



JUSTICE IN ACTION

LEGAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH JUSTICE

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ANNUAL
REPORT

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We faced new challenges throughout 2022 in providing legal aid to clients across Chicago in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has upended expectations in access to justice; as a result, our work has shifted in ways that seem unimaginable in pre-COVID times. In early 2022, our staff returned to in-person work and, whenever possible, work on-site with medical and community partners across Chicago. And, our staff has grown as we have expanded our services to meet new needs. Even with changing circumstances, we remain committed to serving individuals and families facing barriers due to chronic, disabling, and stigmatizing health and social conditions.

As 2022 closes and we reflect on the past year, we are happy to share our successes that have positively impacted the communities we serve:

- Our staff lobbied for and Illinois passed a Medicaid omnibus bill that increases access to quality health services, preserves existing health care coverage, and will create a more equitable health care system in Illinois.
- We are establishing a Trans law project, which aims to provide holistic legal services for low-income transgender clients seeking gender-affirming medical care with partners including

Howard Brown Health and Christian Community Health Center.

- We expanded legal services to people experiencing homelessness to assist them in obtaining housing, and access to health care treatment.
- We provided free legal services to over 1,500 people across Illinois--and their families--to secure their rights to housing support, food assistance, and health care.

Thank you for being our partners in this work, and for your commitment to health justice. Together, we are working towards a future in which all individuals have access to fair pay, a quality education, stable housing, and health care. A future in which no one is denied the opportunity to live the healthiest life possible.

Sincerely,

Tom Yates (he/him)
Executive Director



FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

In September of 2022, the Board of Directors approved a new Strategic Plan. This plan, accessible on our website, is based on inquiry and discussion with Legal Council's Board and staff, and informed by insights and opinions from people outside Legal Council. The Strategic Plan restates our vision, mission and values and sets forth five pillars to guide Legal Council's future growth.

- Pillar One reiterates our commitment to our Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) work by building in tools to obtain and rely on feedback from our MLP communities in guiding our work.
- Pillar Two reflects our ongoing work to dismantle systemic barriers to health equity through advocacy.
- Pillar Three reflects our renewed commitment to publicize our accomplishments and expertise to maximize our impact.
- Pillar Four addresses the need for a resilient and sustainable organizational culture and structure.

- Finally, Pillar Five addresses our need for flexible financial resources to achieve our mission.

Interwoven through each of these pillars are goals to attract and retain diverse staff, volunteers, and Board members; and to partner with diverse communities and stakeholders to shape and achieve their goals.

Our work, and these ambitious goals, would not be possible without the support of individuals and communities like you. With your partnership, we are energized to continue the fight for health equity.

Sincerely,

Bryce Cooper (he/him)
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.

MAKING MEDICAID MORE EQUITABLE

In June of this year, Governor J.B. Pritzker signed House Bill 4343, a Medicaid omnibus bill that increases access to quality health care services, preserves existing health care coverage, and will create a more equitable health care system in Illinois. Legal Council is proud to have advocated alongside our partners and our legislative champions in the House and Senate to pass this landmark piece of legislation.

HB4343 eases the burden on older adults and people with disabilities with Medicaid insurance by: reforming estate recovery and ending mandatory liens, expanding medical coverage to age 42+ regardless of immigration status, prioritizing Medicaid continuous eligibility, and requiring ex parte redeterminations for Medicaid's Aged, Blind and Disabled (AABD) participants.

Further, the bill also has the potential to save older adults and people with disabilities hundreds of dollars in out-of-pocket Medicare costs through streamlining applications for Medicare Savings Programs (MSPs), which pay those costs, allowing



individuals to use the money they save for other critical expenses, like housing and food.

We are so grateful to our partners in advocacy for their tireless work on this bill. We are also deeply encouraged by the commitment Illinois has made through HB4343 toward making medical coverage less burdensome and more equitable for older adults, people with disabilities, people of color, and immigrants. These changes help us all, as our communal health is intertwined.

FIGHTING FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

A FINAL PUBLIC CHARGE RULE

Legal Council works in partnership on all the barriers we tackle, and we are proud to be a founding member of Protecting Immigrant Families – Illinois (PIF-IL), a statewide coalition of advocates, service providers, and community organizations working to defend access to basic essential needs programs for all. The Protecting Immigrant Families-Illinois (PIF-IL) coalition was created in the Spring of 2018 specifically to resist the harmful changes to the public charge for inadmissibility rule.

To achieve justice for all, our coalition supports Congress repealing the statutory provision governing public charge. But, short of congressional action, our coalition welcomes the final rule on public charge

that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published last fall. Public charge is a factor in federal immigration law governing whether immigrants will be barred from entering the United States, including obtaining lawful permanent resident status (also known as getting a “green card”). This new Biden rule added critical protections to ensure immigrant families are not penalized for accessing government services, such as food assistance, health coverage and housing programs, that they are eligible for under federal law. The final rule codifies that immigration officials can only consider the following services in making a public charge determination:

- Long-term institutional facility-based care paid for by the government; and

- Public cash assistance for income maintenance such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and state, local and tribal cash assistance.

