



2022 ANNUAL REPORT

annualreport.lafla.org



@LegalAidLA



Dear Friends and Supporters,

At the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, **expanding equal access** is a core principle of our work to achieve justice for our communities. We take great pride in our five brick-and-mortar offices across Los Angeles County, as well as our clinics inside busy courthouses and healthcare facilities, that bring our services directly to the neighborhoods where our clients live, work, and play. In 2022, as the worst impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic began to ebb, we were grateful for the opportunity to reopen our in-person services and once again meet our clients face-to-face.

We've embraced the return to community with zeal. Our new neighborhood outreach series, Ask LAFLA!, invited our neighbors, friends, and partners to reconnect with our free services, enjoy activities for kids, and get on-the-spot legal help. At our Access to Justice Gala, we were honored to host the inimitable Dolores Huerta, a civil rights icon for the working poor, women, and children, and Martin Estrada, U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California and longtime member of LAFLA's Board of Directors. But as we reopen our doors, we're not content to go back to the way things were. Instead, **we are building new ways forward toward our vision of a more just world.**

The suffering caused by the pandemic clearly illustrated the urgency of intervening in poverty and injustice. **At LAFLA, our advocacy to empower individual clients stands alongside our fight to reshape the conditions that block access to justice.** In 2022, we not only connected Asian and Pacific Islander clients to services in their primary languages; we also launched a first-of-its-kind Medical-Legal Partnership dedicated to expanding access to medical care and improving health outcomes for underserved API communities. We not only helped workers to apply for unemployment benefits; we also won the right to language access at the California Employment Development Department. We not only defended low-income tenants from unfair evictions that threatened to leave them homeless; we also built a system to make legal representation available to all who need it, as well as a pipeline of advocates to provide that service.

Our staff—as well as our pro bono partners, volunteers, and supporters—continued to demonstrate incredible commitment and skill in their daily fight for equal justice against the odds. Our advocates adapted swiftly and deftly to a new hybrid model of services that both crosses the digital divide and reaches those unable to be physically present.

In our 2022 annual report, you'll learn about the many ways we furthered justice in housing; economic stability; gender and the family; race equity; and language rights for and with our clients. We're carrying this spirit with us into 2023 and beyond, and we invite you to join us.

In solidarity,



Silvia R. Argueta
Executive Director



Amy Lerner-Hill
President, LAFLA Board 2022-2024

ACCOMPLISHMENTS



STAY HOUSED L.A.

LAFLA continues to lead Stay Housed L.A., a City- and County-funded program to prevent eviction and provide legal representation to low-income tenants. Now in its second full year, the partnership continues to expand access to justice for L.A.'s most vulnerable households. **In 2022, Stay Housed L.A. reached out to 490,016 tenants, held 396 workshops and clinics with 8,890 attendees, and provided 9,547 low-income tenant households with legal services.** As one of 10 legal service providers and 15 community-based organizations, LAFLA's Eviction Defense Center represented tenants in eviction court, provided counsel and advice at clinics, and educated tenants about their rights.

HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALTH INEQUITIES IN API COMMUNITIES

We've proven that accessible legal services can help people access healthcare, improve overall wellbeing, and transform lives. **This year, LAFLA partnered with Community Medical Wellness Centers to launch Southern California's first Medical-Legal Partnership dedicated to underserved Asian and Pacific Islander (API) communities.** This pioneering initiative provides holistic health and legal services that center the specific needs and experiences of the API communities of Long Beach, including expanding access to care for the significant Cambodian population.



LANGUAGE ACCESS FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

你好

Hello

¡Hola!

