



2024 Annual Report

**Stronger
Together:**
*Advancing
Health and
Justice in our
Communities*

www.legalcouncil.org

LEGAL COUNCIL
FOR HEALTH JUSTICE

Who we are

Legal Council for Health Justice (Legal Council) is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that began in 1987 to provide free legal help to people with HIV and AIDS. In 2014, we expanded our work and added programs that provide free legal help to children with chronic health conditions and their families; people who have severe mental illness, many of whom are experiencing homelessness; and older adults.



What we do

We are dedicated to advancing health equity and improving access to justice for people facing the greatest structural barriers to health and income security. Through innovative legal services and community partnerships, we tackle the systemic barriers that impact health and well-being, particularly for low-income individuals and families facing complex medical and social challenges.

At Legal Council, we drive real change for people facing illness, disability and discrimination by breaking down the legal and social barriers that affect their health. We provide bold legal advocacy to ensure everyone has a fair shot at a healthier life. Through direct representation, systemic change, and community education, we're championing health equity and justice for those who need it most.

Where we are going

We envision a community where everyone—no matter their health challenges or socio-economic background—has equal access to justice, healthcare, and the resources needed to thrive. We push for a future where health equity is a reality, and legal or financial barriers to well-being are a thing of the past. Through unwavering commitment and transformative action, we aim to make this vision a powerful, lasting force for change.



Throughout this annual report, we highlight the transformative initiatives and collaborative efforts that empower individuals and communities, dismantle barriers, and promote healthcare as a fundamental right. Join us as we reflect on our achievements and look ahead to a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

How we get there

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Ensuring access to healthcare and essential supports

At Legal Council, we recognize that systemic barriers often prevent low-income individuals and marginalized community members from accessing essential healthcare, income, and support services.

We partner with clients and communities to unlock access to these essential resources and build a more just society, equipping individuals, service providers, and community members to advocate for their rights.

Our work is rooted in the belief that everyone has a right to health and well-being.

Last year, we assisted

1,610

Clients

Client Focus

Lee* reached out to Legal Council for help securing special education services for her 12-year-old son, David*, who has ADHD. Despite multiple requests, the school ignored her efforts to get David evaluated for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). David struggled with remote learning, and Lee was determined to get him the support he needed.

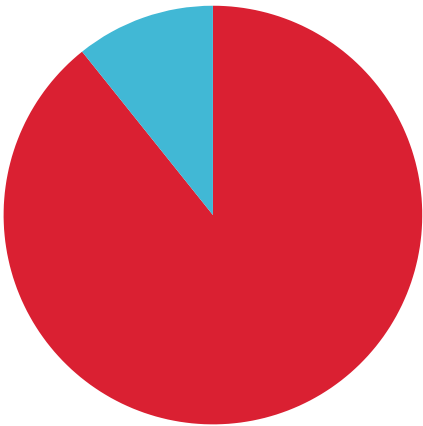
Senior Staff Attorney, Sarah Hess (she/her), worked with Lee, guiding her on David's rights and collaborating to draft formal requests to the school. Together, they secured an IEP evaluation, providing David with the accommodations he had long been denied.



Promoting health as a human right

We believe that access to quality healthcare is a fundamental human right. Our advocacy efforts focus on ending barriers so we all can access the care and support we need to lead healthy lives.

89% of our clients have incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level



- Legal Council clients with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level
- Legal Council clients above 200% of the federal poverty level