By specifying the few, limited programs that may be considered, the new public charge rule helps address the fears of immigration consequences and chilling effects caused by the Trump administration’s confusing, punitive and discriminatory public charge rule. The original rule had a devastating effect on immigrants across the country, stoking fears that led tens of thousands of immigrants to decline food assistance, health care, and housing programs designed to protect families and strengthen communities regardless of an actual impact on their immigration status. The district court in Chicago

IMMIGRANT HEALTH ACADEMY

Last year, Legal Council joined with the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) to launch The Immigrant Health Academy, a two-year project that aims to improve immigrants’ access to healthcare by educating immigrant leaders in the Chicago suburbs about their rights and the health care system.

As part of the launch, ICIRR and the Center for Community Health Equity at DePaul University released a report: Overcoming Barriers and Empowering Communities: The Immigrant Health Academy. We know that achieving health equity requires focused and ongoing societal efforts to address historical and ongoing injustices, and dismantle the institutional barriers that result. The report outlines the health disparities and access barriers immigrants face in obtaining healthcare in the Chicagoland region and articulates the goals of the Academy.



invalidated the Trump Administration’s rule in a case brought by Legal Council on behalf of ICIRR, in collaboration with our co-counsel the Shriver Center, Sidley Austin, and co-plaintiff the Office of the Cook County State’s Attorney represented by Goldberg Kohn. The Biden Administration rescinded the Trump rule in March 2021, and the Biden rule is scheduled to go into effect on December 23, 2022.

Legal Council and our partners recognize that anti-immigrant forces will continue to fight for their agenda and that they will challenge this new rule as part of that effort. PIF-IL remains committed to defending and protecting immigrant rights in accessing benefit services for themselves and their families. Everyone deserves access to health care.



We collaborated with this initiative to provide legal technical assistance on healthcare rights and to share power by transferring skills in the lawyer’s toolkit to approachable information that communities can use directly on their own behalf.

This one-of-a-kind pilot project is rooted in community empowerment and trains and educate leaders in understanding their healthcare rights as immigrants. The Academy aligns with ICIRR’s long-term goal of ensuring that everyone has access to quality and affordable healthcare coverage and healthcare systems regardless of their immigration or health insurance status. Legal Council is proud to be a partner organization to ICIRR and we remain steadfast in the same goal of improving access to healthcare for all.

AIDS LEGAL COUNCIL

TRANS LAW PROJECT

Gender-affirming healthcare, such as hormone therapy and surgery, is a life or death issue for transgender people. Without such care, transgender people (particularly transgender people of color) are at markedly higher risk for negative health outcomes, poverty, suicide, violence, and discrimination. Yet, in the United States, transgender people face significant barriers to obtaining gender affirming care.

Low-income transgender patients must navigate a complex and ever-changing array of health insurance policies to obtain coverage for surgery, while simultaneously attempting to update their name and gender marker on identification documents and traversing barriers to accessing public benefits. Without comprehensive legal assistance across these issues, transgender clients are barred from lifesaving medical care and full civic participation.

This fall, Legal Council for Health Justice expanded our partnership with Howard Brown Health (HBH) by bringing on Milo Vieland (he/him), an Equal Justice Works Fellow sponsored by McDermott Will & Emery LLP, to run our Trans law project. The project aims to provide holistic legal services for low-income transgender clients seeking gender-affirming medical care. We sat down with Milo to hear more about the project and his goals for the duration of his fellowship.



Q&A WITH MILO VIELAND

You were awarded an Equal Justice Works Fellowship; can you talk a little more about the Fellowship and the focus of your specific project?

Definitely, so Equal Justice Works Fellowships allow new attorneys to develop public interest legal projects and then work at a host organization to carry out the project for two years. My project will focus on addressing health insurance denials for transition-related medical care, will offer holistic public benefits assistance for trans clients, and will provide assistance with name and gender marker changes on vital records. The project as a whole is really about healthcare access for trans clients while also recognizing the importance of broader economic security for that population.

What goals do you have for the Howard Brown Health-LCHJ MLP (specifically regarding the trans health initiative)?

First and foremost, to serve individual clients and provide comprehensive legal services. But also, to use the project as a platform to gather information about client experiences and trans health access issues occurring in Illinois. My hope is through gathering that information, we will be able to identify and address legal advocacy issues and do impact work to create structural change, as well as better tailor individual services.

What are you most excited for regarding your project?

I was a medical case manager for several years prior to law school so I'm really excited to get to work directly with clients again. I'm also excited about the trans health landscape in Illinois. There has been a lot of positive change in the last few years, but there is definitely still a lot of work to do. Additionally, I'm excited to do this project at Legal Council. We have an amazing and supportive team with knowledgeable attorneys on all of the topics my project specifically focuses on. I'm just happy to be back working with clients and getting the opportunity to learn new things.



Milo Vieland, Staff Attorney and Equal Justice Works (EJW) fellow, joined Legal Council in the fall of 2022.

Our HIV/AIDS Program, or the AIDS Legal Council (ALC), was established at the height of the AIDS epidemic in 1987. For over 30 years the program has provided free legal services to low-income Illinoisans living with or at-risk for HIV infection. The HIV/AIDS program provides services through the MLP, or Medical-Legal Partnership, model, and currently partners with Christian Community Health Center, Cook County Health's CORE Center, Howard Brown Health, the Michael Reese HIV Program at UI Health, and TPAN.