This year, LAFLA celebrated a major victory in our ongoing advocacy to make critical government support accessible to people of all cultural backgrounds. California workers who use languages other than English previously faced insurmountable barriers to accessing unemployment benefits, which were especially crucial at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, as the result of a discrimination complaint filed by LAFLA and our partners (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, the Asian Law Caucus, California Rural Legal Assistance, Center for Workers' Rights, and Legal Aid at Work), **the California Employment Development Department has agreed to make unemployment benefits available in more than 200 languages used by California residents.**

\$5.8 BILLION OF PREDATORY STUDENT LOANS FORGIVEN



For years, LAFLA has fought to achieve justice for thousands of California students who were preyed on by for-profit schools and left to carry the debt. One of the worst offenders was investor-owned Corinthian Colleges Inc., whose fraudulent practices finally led its collapse in 2015. In 2022, **LAFLA's leadership contributed to the U.S. Department of Education (DOE)'s decision to discharge all federal student loans still held by Corinthian alumni**, dating back to its founding class of 1995. Nearly 560,000 borrowers will see their loans forgiven, amounting to \$5.8 billion in full loan discharges. LAFLA is proud to have played a role in both this sweeping action—the DOE's largest loan discharge in history—and the lives of each individual student who came to us for help.

BUILDING THE PUBLIC INTEREST PIPELINE FOR EVICTION DEFENSE

LAFLA is building a pipeline of eviction defense attorneys to meet the wave of post-COVID-19 evictions.

In Fall 2022, our Eviction Defense Center (EDC) brought on seven non-barred post-graduate fellows—the largest class of fellows in recent LAFLA history. As they waited for the results of the California State Bar, this cohort of future advocates trained alongside EDC attorneys to learn landlord-tenant law and strategies to prevent unfair eviction and displacement.



PROVIDING PRO BONO SERVICES



In 2022, LAFLA's pro bono projects engaged more than 700 volunteers made up of attorneys, law students, undergraduate students, interpreters, community volunteers, and many others. These skilled advocates contributed nearly 25,000 hours—valued at nearly \$13 million—to expand LAFLA's capacity to meet the legal needs of the community. They helped tenants to avoid homelessness; domestic violence survivors to obtain protection from their abusers; victims of crime to gain refuge in the U.S.; formerly incarcerated individuals to achieve a fresh start; and many others. LAFLA is grateful for the continued dedication of our pro bono partners who go out of their way to support the community during times of need.

SERVICES

ASIAN & PACIFIC ISLANDER (API) COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROJECT:

Provides linguistically accessible, culturally intelligent, trauma-informed help to API clients in their preferred language, with access to all LAFLA services.

ECONOMIC STABILITY WORKGROUP:

Government benefits — Helps people obtain benefits to fulfill basic needs (food, shelter, medical care, and services to attain self-sufficiency).

Employment — Fights wage theft and denial of unemployment insurance benefits. Advises on wrongful terminations and discriminatory employment practices.

Student loans — Helps people who cannot afford to repay their student loans due to disability or who have attended for-profit colleges that engaged in predatory, deceptive, or illegal practices.

EVICITION DEFENSE CENTER:

Provides housing rights information and direct representation for individuals facing eviction. Prevents housing-subsidy residents and Section 8 voucher holders from losing their housing and/or subsidies. Preserves Rent Stabilized Ordinance (RSO) tenancies and prevents RSO violations. Helps clients living in uninhabitable conditions get repairs or reductions in rent. Provides eviction defense resources to tenants through the Stay Housed L.A. partnership.

HOUSING & COMMUNITIES WORKGROUP:

Engages a movement-lawyering approach to prevent unfair displacement and preserve and expand affordable housing. Deploys legal strategies in partnership with the community to defend the rights of unhoused individuals and families and provide legal support to community-based organizations seeking to build healthy, economically vibrant communities.

MEDICAL-LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS:

Provides patients with access to legal services — focusing on those that can negatively impact the health of patients, such as poor housing conditions, loss or denial of public benefits, and violence within the home.

PREVENTING & ENDING HOMELESSNESS PROGRAM:

Provides legal services to households facing homelessness and/or imminent eviction, as well as unhoused individuals and families, in the South Bay/Harbor area and southeast Los Angeles County.

