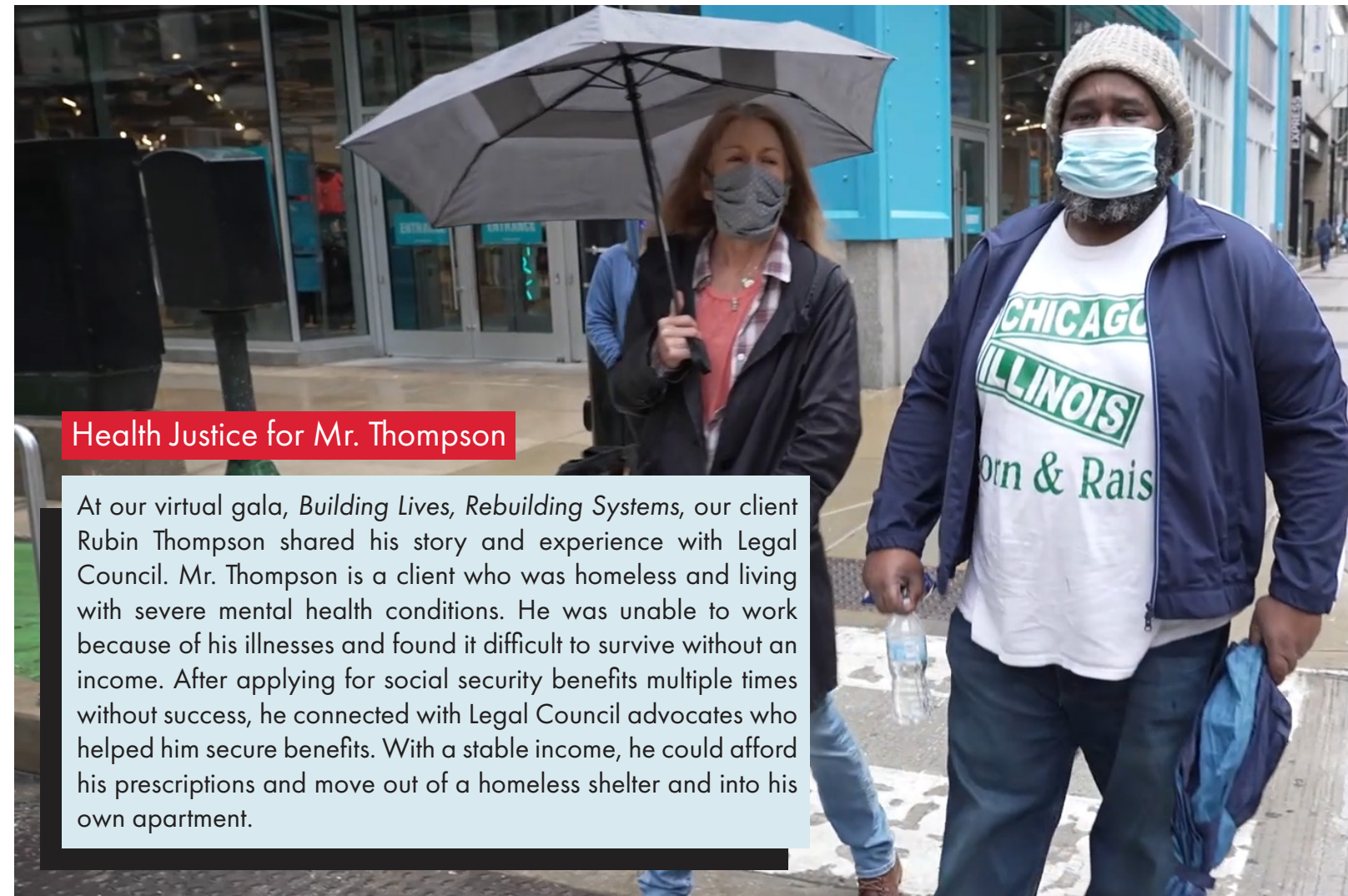
Health Justice for Lydia

Lydia, who was born with a developmental delay, received early intervention speech therapy to help her learn and grow. But when Lydia transitioned into preschool, these services were discontinued.

Lydia's mom connected with Legal Council and collaborated with our legal team to advocate for Lydia's right to the support she needed to be successful inside and outside of the classroom. Using tools and resources provided by Legal Council, Lydia's mom not only successfully advocated for her daughter's speech therapy to continue, but also secured her right to Spanish translations of Lydia's special education plan.

Along with connecting families to life-changing care and services, advocates in our Children & Families Program connect parents and guardians to the tools they need to be strong advocates for their children.

Advocates in our Homeless Program returned to in-person services at shelters on the west and south sides, as well as outreach to encampments across the city.