Attorneys and legal advocates in our HIV/AIDS program provide legal assistance and advocacy most frequently in cases where HIV status is the cause of legal problems. These might be issues of discrimination, insurance disputes, return-to-work questions, confidentiality, and assistance with applying for public benefits. In line with data on current infections, Legal Council reads the phrase "at risk of HIV infection" broadly and thus are able to serve any potential patient referred to us by one of our program partners. For example, our HIV/AIDS program recently expanded services to transgender patients, starting with patients served at Howard Brown Health, one of our MLP partners.

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Legal Council for Health Justice has been in partnership with Christian Community Health Center (CCHC) since 2019, seeking to expand our ability to provide legal services on Chicago’s far south side. After a delay due to the pandemic, we are now providing free legal services to CCHC patients. A major goal of this partnership has been to reimagine the traditional image of what a Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) looks like, specifically by inviting members of the community served by CCHC to be a guiding force in the partnership’s success. To that end, LCHJ and CCHC have convened a Community Council to advance quality health, mutual justice, and community well-being on the south side and south suburbs of Chicago.

Legal Council’s goal with the Community Council is to ensure our work is accountable to the communities of color impacted by HIV/AIDS that we serve. The Council consists of patients, clients, and community stakeholders who receive services at CCHC, live in the service area (south and far south side of Chicago), and have a stake in the outcome and well-being of the communities served by CCHC.

In addition to working on advocacy, building partnerships, and working on philanthropy, the Community Council will act as an advisor and guiding community voice to the CCHC MLP. The Council will weigh in on the legal services we provide and drive change from the ground up, utilizing organizing and advocacy to create a just, healthy, and sustainable way of living.



Benjamin Handy (he/him), Community Organizer

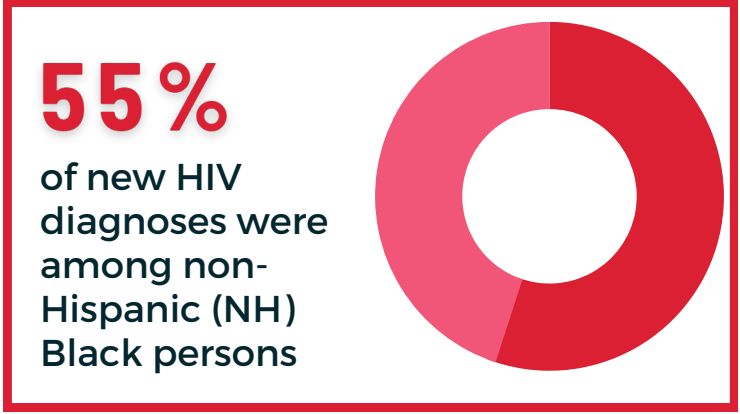
The Community Council first convened in the Spring with three members. “Our new Community Council is off to a great start!” said Legal Council’s Ben Handy, who works with the council. “We’re organizing a Town Hall Meeting aimed at engaging young people in frank conversations about what they’d like to see in a healthy, just and prosperous Southland. The Council sees this as the first step in building a coalition of youth that will begin to create civic solutions to the challenges they face in their neighborhoods. It’s exciting to see new ideas take hold. The Council wants to be a catalyst for positive change in the areas served by CCHC. There are big things on the horizon for our MLP that promise to improve the lives and unlock the potential of many South Siders.”



Members of our AIDS Legal Council (ALC) team.

CDPH HIV/STI SURVEILLANCE REPORT

In September, the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) issued their most recent HIV/STI Surveillance Report, detailing HIV and STI trends within the city. While the city reports the lowest number of new HIV diagnoses since 1987, an undeniably positive fact, the report also details the persistent inequities that leave marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by HIV. Legal Council believes that engaging intensively with Black and Latinx communities on Chicago’s West and South Sides is critical to combating these inequities, community disinvestment, and institutional racism.



Over the past year, Legal Council has partnered with the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC) and with the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) and Department of Health (DHS) to support those living with HIV on their way to **undetectability**. Legal Council and our aforementioned partners have worked to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the impact of a data-sharing program that facilitates Illinois’ ability to understand who in the positive community is not virally suppressed, and to direct focus and resources to these individuals.

Kenya Garrett-Burnett (she/her), Legal Director of our HIV/AIDS program says, “Getting to zero new HIV transmissions by 2030 is within reach when we all work together to provide the community with every available resource to manage their health. Our efforts with AFC and HFS will hopefully play a role in moving us towards that end.”



UNDETECTABILITY

Individuals living with HIV become undetectable when the amount of HIV present in their blood—the HIV viral load—has become too low to measure, achieved through taking HIV medication. Being undetectable prevents HIV from progressing in an individual, and prevents transmission of HIV through sex to partners.



CMLPC

CHICAGO MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN

Our Children’s Program—the Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children (CMLPC)—serves Chicagoland’s children and youth who have a combination of social, medical, and educational needs. Our CMLPC attorneys and legal advocates work in collaboration with some of the largest and leading hospital and health systems in Cook County to provide free legal assistance so that patients and their families can access public benefits, get medical care covered, and receive a free and appropriate education.