RESTORING COMMUNITIES WORKGROUP:

Provides legal assistance to reentry for individuals in various substantive areas including but not limited to housing, benefits, and record clearing. Removes barriers to reentry and housing and housing stability, so people can have a fresh start and better access to work and housing opportunities.

SANTA MONICA COMMUNITY OFFICE:

Provides legal services to the Santa Monica client community in the areas of housing and homelessness, tenant harassment, domestic violence, family law, and public benefits. **Tenant Small Claims Project** — Provides resources and support to tenants sued in small claims court for COVID-19 rental debt, including workshops and seminars. Assists tenants in suing their landlords in small claims court for violation of their tenants' rights. Represents some tenants in small claims court appeals.

SELF-HELP LEGAL ACCESS CENTERS:

Assists individuals who represent themselves regardless of income or immigration status. Offers legal information, help with preparing court forms, and guidance on a variety of civil legal matters. Provides referrals to private attorneys or legal services programs as needed.

SURVIVOR & FAMILY JUSTICE WORKGROUP:

Helps and represents survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault in obtaining restraining orders, and orders for custody, dissolution, visitation, and support.

IMMIGRATION ACCESS WORKGROUP:

Assists and represents survivors of domestic violence, torture, human trafficking, and other serious abuse in removal proceedings and before U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS). Helps and represents individuals before USCIS to become U.S. citizens.

Torture Survivors Project — Provides legal assistance, representation, and community education to immigrants who are survivors of torture.



VETERANS JUSTICE CENTER:

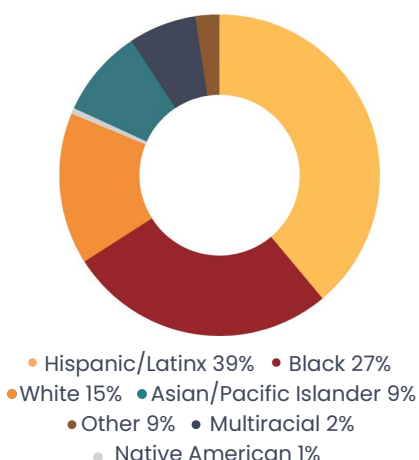
Advocates on behalf of veterans to obtain life-sustaining income, health, and housing benefits. Dismisses tickets and expunges convictions so veterans can have a fresh start. Upgrades unjust less-than-honorable military discharges. Prevents veteran homelessness.

2022 IMPACT

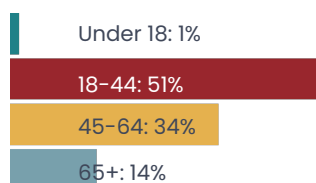


WHO WE HELP

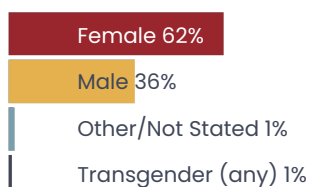
By Race/Ethnicity:



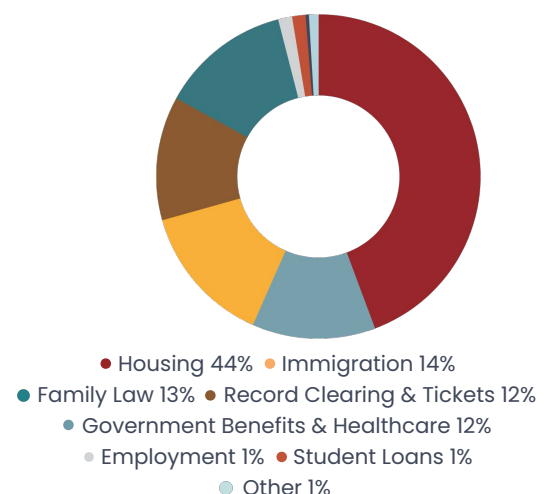
By Age:



By Gender:



By Legal Issue:



CLIENT VICTORIES



LAFLA Fights Unfair Eviction & Helps Stabilize a Family

Frances had lived happily in her Long Beach apartment for 10 years. Located just across the street from the school her two children attended, she proudly watched them succeed academically and thrive socially. Even when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the U.S., and her work as a muralist abruptly dried up, Frances's CalWORKS benefits and Section 8 voucher helped her to scrape by—until her landlord gave her a 3-day notice to leave.