Client Focus

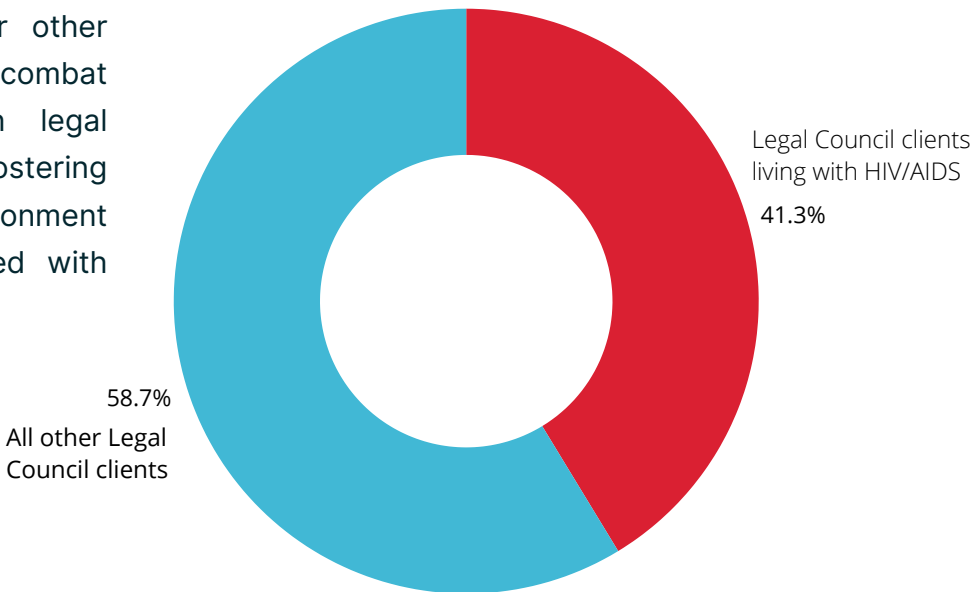
We take a trauma-informed approach to client services, listening deeply to address not just immediate needs but also to build trust and understanding. This was vital in our work with Robbie*, who, after 20 years in prison, found himself homeless and navigating a complex web of systems for essential documents, housing, employment, and benefits like Medicare, Social Security, and SNAP.

As a Black man, Robbie's trauma was intensified by decades of pervasive racial bias in incarceration, and isolation. Through our trauma-informed partnership, we worked with him to begin to address these barriers. Today, Robbie is housed, free from the crisis of homelessness, and committed to helping others. He is now involved in community advocacy, using his experience to advocate for systemic change and support those facing similar struggles.

Combating stigma and discrimination

Many of our clients face stigma and discrimination due to health conditions, such as HIV/AIDS, serious mental illness, or other disabilities. We strive to combat these injustices through legal advocacy and education, fostering a more inclusive environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Over 40% of our clients live with HIV/AIDS



