

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



**RISING**

FOR JUSTICE

**CELEBRATING 55 YEARS**

# RISING

1969 55 YEARS 2024

## FOR JUSTICE

Celebrating its 55th year, Rising for Justice, formerly known as DC Law Students in Court, has a rich history of advocating for equal access to justice and for providing legal services to those in need.

### A BRIEF TIMELINE OF RFJ MILESTONES.

**1967.** Judge Timothy Murphy, assigned to the Small Claims & Conciliation Branch of the Court of General Sessions (today DC's Superior Court) pens an article in the DC Bar Journal about the inequities in legal representation for indigent litigants in small claims matters.

Inspired by Judge Murphy's words and out of a shared and growing concern among other forward-thinking DC attorneys, judges and law school deans who recognized the inequality faced by low-income small claims defendants who couldn't afford legal representation, then-attorney (later Associate Judge of the DC Superior Court) Peter H. Wolf spearheaded the creation of the Task Force on Representation of Indigents by Third-Year Law Students. Composed primarily of deans from DC law schools, including American University Washington College of Law, Catholic University Columbus School of Law, George Washington University Law School, Georgetown University Law Center, and Howard University School of Law, the Task Force focused on having third-year law students represent indigent litigants in DC's Court of General Sessions in cases involving small claims and landlord-tenant disputes. To do that, though, DC's court rules would need to be amended.

**1969.** Thanks to the Task Force's advocacy efforts, the DC Court of Appeals adopted Rule 48, Legal Assistance by Law Students, allowing eligible DC law students, working under supervision and within a clinical law program, to engage in the limited practice of law in DC for which they would receive course credit from their respective law schools. This change in the court rules not only provided an opportunity for law students to gain valuable hands-on experience, but also improved access to justice for those who could not otherwise afford private counsel.

The passage of Rule 48 also laid the groundwork for the creation of DC Law Students in Court by the Task Force, the DC Bar, and other advocates. Through a grant of \$93,000, the organization's first full-time staff were hired. They included an executive director, a staff attorney, an office manager, and a secretary.

**1970.** The first 36 students enrolled in the DC Law Students in Court program. Initially the organization focused on improving the quality of justice available to people living below the poverty line in small claims and landlord-tenant cases.

**1972.** DC Law Students in Court added a criminal defense practice to its clinical program and provided representation to indigent litigants charged with misdemeanors. Over the next few decades, DC Law Students in Court would expand and contract, if necessary, its clinical program in different practice areas, including criminal, immigration, juvenile, bankruptcy, and family.

**1980.** DC Law Students in Court incorporated as a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 corporation in DC.

**2019.** In honor of DC Law Students in Court's 50th anniversary, the organization changed its name to Rising For Justice to reflect the organization's evolution into a full-fledged legal services program with a law school clinical program embedded in it.

**2022.** Recognizing the complex and intertwined needs of its clients, Rising For Justice added a Social Work division to address its clients' full-life circumstances and to help put clients on the road to genuine, long-term success. Similar to Rising For Justice's clinical legal education program, the Social Work division serves as a field placement for graduate students pursuing their Master of Social Work degrees.

**Today.** In addition to its Clinical Legal Education Program which concentrates solely on housing and eviction defense services, and its Social Work division, Rising For Justice also offers innovative projects that focus on representing respondents in civil protective order and anti-stalking order cases and helping justice-involved individuals get a fresh start by providing legal assistance with expunging or sealing their criminal records.

Annually, Rising for Justice represents close to 4,000 clients facing serious legal jeopardy. Over the past 50 years, Rising For Justice has protected the rights of over 250,000 DC residents.

# LETTER FROM THE BOARD CHAIR & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Reflecting on the past year brings immense gratitude and pride for the accomplishments achieved together. For the past 55 years, Rising for Justice (RFJ) has stood as a beacon of hope and resilience, facilitating meaningful change and offering essential support to those navigating the complexities of the justice system.