Frances had already informed her landlord that she was suffering financial hardship because of the pandemic. Under the Los Angeles County COVID-19 Tenant Protections, she qualified to delay her rental payments until the emergency was over. Moreover, things were looking up for Frances: She had finally found steady new work at a barbershop less than two miles from her current home, and would soon be able to resume paying full rent and make payments toward her debt. But her landlord refused to accept any further payments and let her know in no uncertain terms that he would proceed with an eviction.

LAFLA first met Frances at our Self-Help Center at the Long Beach Courthouse, where she had come for help responding to the eviction on her own. Fortunately, after helping Frances submit a general denial, paralegal **Rhoda Mercado** realized that not only was this eviction unlawful, but there were additional issues in Frances's case that LAFLA's Eviction Defense Center could help with.

For months, Frances had been asking her landlord to help her address a cockroach infestation at her home—a request that he consistently ignored, leaving her with a home that was legally unfit to rent out. Additionally, her landlord was so eager to evict Frances that he had ignored her right to due process under Section 8 program rules, and was illegally refusing payments from the Housing Authority of the City of Long Beach (HACLB).

Attorneys **Javier Valencia** and **Akila Shinroy** knew something was amiss. After filing an amended answer, they dug further, filing subpoenas and California Public Records Act Requests to investigate. Their work paid off when they discovered that Frances's landlord had been unlawfully overcharging her for rent every month for nearly three years. When everything was tallied up, it turned out that not only was Frances not behind on rent, but she was more than \$700 ahead on her payments.

LAFLA swiftly brought this information to light and reached a settlement with the landlord that allowed Frances to stay in her home. LAFLA also worked extensively with HACLB to ensure that Section 8 payments would continue, and that Frances would pay the correct rate going forward.

When Frances first came to LAFLA, she hoped she could get more time to move out and avoid the black mark of an eviction on her record. Instead, she got something more: the right to stay in her home, the ability to keep her children in the school they loved, and the promise of a new job that would help her keep her life stable.

CLIENT VICTORIES

Reuniting a Refugee Family from War-Torn Ukraine

Tetyana was asleep in her apartment in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine, when bombs began to rain down on her building and all over town. She quickly grabbed her one-year-old daughter Edel while her mother, Vera, threw whatever she could fit into a suitcase. Together, they ran for their lives.



Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, **Tetyana** and her husband of 20 years, Vasyl, were thriving small business owners. As a teenager, winning the title of “Miss Ukraine” made Tetyana a national symbol and planted a seed in her to work hard for her dreams. She became a passionate entrepreneur whose pursuits ranged from dog training to organic farming. But as tensions rose, Tetyana began to fear that her prominence in the community would make her a target for anti-Ukrainian violence.

Tetyana had heard the rumors that Russia's goal was genocide. She had seen firsthand the leaflets from Russian soldiers, and even from churches, calling for her area to be “cleansed” by “killing any Ukrainian [you] meet.” The bombing of her own building made it crystal clear that she had to get out now.

When Tetyana arrived at LAX with her mother and daughter, she had no idea where her husband was, whether her home was still standing, whether she had the right to stay in the country, or how she would support her family here if so. She had one glimmer of hope: Her sister, who lived in Long Beach, gave her a place to stay and soon referred her to the Legal Aid Foundation.

LAFLA immigration attorney **Nhien Tran** quickly got to work on Tetyana's case. Nhien knew that the U.S. had issued emergency permissions for refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, and requested an emergency expedited Temporary Protection Status (TPS) for Tetyana and Edel, as well as employment authorization for Tetyana so that she could support herself and the baby. She also referred Tetyana to the International Institute of Los Angeles to help her access food, trauma support, childcare, and anything else she might need on top of her legal case.