The Children’s Program meets children and families where they are at by providing services through Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLPs) with children’s hospitals and federally-qualified health centers (FQHCs) across the city and surrounding areas. The MLP model allows patients to get connected to legal services, such as issues accessing health insurance and special education advocacy, in a familiar setting. Our Children’s Program’s current MLP partners are ACCESS Community Health Network, Comer Children’s Hospital, Lurie Children’s Hospital, Medical Home Network, and Sinai Health’s Under the Rainbow Program.

Q&A WITH COMER PARTNERS

A critical piece of MLPs is the idea of partnership. Within all of our MLPs, legal advocates, attorneys, medical providers, social workers, and benefit enrollment assisters each play a key role in helping Chicago’s children and their families stay healthy. “Our MLP partnerships allow us to work closely with medical teams who have a unique understanding of their patients’ needs,” said Legal Director Katie Shelton (she/her). “With their help, we collaborate to identify and solve legal problems early, relieving stress and protecting rights for families.”

We sat down with Maria and Isamar, social workers in our MLP with Comer Children’s Hospital, to hear why Comer’s partnership with Legal Council is important to them.

Can you briefly explain your role at Comer Children’s and how that connects to this MLP with Legal Council?

Part of our role as social workers is to help connect patients with resources that unfortunately are not easily accessible to them. We also advocate for families and provide guidance on matters that can affect their health and overall wellbeing including other factors such as housing, school issues, state benefits and parental rights. When advocating is not sufficient, we do a referral to Legal Council for ongoing support and empower parents to properly address their situation.

Why is this Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) important to you?

[The] MLP is very important to our families because it ensures they receive health justice. [The] MLP helps families navigate structural barriers. This partnership is important to us because it helps us build rapport with our families and see them succeed. It is important for us to see that our families are not only getting their medical needs met but other social factors are properly being addressed.

What differences have you noticed in your ability to perform your job since the partnership began?

Often times social workers don’t have the resources to help families with certain issues that can turn out to be more complex. [The] MLP offers the support we can’t always provide due to constraints in our role. Working with [the] MLP has allowed our social work team to properly refer families to an organization that we can trust and can get the job done!

What do you wish more people knew about MLPs (either generally or about this one in particular)?

That they are awesome, easy to work with, reliable, knowledgeable and they do AMAZING WORK!



Isamar Mendoza (she/her) and Maria Perez (she/her), social workers at Comer Children’s Hospital.



Our Chicago Medical-Legal Partnership for Children (CMLPC) team.

CASE EXAMPLES

Through its various partnerships, our Children's Program serves patients from over 39 medical clinics. While all low-income, patients have unique backgrounds and experiences that impact their legal needs, lending a great deal of variety to the types of cases CMLPC regularly sees. As it would be nearly impossible to fully describe the scope of CMLPC's services, here are a few cases our Children's team took on this year that exemplify the team's method of fierce yet compassionate advocacy. **Names and specific details have been changed to ensure client confidentiality.**

CORRECTING A COSTLY ERROR WITH HORACIO

When Horacio, a retired Marine discharged for health-related reasons, was informed by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that he had been overpaid benefits and owed SSA nearly \$9,000, he was both mystified and terrified. He was certain this was an error, but needed some assistance proving it—that's when Legal Council got involved.

Our legal team read Horacio's notice from SSA carefully, which stated that Horacio had worked and failed to report his wages for an eight-month time period—a time period in which he was actively in chemotherapy and experiencing recurring seizures. Besides his monthly Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefit, the only income Horacio had during this time were his VA Disability Compensation payments. After collaborating with Horacio and working with SSA, the legal team learned that SSA had interpreted Horacio's sick leave payments as earnings related to work, and had wrongly enacted Horacio's **Trial Work Period (TWP)**. After Horacio's TWP ended, SSA further misinterpreted the VA Disability payments as evidence that Horacio's disability had ceased and that he had gone back to work—in the Administration's eyes, they had therefore overpaid Horacio during the period he was supposedly working. With Horacio's records, the legal team proved that Horacio had not, in fact, exhausted his TWP nor engaged in substantial work activity during this period.

By proving these facts, it became clear to SSA that the \$9,000 overpayment was incorrect, and was ultimately erased. Not only does Horacio now have stable income due to his monthly benefits being resumed, but he can access Medicaid benefits for his ongoing care.

TRIAL WORK PERIOD (TWP)

TWP is a period in which Social Security beneficiaries can test their ability to work while still being considered disabled and receiving their usual monthly benefit amount. A TWP lasts for a total of nine months and each beneficiary is allowed one TWP.



HOME AND HOSPITAL INSTRUCTION PROGRAM (HHIP)

HHIP is a program that provides continuous instruction to students whose academic programs are often interrupted due to a documented medical or psychiatric condition. In order to be eligible for HHIP, students must be absent (or expected to be absent) from school for 10 consecutive days, or on an ongoing intermittent basis.

HEALTH JUSTICE FOR SASHA

Ever since middle school, Sasha experienced nausea and upset stomach, which worsened in high school, forcing her to miss a majority of her freshman year. Despite providing the school with a written diagnosis of Sasha's condition, as well as doctor's notes to excuse her absences and request accommodations, Sasha's school referred her to a local truancy officer and scheduled an imminent truancy hearing. Her providers learned about the hearing and immediately referred Sasha and her mother to Legal Council.