RFJ's mission, deeply rooted in the District of Columbia Court's vision of "Open to All, Trusted by All, Justice for All," has never been more critical. This past year, witnessing first hand the disparities and barriers that persist in the legal system was enlightening. Exacerbated by a global pandemic and societal inequities, the challenges that RFJ's clients face underscore the necessity of RFJ's work. Alongside dedicated volunteers and supporters, RFJ meets each challenge with unwavering determination and compassion.

Thousands have been empowered this year through legal assistance, trauma-informed support, and relentless advocacy. RFJ's efforts have kept families in their homes, ensured fair representation in courtrooms, and provided a guiding light during some of life's most difficult moments. Each victory, no matter the size, has been a step toward a vision of a just system that is truly open, trusted, and equitable for all.

RFJ's achievements in 2023 extend beyond the courtroom, reflected in lives changed, policies influenced, and a strengthened community. These accomplishments testify to the collective action and dedication of attorneys, paralegals, administrative staff, law students, clinical social workers, social work students, and the broader RFJ community. A steadfast belief in RFJ's mission has propelled the organization forward, enabling it to impact the lives of countless individuals and families.

The work, however, is far from done. Looking ahead, the path toward justice is a continuous journey requiring persistence, innovation, and collective effort. There is a commitment to not only address the immediate needs of those served, but also to dismantle the systemic barriers that obstruct justice for the most vulnerable.

Reflecting on the past year, we are reminded of the transformative power of advocacy and support. RFJ is more than an organization; it is a movement, a community, and a family. Together, we have the power to effect lasting change and ensure that our justice system lives up to its highest ideals.

Deep appreciation is extended to all for the continued support, partnership, and belief in the shared mission. Contributions, whether in the form of time, expertise, or resources, are the foundation upon which successes are built. Looking to the future, the call is to remain united in the pursuit of justice for all.

With heartfelt appreciation,



HELEN DOOLEY  
BOARD CHAIR



CHIJOKE AKAMIGBO  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# RFJ PROGRAMS

## CLINICAL EDUCATION

Rising for Justice's law school clinical program equips students with practical lawyering skills while providing legal representation to low-income DC residents. RFJ's curriculum focuses on developing strong litigation skills and instilling a passion for public interest service. The many law students who participate in RFJ's clinics and summer internship programs provide direct representation to RFJ's clients in DC's Landlord-Tenant Court under the supervision of experienced clinical staff attorneys.

## HOUSING

Most low-income DC residents do not have access to an attorney when facing housing-related legal issues. RFJ addresses this critical gap by providing tenants with same-day representation at the DC Superior Court as well as full representation in a range of housing matters to help tenants avoid eviction and displacement, preserve affordable housing, remedy substandard housing conditions, and address systemic issues. RFJ staff advocate for thousands of DC residents in housing matters each year.

## RESPONDENT REPRESENTATION

RFJ's Respondent Representation Program serves respondents in civil protection order (CPO) and anti-stalking order (ASO) matters with same-day intake/advice and mediation support. RFJ staff also provide full representation, often facilitating resolution of serious conflicts, which, in turn, impacts entire families. Legal representation on behalf of respondents in CPO and ASO cases can significantly lessen contentiousness between parties, distill the facts of a case to ensure that the matter is in the appropriate forum, and increase compliance with the terms and conditions of a court order should one be issued. RFJ is one of the few organizations in the country with this distinct focus.

## SOCIAL WORK

RFJ recognizes that the legal challenges clients face often relate to other aspects of their lives. As such, RFJ takes an integrated approach through its Social Work Program to address each client's overall circumstances, helping to pave a clear path to long-term success.

As a corollary to RFJ's law school clinical program, the Social Work program trains graduate students pursuing Master of Social Work degrees in the context of a clinical field placement. RFJ's social work staff and students work with RFJ's law students, paralegals, and attorneys to provide comprehensive assistance to clients.

## COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

RFJ provides community legal education events and "Know Your Rights" presentations for community organizations throughout DC to empower low-income individuals to advocate for themselves and to increase the likelihood of their success should they need to proceed without legal counsel. Through these activities, RFJ connects with community members who might benefit from information about tenants' rights, expungements and record-sealing, CPO and ASO-related legal proceedings, and availability of social work assistance.

## EXPUNGEMENT

RFJ's Expungement Program is designed to give justice-involved individuals a fresh start by sealing or expunging their criminal records and, thereby, removing barriers to economic stability, including barriers to employment, housing stability, educational opportunities, and family unity. This program provides free legal counsel, either through RFJ staff or volunteer (pro bono) attorneys, to low-income DC residents who want to eliminate the collateral consequences of a criminal record but are faced with DC's daunting record-sealing and expungement process. Demand for representation is high as RFJ is one of the few local organizations that offers these services for low-income residents.

Rising for Justice's Pro Bono Program focuses on expungement cases. To get involved, email [expungement@risingforjustice.org](mailto:expungement@risingforjustice.org).

**SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1969, RISING FOR JUSTICE HAS PROTECTED THE RIGHTS OF OVER 250,000 DC RESIDENTS AND GIVEN THOUSANDS OF LAW STUDENTS HANDS-ON INTENSIVE TRAINING TO PREPARE THEM FOR PUBLIC INTEREST CAREERS.**

# THE RFJ IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

**RISING FOR JUSTICE IS A LEADER IN TRAINING SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES AND REPRESENTING LOW-INCOME CLIENTS IN MATTERS CRITICAL TO THEIR WELLBEING.**

Rising for Justice makes justice a reality for vulnerable DC residents by providing free, high-quality legal representation in tandem with social work services to promote long-lasting positive outcomes for clients.

Since 1969, RFJ has protected the rights of over 250,000 DC residents and given thousands of law students hands-on, intensive training to prepare them for public interest careers.



JOHN HANEBUTH ('23) & RFJ HOUSING ADVOCACY AND LITIGATION CLINIC DIRECTOR, DAVID YELLIN, SPEAK WITH A CLIENT.

## In 2023, Rising for Justice...

Provided 3,785 low-income DC residents with free legal and social work services, trainings, and educational presentations.

Provided 1,486 households with direct legal services, along with community legal education trainings and Know Your Rights presentations.

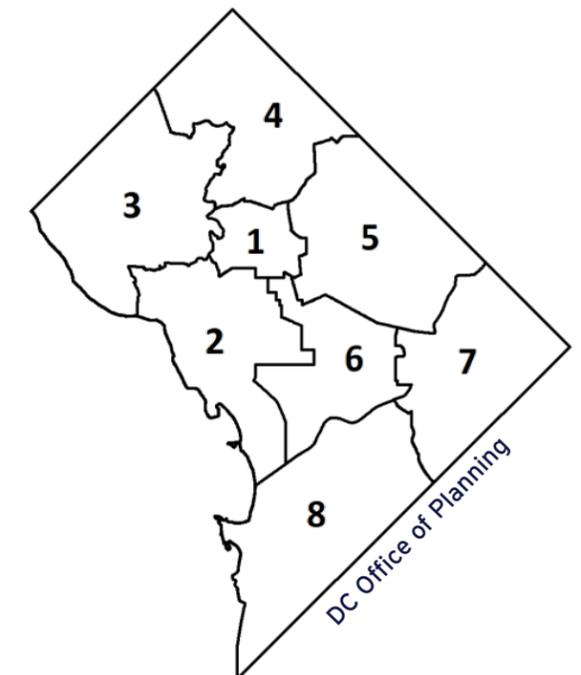
Served 269 individuals and their families with social work services.

Trained 63 law and social work graduate students.

Partnered with and trained 136 pro bono attorneys through the expungement program to provide legal advice and representation for 135 clients seeking to seal 305 DC criminal cases.