In the meantime, Nhien began exploring options for Vasyl to join Tetyana in the U.S. so the family could be reunited in safety. Here, an unexpected problem arose: The couple had followed their community's tradition of marrying in the church after counseling with the priest to prepare for what they viewed as a sacred commitment. But unbeknownst to them, the marriage certificate issued by the church was not legally valid—so Tetyana did not have the right to bring Vasyl with her to the U.S.

Nhien contacted the California Attorney General, the Los Angeles County Recorder's Office, the Ukrainian Consulate, and even the Library of Congress to help Tetyana register her marriage from afar. Luckily, timely new guidance from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) allowed Vasyl to be recognized as Tetyana's husband so that they could apply for asylum together.

Finally, in December 2022, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted Tetyana and Edel's application for TPS and employment authorization. Tetyana now has a job that provides for her family and recently found new affordable housing in Long Beach. She is grateful that LAFLA stuck by her side through every new step of her case—and in fact, we still are. Today, we continue to work with Tetyana to apply for asylum and make her, Edel, and Vasyl's protections permanent.

CLIENT VICTORIES



Defrauded Student Wins Justice & Economic Stability

Varela had always been told that a quality education could open the door to lifelong economic opportunity. In 2013, she enrolled in Everest College to train as a medical assistant, and eventually as a nurse. Like many students, she couldn't afford school on her own, so she borrowed nearly \$25,000 in federal and private loans, believing that the career she was training for would enable her to pay it back over time. But Varela had fallen prey to an educational scam.

Everest promised to support alumni in finding a good-paying job after graduation, and boasted high rates of successful placements. But it was all untrue—part of a decades-long campaign of fraud and illegal business practices by the school's parent company, Corinthian Colleges. When potential employers started turning Varela away because she had trained at Everest, she realized that her education experience had left her with more debt and fewer prospects than before she had started. She was so discouraged that she considered advising her children not to go to college at all.

Varela wasn't alone. By the time she came to LAFLA for help in 2016, Corinthian Colleges had collapsed, and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) had finally begun developing a discharge program for the nearly 500,000 borrowers who had been defrauded there over the years. LAFLA's student loan team, led by senior attorney **Robyn Smith**, first helped Varela apply for a Defense to Repayment (DTR) against her federal loans using the new process.

But even with new recourse for borrowers like Varela, and with LAFLA's nationally renowned experts on her side, it still took years of advocacy before Varela's loans were successfully discharged. Finally, after LAFLA and others flagged systemic issues in the borrower defense process, the DOE announced a group discharge for all federal student loan borrowers who had attended a Corinthian school.

In the meantime, though, the COVID-19 pandemic had struck, and Varela's unemployment benefits ran out. Despite her prior experience, she was willing to re-train in a new career to find work—but she was struggling under the weight of the debt she had incurred under false pretenses.

In 2021, the DOE discharged most of Varela's federal loans. To tackle the rest, Robyn and attorney **Cara McGraw** helped Varela apply for additional relief from California's Student Tuition Recovery Fund. Finally, in 2022, the last of her loans from Everest were discharged and the out-of-pocket payments she had made over the years were reimbursed. While Varela will never get back the time, effort, and opportunities she lost during her years at Everest, she no longer has to carry the burden of debt with her as she moves forward.

"LAFLA has helped me tremendously. I tell everyone who will listen: I don't know where I'd be without you," Varela said. Now, she has a chance to end up where she always hoped: in a stable career that will enable her to support her family—including her newborn grandson!

FINANCIALS

REVENUE & SUPPORT

Total Income \$37,571,083

Gov. Contracts \$31,561,661

Misc. \$4,702,957

Grants & Contributions \$704,853

Special Events \$601,612

EXPENSES

Total Expenses \$37,354,022

Program \$30,226,568

Support \$6,893,405

Fundraising \$234,049

DONATED SERVICES

Expenses, Revenue, & Support
\$11,876,329

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