The legal team worked closely with Sasha's mother to straighten out the facts and then reviewed hundreds of pages of medical records, school records, and emails between Sasha's mom and doctors with the school. Legal Council sent a formal demand to both the school district and the regional office of education to drop the truancy charges, which were rooted in disability discrimination. While this alone was a huge win, Sasha also needed an educational plan going forward—one that would accommodate her medical condition. Supported by our legal team, Sasha's mom worked with her school to find her eligible for the **Home and Hospital Instruction Program (HHIP)**, a far better fit for Sasha. Now, Sasha's legal rights are better protected, and she has a chance to participate in her education regardless of her disability.



CASE EXAMPLES

RYAN RETURNS TO SCHOOL

Ryan and their Mom were referred to Legal Council when they were experiencing issues in getting Ryan to return to in-person school safely. Ryan has a heart condition that requires general monitoring by someone who has completed a training session—this individual can be a personal aide or someone employed by Ryan’s school. Despite communicating with the school about Ryan’s condition, and despite having a **504 Plan** in place, the school failed to provide staff the monitoring training Ryan’s condition requires, so it was not safe for Ryan to attend school.

When it comes to education-related cases, one of our legal team’s top priorities is to first get the child back to school safely, whether this be in-person or from home. In Ryan’s case, the legal team worked directly with Ryan’s medical providers and the school to coordinate a training session on the monitoring requirements for their heart condition for all the staff members who interact with Ryan. With Ryan able to return to school safely, the legal team then assessed the pre-existing 504 Plan. The team saw that, due to the severity of Ryan’s heart condition, they developed new needs that would require an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**, not a 504 Plan. The school is currently in the process of doing a full individualized evaluation for Ryan to determine what services and supports are needed to help Ryan thrive.



Sarah Hess (she/her), Senior Staff Attorney

“Special education is a civil rights matter,” explained Sarah Hess when asked why the team considers getting children back in the classroom a top priority for education-related cases. “Every day a child is excluded from the classroom is a loss for that student with short and long-term impacts. We fight for what our clients are already eligible for, but what the school districts have denied. Even when parents and caregivers do everything right, sometimes the only way to enforce their child’s civil rights is through legal advocacy.”

IN-HOME SERVICES FOR AZIZ

10-year-old Aziz has a series of complex medical needs that require additional support and accommodations in school. When Aziz and his mother first got in contact with Legal Council, Aziz had never been to school in person—although the school had drafted Aziz an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** during the previous school year, they had yet to provide the services and supports they determined Aziz needed.

The legal team first worked to get Aziz back to school in a safe manner. In collaboration with Aziz’s mother, doctors, and school staff, the legal team used medical evidence to demonstrate that his condition was severe enough to render him eligible for the **Home and Hospital Instruction Program (HHIP)**. Aziz started receiving HHIP services shortly after.

With Aziz’s in-home education issue resolved, the team moved to tackling the next legal issue: the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services’ (HFS) decision to cut the hours of in-home nursing Aziz receives per week by over 15 hours. The team worked with Aziz’s mother to appeal the decision and, with the help of his doctors, submitted strong evidence showing the need for Aziz’s current care hours. The case went to a fair hearing before HFS, where the agency found in Aziz’s favor. Our team successfully maintained Aziz’s regular in-home nursing hours, allowing him to continue to receive the health care necessary to keep him safe and stable at home.



IEP vs. 504

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Section 504 Plans are both documents designed to help children access the educational environment, but have some important distinctions. An IEP is a plan for a child’s special education experience at school, and provides individualized special education and related services to children who have one or more of the 14 disabilities listed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A 504 Plan outlines how a school will provide support and remove barriers for a student with a disability or a suspected disability, and provides services and changes to the learning environment to allow students to succeed in their existing general education environment.

HOMELESS OUTREACH PROGRAM

ALL CHICAGO PARTNERSHIP

In 2022, Legal Council began partnering with All Chicago Making Homelessness History (All Chicago) to expand our reach by adding three additional legal advocates to provide SOAR Advocacy (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) to persons transitionally housed due to their history of homelessness. Among the many urgencies of COVID was to move medically-vulnerable persons out of crowded shelters and off the streets and in to housing. To do so, the Chicago Continuum of Care (including All Chicago) developed the Expedited Housing Initiative (EHI) to quickly house, on a temporary basis, persons at high risk of serious illness or death from COVID. However, to remain stable in housing long term, income is essential. That is when expanded SOAR advocacy services can make all the difference.

Many of those housed are among the thousands of persons unable to sustain employment and whose poor health make them eligible for SSI/SSDI benefits. However, applying for and securing SSI/SSDI has always been difficult and became much more so when Social Security temporarily closed access to its field offices to walk-in visitors due to COVID. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services' SOAR program aims to increase access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible children and adults who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness, and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or co-occurring substance use disorder.



Through our partnership, Expedited Housing case managers refer clients who are temporarily housed through EHI to Legal Council. Our SOAR Advocates provide advocacy and assistance to clients from pre-application through successful receipt of benefits, which often involves multiple appeals, and even hearings. All this work is done in collaboration with EHI or housing case management staff so participants can benefit from a supportive team of professionals.

With the funding from All Chicago, Legal Council was able to expand the reach of our Homeless Outreach Program team, offering services to more than 100 people who have been referred through this new partnership.