Client Focus

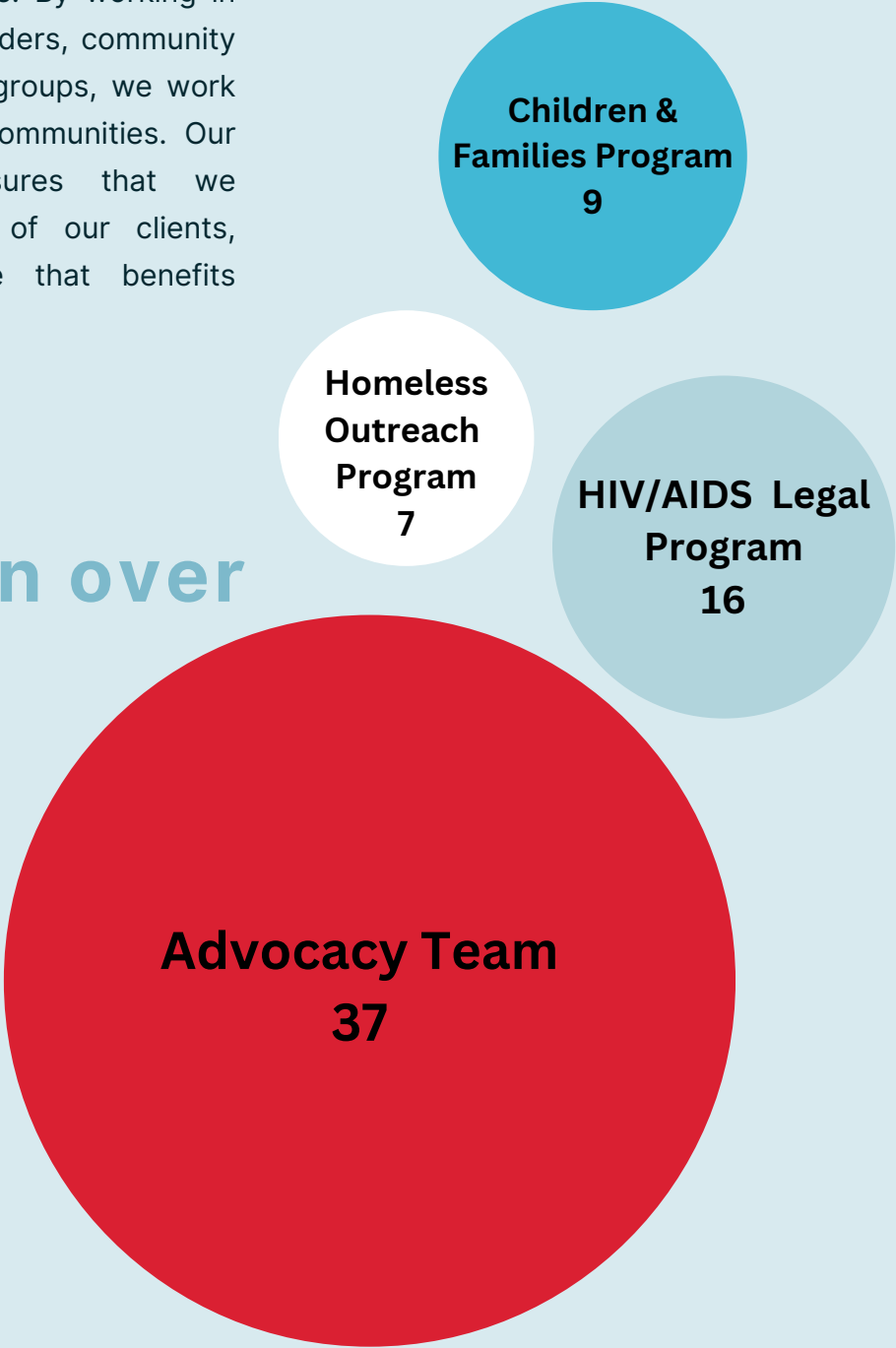
Eve*, a trans woman employed by the State of Illinois, spent over a year trying to get her health insurance to cover facial feminization surgery, which is essential gender-affirming care. Despite it being illegal in Illinois to deny coverage for such surgery, her insurance repeatedly denied her claim. To afford the surgery, Eve took out substantial loans and paid out-of-pocket. Afterward, her attempts to get reimbursement were unsuccessful.

When our team met Eve, she expressed her desire to not only get reimbursed but also prevent other trans people from facing similar challenges. With our help, Eve appealed the denial and successfully secured reimbursement for over \$35,000 in covered charges for her surgery. This partnership also led to action from Governor Pritzker's office, and changes have been made to the state employee health plan for 2025 to eliminate discriminatory exclusions of transition-related care.

Building stronger communities

We do not do this work alone. By working in coalition with healthcare providers, community organizations, and advocacy groups, we work to build stronger, healthier communities. Our collaborative approach ensures that we address the holistic needs of our clients, creating sustainable change that benefits everyone.