## CLIENT CASES BY DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WARD

DC WARD	% OF CASES
Ward 1	10%
Ward 2	5%
Ward 3	4%
Ward 4	10%
Ward 5	15%
Ward 6	11%
Ward 7	17%
Ward 8	28%



# STUDENT CLASS OF 2023



SOCIAL WORK INTERNS 2023



HOUSING LITIGATION AND ADVOCACY CLINIC STUDENTS, SPRING 2023

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**CELEBRATION OF SERVICE LUNCHEON**  
**OCTOBER 10, 2024**

# CELEBRATION OF SERVICE 2023

The Celebration of Service honors individuals and organizations that most embody Rising for Justice's commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of people.

This year's Celebration featured two honorees: Patricia Mullahy Fugere, co-founder and former Executive Director of the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, and Patrick McGlone, Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Chief Compliance Officer at Ullico Inc. The keynote speaker was Marc H. Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League, and RFJ alumni. The program host was RFJ board member Heather Pinckney, also an RFJ alumni, Board member of Rising for Justice, and Director of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia.

The 2023 Celebration of Service was attended by 200 donors, staff, students, alumni, and board members. Thanks to the generosity of Rising for Justice sponsors and individual donors, the \$262,020 raised will enable RFJ attorneys, social workers, and students to continue to provide free, high-quality support and representation to DC residents experiencing critical moments of transition.



CELEBRATION OF SERVICE HONOREE PATRICIA MULLAHY FUGERE.



CELEBRATION OF SERVICE HONOREE PATRICK MCGLONE (R) WITH EVERSHEDES SUTHERLAND PARTNER NICHOLAS T. CHRISTAKOS.



KEYNOTE SPEAKER MARC H. MORIAL.

# TESTIMONIALS

***“The judge heard both sides of the argument and decided that the case would be dismissed.”***

***I was like, wow. I felt relief. Because of Rising for Justice, I’m able to keep my home.”***

## JOY MASON, CLIENT



“I was working for a nonprofit, going to work every day and then COVID hit. During COVID, I went from a very healthy, generous salary to just receiving Social Security. And that’s where my trouble started.

I was paying a portion of the rent, what I felt like I could pay and still survive. But you know, the back rent just kept adding up, adding up, adding up. I kept receiving notices from the management company that they would be taking me to court. I did go to court alone.

During that hearing, the judge asked if I had legal representation, which I did not have. Didn’t think I could afford it. The judge gave me the number for Rising for Justice.”

## JOHN HANEBUTH, STUDENT ATTORNEY SPRING 2023

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

“After hearing Joy’s story, I thought that she’d been a great fit for a motion to dismiss that my supervisor and I had been working on for several other clients.

The motion we were working on involved dismissal based on ‘failure to state a claim’ because under DC law, a landlord’s required to serve a tenant a notice of past due rent in English and Spanish, and make diligent and conscientious efforts to serve the tenant in person.

After speaking with Joy, I discovered that neither of those things had occurred.”



## OLIVIA FURMAN, EXPUNGEMENT INTERN SPRING 2024

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK BROCKPORT



“I have been interning this spring at Rising for Justice, working for the Expungement Program, which assists low-income DC residents with expunging or sealing DC records. The biggest thing I’ve learned since starting this internship is how record sealing can benefit the lives of those with criminal histories.

Record sealing is a great aspect of our criminal justice system. Those with criminal histories can file motions to have their records sealed from the general public, making it easier for them to find employment and housing. Due to the complexity of record sealing laws in DC, lawyers, like those at Rising For Justice and other agencies, are critical in assisting movants in this process.

The clients I have worked with accept that they made mistakes in their lives and have actively worked to improve their situations by participating in rehabilitation programs and other services. Despite their hard work, they often can’t find stable employment or housing because they face discrimination in these areas. Many have loved ones to support and have goals of going back to school and pursuing their dream career, but their record puts them at a severe disadvantage.”

## ANNA BERTRAND, SOCIAL WORK STUDENT 2024

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY NATIONAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE



“Working closely with Rising for Justice clients, I learned about the complexities of DC’s housing system and the challenges faced by vulnerable communities.