Our Homeless Outreach Project (HOP) team.

Since 2007, Legal Council for Health Justice's Homeless Outreach Program (HOP) has provided specialized benefits advocacy to persons who are experiencing homelessness and who have a serious mental illness and/or disabling physical health conditions, often with co-occurring substance use disorders. HOP perform outreach at shelters, drop-in centers, on the street, and in health care and treatment settings to engage clients around the issue of benefits enrollment--specifically Social Security disability benefits (SSDI).

HOP staff are trauma-informed and utilize motivational interviewing techniques to help evoke and inspire action around benefits, attending to medical and mental health needs, harm reduction, housing resources and/or pursuit of job training and employment opportunities. During the course of representation, advocates remain connected to clients wherever they go--including hospitals, jails, treatment programs, to the streets or encampments, or into the homes of relatives.

LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY (CPL) CARES

In 2020, HOP joined an emerging effort at the Harold Washington Public Library Center (HWPLC) to offer on-site space for library patrons to learn about and engage with essential social services. The program, called CPL Cares, aims to provide services particularly responsive to the needs of Chicagoans experiencing homelessness. Although the partnership was begun with just three organizations—Thresholds, Heartland Alliance, and Street Plus/Chicago Loop Alliance—over seven social service and advocacy agencies, including Legal Council’s HOP, now work in partnership to provide services to unhoused individuals.

“There are not many safe and welcoming public spaces to meet with clients,” Senior Legal Advocate Kate Miller (she/he) said, “especially spaces that are protected from the weather. Many patrons of the library are unhoused and when social services agencies are on-site, it creates opportunities for engagement in areas like healthcare, housing and income stabilization.”



WHY THE LIBRARY?

Legal Council first entered into the CPL Cares program because libraries are crucial spaces in our communities. They are spaces in which anyone, from any background, can access the internet, information and resources, clean bathrooms, drinking water, and shelter from harsh weather.

With an increased number of agencies participating in the partnership, Kate has noticed a significant increase in the number of unhoused individuals who now come to the library and connect with services that improve their health, wellness and well-being. In fact, quarterly reports show that greater numbers of patrons in these services have engaged every quarter for the last two years.

In addition to being in an easily accessible location, the CPL Cares program is important in combating the issue of homelessness in Chicago as it increases the collaboration between service organizations. When an individual walks into Harold Washington Library, perhaps from a shelter or even from the street, they can expect comprehensive support on a wide range of issues, with each participating organization contributing their expertise. Legal Council staff and their partners at CPL Cares see the program as a one-stop shop for someone seeking support in accessing housing, food, medical care, public benefits, and more.

One individual who was recently seeking such support is Mr. Lange*. Kate first met Mr. Lange at a shelter in Pilsen in 2018. Mr. Lange, around 50 years old at the time, had been homeless for his entire adult life. When Kate first met Mr. Lange, it became apparent that he had a disability that had likely never been assessed or treated. Kate wanted to help Mr. Lange apply for and receive Social Security benefits, but shortly after their meeting, Mr. Lange disappeared.

This year, Kate ran into Mr. Lange while staffing HOP’s Monday hours at the Harold Washington Library. It turned out that Mr. Lange was still experiencing homelessness, and he had a hearing with Social Security scheduled to determine if he was eligible for monthly benefits. Kate immediately jumped on the case to represent Mr. Lange in his hearing. It took collaboration between LCHJ HOP, Thresholds, Heartland, the Night Ministry and the City of Chicago DFSS Outreach teams to get and keep Mr. Lange connected with medical care, to pursue housing and to make essential appointments for his Social Security case. Mr. Lange not only had Kate in his corner, but essentially had the whole city supporting him in his pursuit of stable income, housing, and a more healthy life.

Seven months later, Mr. Lange has a move-in date for an apartment, has healthcare coverage, and gets monthly SNAP benefits to purchase food. HOP’s perseverance secured him regular monthly SSI income. “It was a city-wide effort to remain in touch with him and to win the case,” said Kate. “Everyone got involved and helped out.”