Our staff
participates in over
65
coalitions



Coalition participation by team

Creating lasting impact

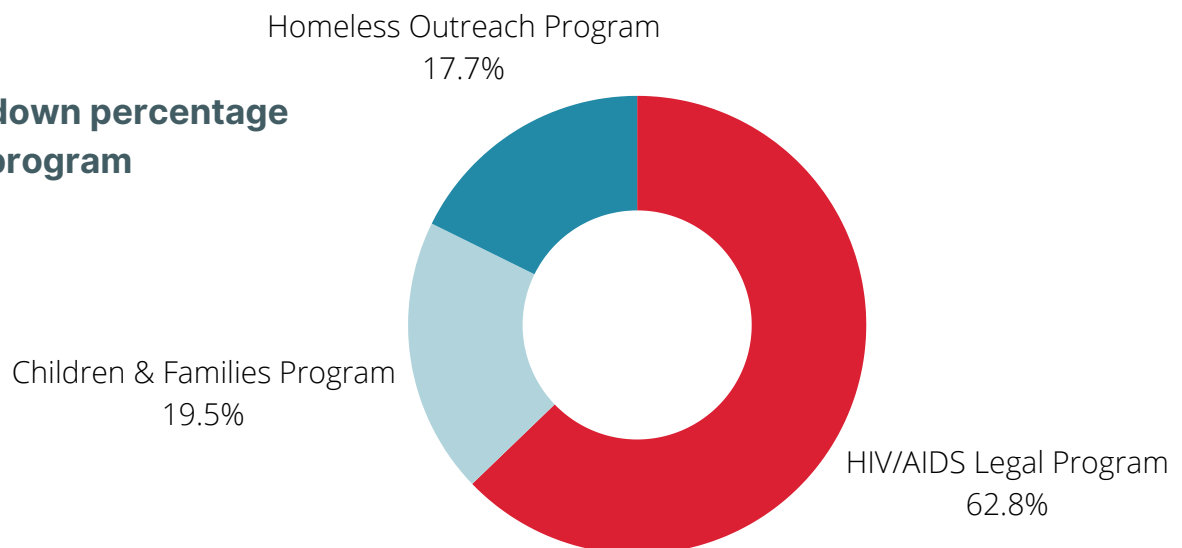
Through our innovative **Medical Legal Partnership** (MLP) model, we leverage the power of law, social work, and medicine to create lasting impact. Our integrated services not only address immediate legal needs but also contribute to improved health outcomes, reducing long-term disparities.

Our client-centered approach ensures that we provide comprehensive, trauma-informed support by embedding attorneys and legal advocates right where they're needed—within hospitals, community health clinics, and homeless services agencies.

Last year, we helped over 1,600 individual clients, all of whom fell within one of our priority areas of service:

- Unhoused individuals with severe physical and/or mental health challenges;
- People living with HIV or at risk of HIV infection, including a significant non-binary and gender non-conforming population;
- Children with disabilities and chronic health conditions and their families.

**Client breakdown percentage
by program**



The MLP in practice

Step 1: We train healthcare and social service providers to identify legal needs affecting patients' health and well-being.

Step 2: Patients are screened for legal issues during regular visits and referred to us when needed.

Step 3: We provide trauma-informed legal services and screen for additional legal needs.

Step 4: As individual representation reveals systemic barriers, we develop partnerships to address these needs.



Our Healthcare and Social Service Provider Partners



Summer Soirée

Each year, we value the opportunity to gather with our community at the Summer Soirée to celebrate our collective successes and inspire our supporters for the future. All funds raised directly benefit our work, providing hope and stability for children and adults facing life-changing health conditions. Last year, at our 2024 Summer Soirée, we proudly raised over \$150,000.

The event also provides a chance to honor individuals and organizations that enhance our clients' access to quality, affordable, and equitable healthcare. We were proud to honor three of our partners with our annual awards. [Read more about our awardees here.](#)