Health Justice for Mr. Thompson

At our virtual gala, *Building Lives, Rebuilding Systems*, our client Rubin Thompson shared his story and experience with Legal Council. Mr. Thompson is a client who was homeless and living with severe mental health conditions. He was unable to work because of his illnesses and found it difficult to survive without an income. After applying for social security benefits multiple times without success, he connected with Legal Council advocates who helped him secure benefits. With a stable income, he could afford his prescriptions and move out of a homeless shelter and into his own apartment.

CLIENT AND CASE PROFILES

1,533

Individual clients

2,092

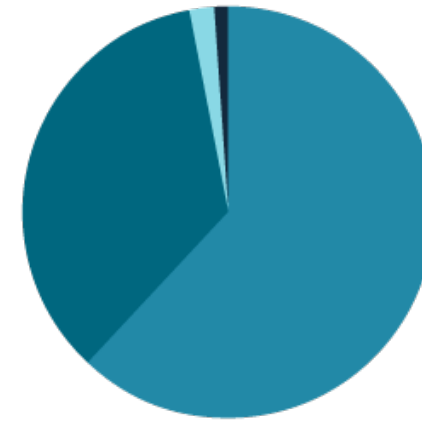
Cases

2,083

People trained in health justice issues

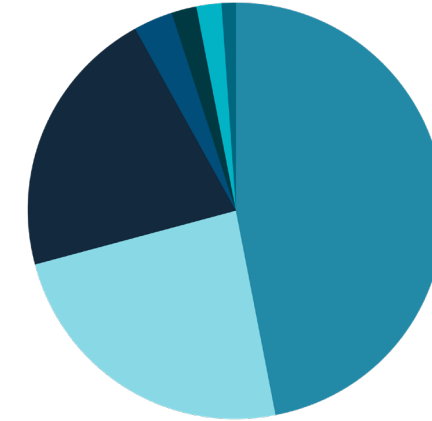
10,000

People represented in 4 class action cases



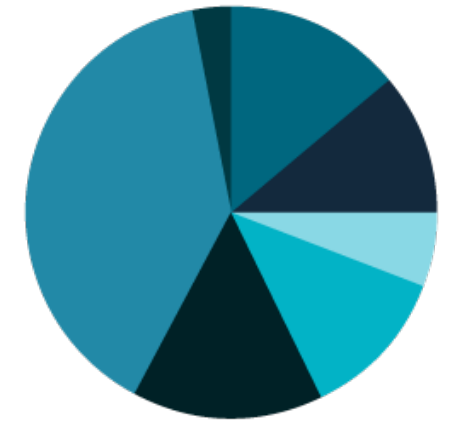
Gender

- Male: 62%
- Female: 33%
- Trans and non-binary identities: 4%
- Unknown: <1%



Race

- African-American: 47%
- White: 24%
- Hispanic: 21%
- Asian: 2%
- Native: <1%
- More than one race: 2%
- Unknown: 3%



Age

- Under 18: 15%
- 18 - 24: 5%
- 25 - 34: 15%
- 35 - 44: 16%
- 45 - 64: 43%
- 65+: 6%

Populations Served



Has a disability:
1,264



Living with HIV:
608



Homeless:
301



Children:
209

Geography



- Chicago South Side: 30%
- Chicago North Side: 27%
- Chicago West Side: 22%
- Outside of Chicago: 21%



FUNDING & ADMINISTRATION

Revenues and other support

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
Non-government grants and contributions (including individuals)	\$570,513	\$851,081	\$1,421,594
Government grants	\$940,843	—	\$940,843
PPP loan grant	\$445,458	—	\$445,458
Program service fees	\$440,177	\$80,000	\$520,177
Special events	\$69,370	—	\$69,370
Donated legal services	\$17,164	—	\$17,164
Interest income	\$1,675	—	\$1,675
Net assets released from restrictions due to satisfaction of program restrictions	\$924,130	(\$924,130)	—
Total Revenue	\$3,409,330	\$6,951	\$3,416,281

Expenses

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Total
Program services	\$2,442,444	—	\$2,442,444
Administrative	\$343,148	—	\$343,148
Fundraising	\$373,889	—	\$373,889
Total Expenses	\$3,159,481	—	\$3,159,481
Change in net assets	\$249,849	\$6,951	\$256,800
Net assets, beginning of year	\$986,983	\$675,911	\$1,662,894
Net assets, end of year	\$1,236,832	\$682,862	\$1,919,694

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

Chicago Department of Family and Support Services
Health Resources & Services Administration (Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, Parts A & B)
Illinois Department of Human Services (Access to Justice)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

FOUNDATION AND MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNER SUPPORT

\$100,000+

Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

\$50,000 - \$99,999

American Bar Association
Healthy Communities Foundations
Howard Brown Health
Michael Reese Health Trust
National Health Law Program
Polk Bros. Foundation
RRF in Aging Foundation
The Reva and David Logan Foundation

\$30,000 - \$49,999

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Irving Harris Foundation
The Chicago Community Trust

\$20,000 - \$29,999

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\$10,000 - \$19,999

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\$5,000 - \$9,999

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Less than \$5,000

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