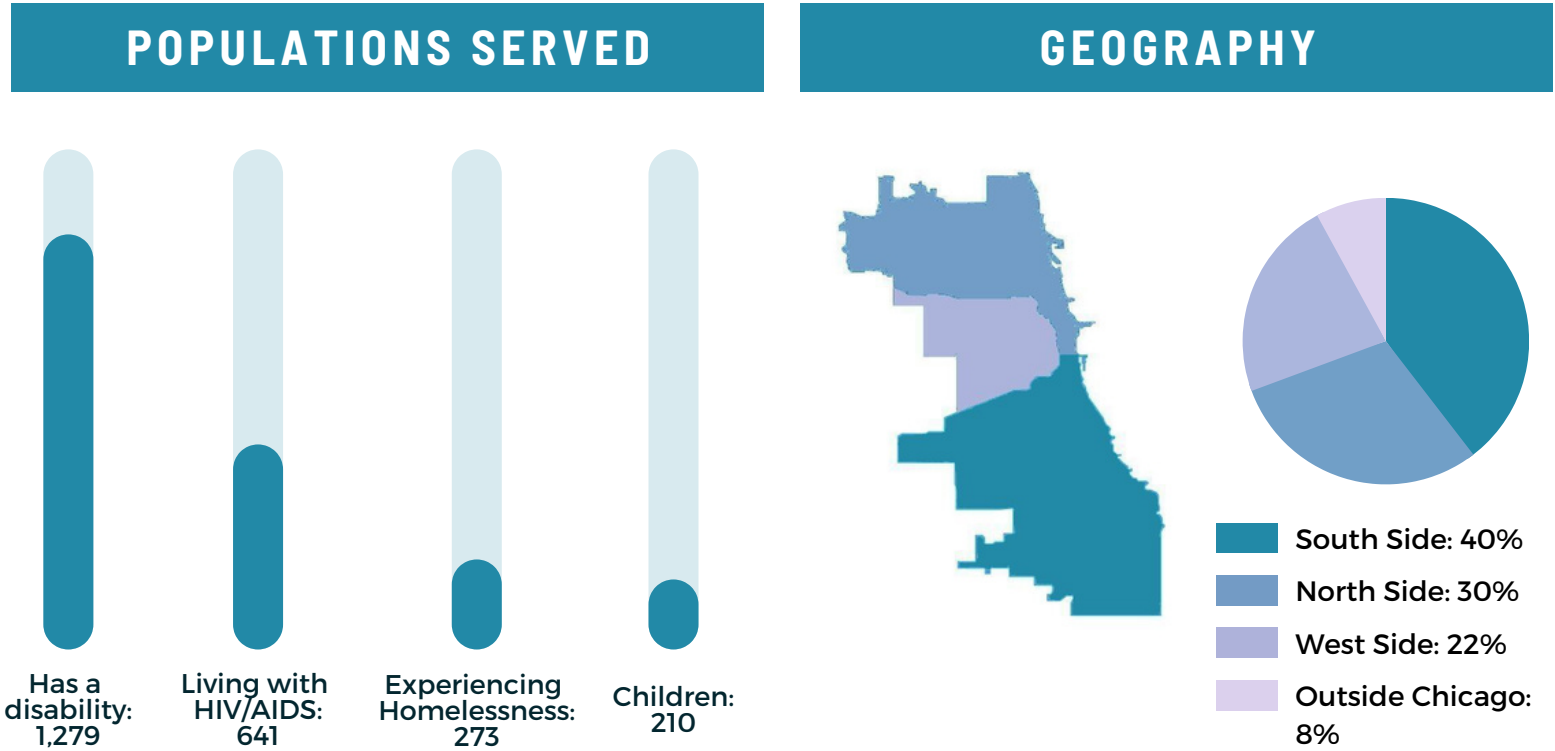
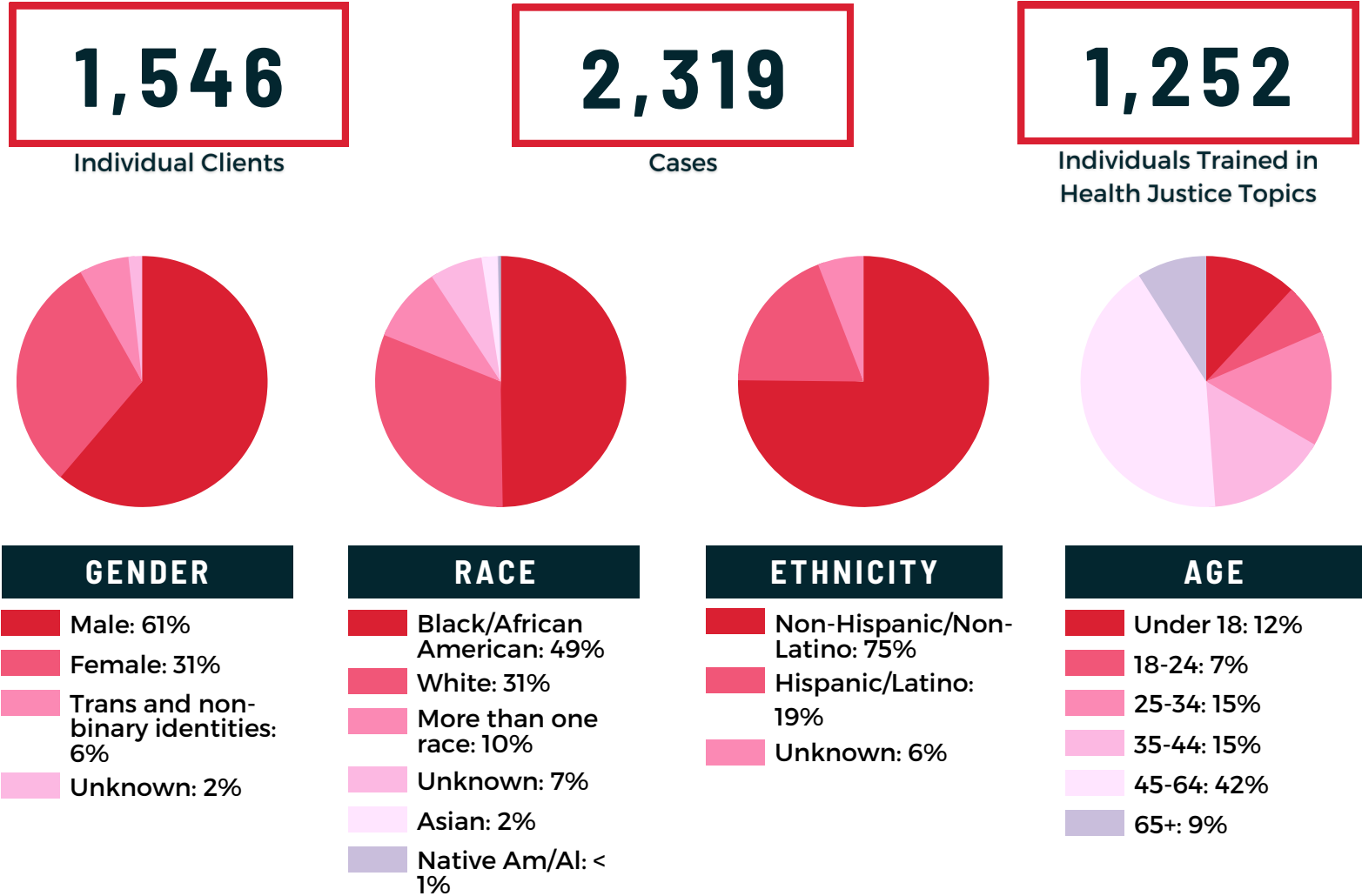
Legal Council is thrilled by the growth of this partnership that improves the emotional, social and material well-being of vulnerable people. We are encouraged by the progress in this and similar efforts nationally that aim to place social workers and essential services in our public libraries.