2024 Awardees

James Monroe Smith Founder Awardee: Dr. Renslow Sherer

Kimball & Karen Anderson Community Awardee: Susan Agrawal

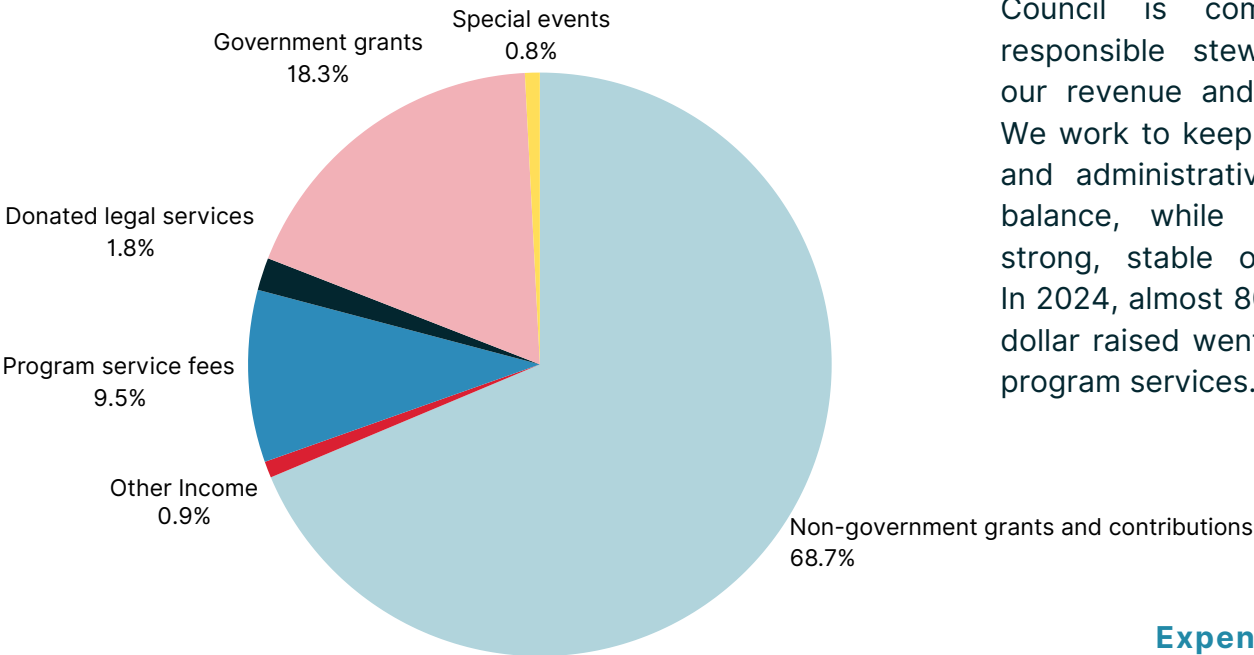
Ann Hilton Fisher Advocate Awardees: Art Johnston & Pepe Peña



Budget

This data reflects the budget during FY 2024.

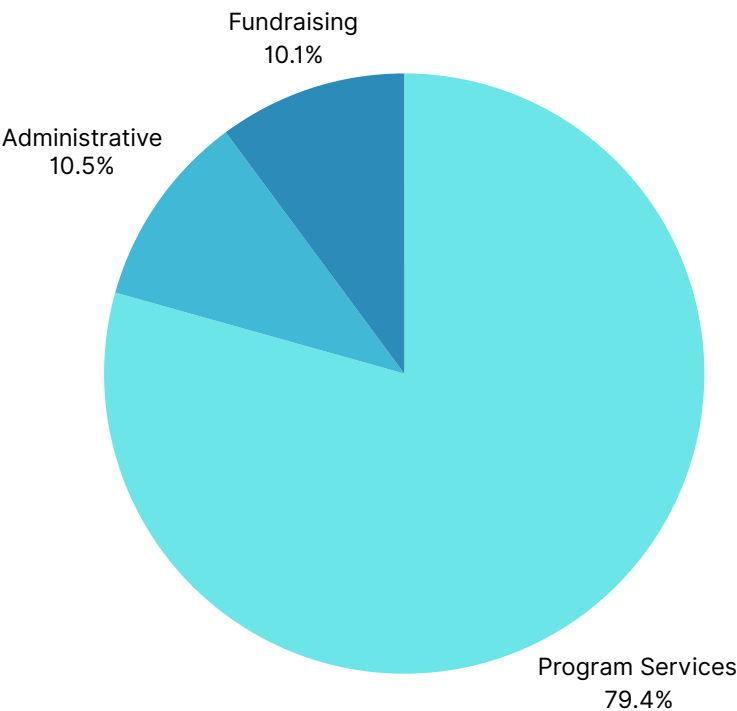
Revenue



With guidance from our Board of Directors, Legal Council is committed to responsible stewardship of our revenue and resources. We work to keep fundraising and administrative costs in balance, while ensuring a strong, stable organization. In 2024, almost 80% of every dollar raised went directly to program services.

We work hard to effectively manage funds to maximize impact while ensuring that the majority of resources are directed toward our core mission of providing legal advocacy for health justice.

Expenses



Our Team

Our dedicated team is at the heart of everything we do. Each staff member brings unique expertise and passion to our work. Together, we collaborate to create lasting impact and drive meaningful change for the communities we serve.