One specific theme that I will carry with me is the importance of holistic support for tenants who are navigating the legal process as well as the importance of a client-centered approach. Through the social work program, I have learned that social workers understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the dynamic and interactive process of social work practice with and on behalf of individuals, organizations, and communities. Rising for Justice and the clients I had the honor of serving challenged me in ways a class or books could not, which has made me a stronger advocate for justice.

I often worked with clients who had been through other systems and felt their needs and goals were diminished or flat-out ignored. Understandably, some clients came to me with a stigma about the legal system and social workers. I encountered clients who were managing traumatic memories triggered by the loss of control or sense of safety caused by their current situation. RFJ allowed me the opportunity to work within the legal system while integrating trauma-informed approaches and evidence-based techniques to connect with clients, supporting them in moving toward their goals.

I am deeply grateful for the invaluable experience I’ve had at Rising for Justice. The lessons I’ve learned and the skills I’ve acquired here will undoubtedly shape my future social work endeavors. I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to apply these learnings and continue my growth in the field.”

# CLIENT STORY

## A FULL CIRCLE OF SERVICE FOR HECTOR

*THE STORY BELOW EXEMPLIFIES HOW COLLABORATION BETWEEN RISING FOR JUSTICE'S LEGAL AND SOCIAL WORK UNITS PRODUCES POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS AND PROVIDES REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES FOR BOTH LAW AND SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS.*

"Hector" is a native Spanish-speaker who came to RFJ's Tenant Justice Program (TJP) facing eviction after experiencing a workplace accident that left him physically disabled and unemployed.

RFJ's TJP staff initially referred Hector to RFJ's Social Work division for assistance with issues related to his injuries and housing situation. Disabled and unemployed, Hector was depressed and had difficulty mustering the strength and mental energy to reach out to the resources that RFJ's social work team had provided him.

Recognizing that Hector needed help beyond referrals, the RFJ social work staff went into action. The social work team made calls and scheduled appointments with local agencies that could assist Hector. They completed the necessary applications on Hector's behalf and found Spanish interpreters to minimize communication issues.

While Hector's eviction case was pending, the court issued a protective order payment schedule, payable to the court registry, so that Hector could pay his rent. RFJ's legal team was able to secure client support funds to help Hector cover his second protective order payment. In addition, RFJ's legal team was able to present evidence showing significant housing code violations in Hector's home which made it uninhabitable. As a result, RFJ was able to convince the court to reduce Hector's monthly protective order payments by 44% for five months, and a 65% reduction for the duration of the protective order.

With RFJ's support, Hector also sought mental health counseling for his depression and continues to pay his protective order obligations on time while he awaits a trial date. He has also found temporary housing for himself and his family while his landlord addresses the housing code violations.

RFJ is optimistic that Hector will prevail in his case, and that he and his family will be able to enjoy safe and stable housing.