*Name has been changed to protect client confidentiality.



CLIENT AND CASE PROFILES

This data reflects client and case profiles during calendar year 2022.



FUNDING & ADMINISTRATION

This data reflects funding and administration during fiscal year 2022.

| REVENUES AND OTHER SUPPORT | | | |
|---|--------------|------------------------|-------------|
| | Unrestricted | Temporarily Restricted | Total |
| Non-government grants and contributions (including individuals) | \$269,787 | \$949,081 | \$1,218,868 |
| Government grants | \$1,096,964 | - | \$1,096,964 |
| Other revenue | \$7,102 | - | \$7,102 |
| Program service fees | \$608,590 | \$145,000 | \$753,590 |
| Special events | \$31,691 | - | \$31,691 |
| Donated legal services | \$146,930 | - | \$146,930 |
| Interest income | \$1,963 | - | \$1,963 |
| Net assets released from restrictions due to satisfaction of program restrictions | \$1,240,515 | \$(1,240,515) | - |
| Total Revenue | \$3,403,542 | \$(146,434) | \$3,257,108 |

| EXPENSES | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|------------------------|-------------|
| | Unrestricted | Temporarily Restricted | Total |
| Program Services | \$2,811,040 | - | \$2,811,040 |
| Administrative | \$309,979 | - | \$309,979 |
| Fundraising | \$328,664 | - | \$328,664 |
| Total Expenses | \$3,449,683 | - | \$3,449,683 |
| Change in Net Assets | \$(46,141) | \$(146,434) | \$(192,575) |
| Net Assets, beginning of year | \$1,236,832 | \$682,862 | \$1,919,694 |
| Net Assets, end of year | \$1,190,691 | \$536,428 | \$1,727,119 |

SUMMER SOIRÉE

On August 18th, Legal Council hosted our annual Summer Soirée at Sidetrack Chicago--our first in-person event in nearly three years. It was wonderful to be back in person for this annual event, celebrating with our communities. Over 200 people signed up to attend, and we raised over \$125,000 to support Legal Council's mission.

At the Summer Soirée, we were pleased to honor three champions in the fight for health justice: the **Illinois HIV Action Alliance, John Hern and Ed Jeske, and Dr. Mark Amdur.**

Thank you to everyone who attended or otherwise supported--this success would not have been possible without you.



Dr. Mark Amdur accepted the James Monroe Smith Founder Award, presented by HOP Legal Director Lisa Parsons.



Kenya Garrett-Burnett, ALC Legal Director, with Tim Jackson, who accepted the Kimball and Karen Anderson Award on behalf of the Illinois HIV Action Alliance.



Honoree John Hern with Kate Miller, HOP Senior Legal Advocate. John and his partner Ed Jeske were awarded the Ann Hilton Fisher Advocate Award.

A special thank you to Christine Grost, our photographer for the event.



Members of our Legal Beagles team.

AIDS RUN & WALK

On October 2nd, Legal Council participated in the Annual AIDS Chicago Run & Walk. We were thrilled to gather with our team, The Legal Beagles, on a beautiful fall day to raise awareness and support for our work around fighting HIV and AIDS.

Thank you to everyone who participated this year; our team raised over \$17,000, coming in fourth place among the top fundraising teams.

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GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

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Illinois Department of Human Services

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

FOUNDATION AND MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNER SUPPORT

\$50,000+

ACCESS Community Health Network

All Chicago Making Homelessness History

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Administrative Assistants Nerida Berrios (left) and Maria Duque (right). Nerida and Maria submit medical records requests, answer phones, refer clients to additional resources, and more, and are critical to our organization.

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Legal Council's Amy Marinacci (right), Social Security Specialist Attorney, speaking at a town hall meeting with Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) on Social Security and Medicare for older adults.

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