Julie Justicz
Executive Director



Taylor Belew
Senior Staff Attorney



Nerida Berrios
Administrative
Assistant



Raine Cáceres
Legal Advocate



Meghan Carter
Senior Staff Attorney



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Deputy ED of Programs
and Policy



Barb Cohen
Senior Policy Analyst



Emily Decker
Development and
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Ruth Edwards
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Theo Grant-Funck
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Marina Kurakin
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and Health Insurance
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Lena Lazar
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Sam Lopata
Evaluation and
Compliance Manager



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Specialist Attorney



Amy Martin
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Lisa Parsons
Legal Director



Liesl Pereira
Chief External
Relations Officer



Nooreen Reza
Staff Attorney



Kevin Scott
Staff Attorney



Katie Shelton
Legal Director



David Titus
Finance and
Operations Manager



Milo Vieland
Staff Attorney



Daniel Washington
Finance Director



Madison Wiegand
Staff Attorney



Nickol Zamora
Legal Advocate

Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors is composed of committed leaders who bring a wealth of expertise and a shared passion for our mission. Their guidance, vision, and strategic oversight are instrumental in shaping our work and ensuring that we continue to make a meaningful impact in the communities we serve.

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Our supporters

We are profoundly grateful to the generous individuals, foundations, and organizations whose support enables us to continue our critical work. Thanks to your commitment, we are able to provide comprehensive legal services that help individuals navigate the complex intersection of health and justice, advocating for access to care, rights, and essential resources. Your contributions allow us to expand our impact, break down systemic barriers, and ensure that vulnerable communities receive the legal support they need to live healthier, more secure lives. This page honors the donors whose partnership makes it possible for us to advance our mission and bring about meaningful change for those we serve.

Medical-Legal Partnership Support

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
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Government Support

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Chicago Department of Family and Support Services
Chicago Department of Public Health
Health Resources & Services Administration (Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program, Parts A & B),
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Illinois Department of Human Services
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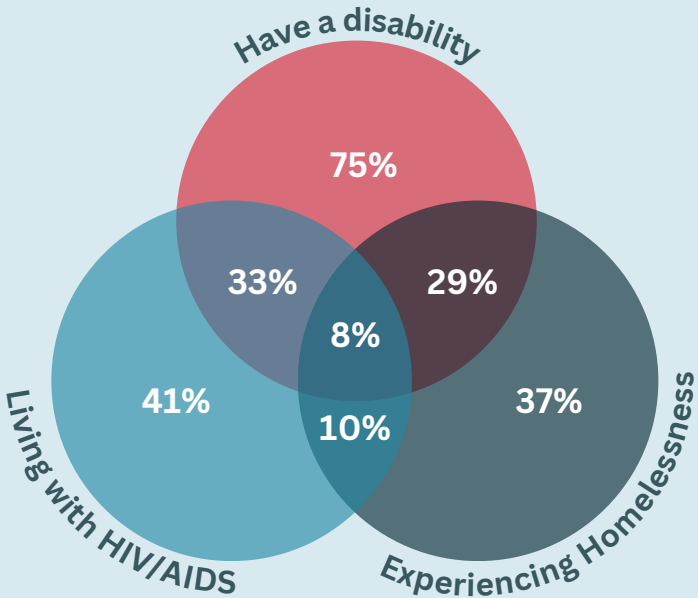
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Legal Council Clients



Individual Supporters

\$5,000+

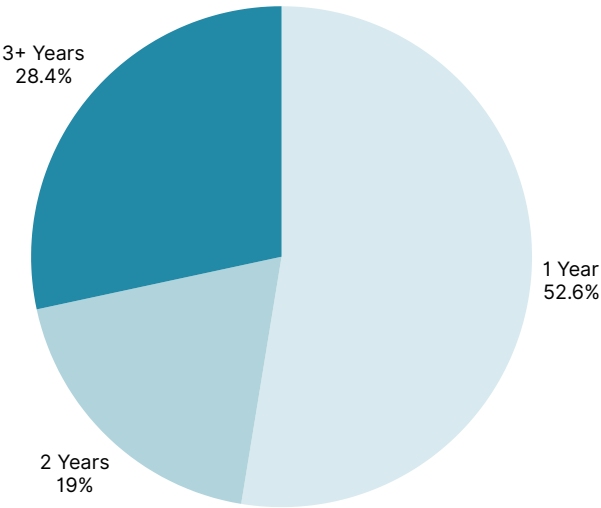
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FOR HEALTH JUSTICE