# 2023 FINANCIALS

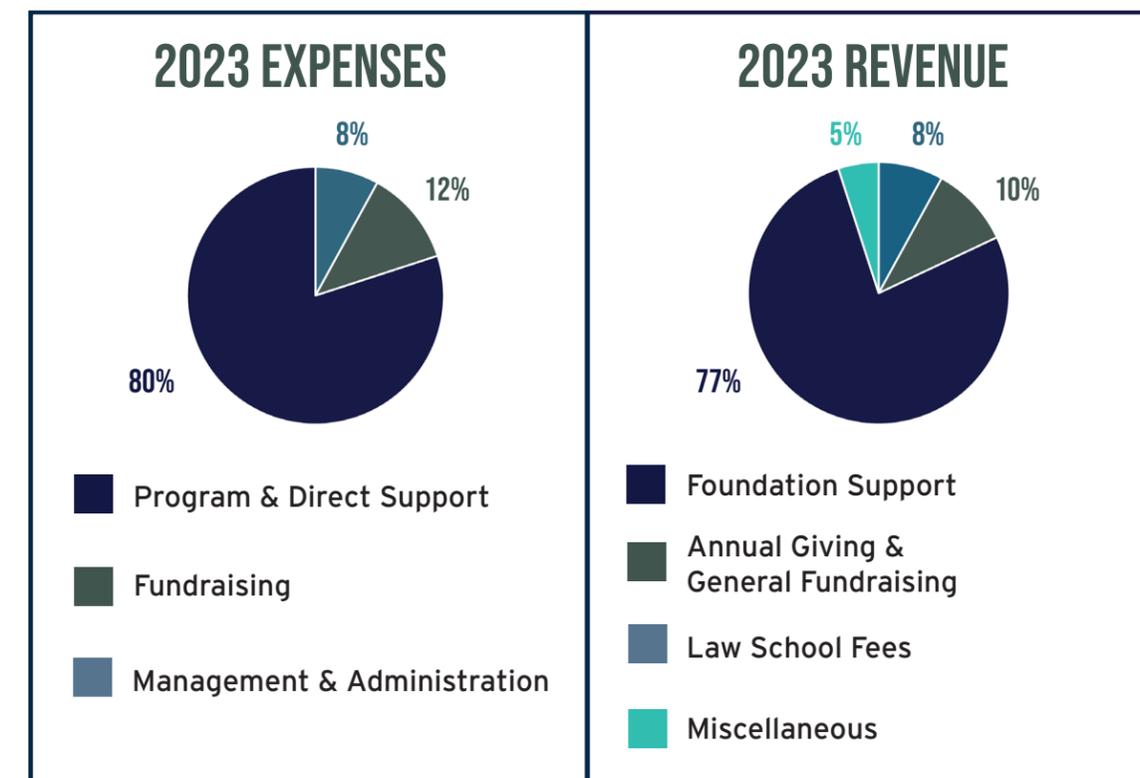
## Statement of Financial Position Fiscal Year January 1, 2023 - December 31, 2023

Income	\$3,637,640
Expenses	\$4,169,843
<b>NET ASSETS, END OF YEAR</b>	<b>\$6,625,329</b>

### SELECTED FUNDING RECEIVED

<b>DC BAR FOUNDATION</b>	
General Support	\$75,000
Civil Legal Counsel Projects Program	\$2,223,354
Civil Protection Order Project	\$79,497
Eviction Diversion Program	\$720,670
Removing Barriers to Opportunity Project ("Expungement Program")	\$139,796
Stabilizing Communities Through Affordable Housing	\$306,457
Greater Washington Community Foundation Health Equity Fund	\$200,000
The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation	\$35,000
The Venable Foundation	\$10,000
Meta	\$10,000
Maximus Foundation	\$5,000
Dimick Foundation	\$3,500

*This report contains a summary of the 2023 financial information and select funding sources. Complete audited financial statements are available from RFJ upon request.*



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# GIVING

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Please join Rising for Justice (RFJ) in celebrating its 55th year. There are many ways to create a lasting legacy by helping RFJ.

Planned gifts provide RFJ with the financial support needed to expand and give donors and their families financial benefits as well. No matter how a donor chooses to express their legacy, this commitment will help RFJ continue to be a powerful force in advocating for equity and justice in Washington, DC.

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**To make a planned gift and join the RFJ Legacy Society, to support RFJ's mission in other ways, or if you have any questions, please email [RFJLegacySociety@risingforjustice.org](mailto:RFJLegacySociety@risingforjustice.org) or call (202) 888-6350.**

\* RISING FOR JUSTICE DOES NOT PROVIDE LEGAL OR TAX ADVICE; THESE EXAMPLES OF TAX BENEFITS ARE BASED ON ASSUMPTIONS THAT MIGHT NOT APPLY TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU SEEK THE ADVICE OF YOUR ATTORNEY, TAX ADVISOR, AND FINANCIAL PLANNER IN CONNECTION WITH ALL GIFT AND ESTATE PLANNING MATTERS.

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DESIGNED, WRITTEN, & EDITED BY EVE ETTINGER, 2024.