



Facts & Statistics

Increased Need in the Pandemic, and Increased Inequality

- The end of 2020 brought the sharpest rise in the U.S. poverty rate since the 1960s according to a [study released in January 2021](#), and it has fallen disproportionately on people of color.
 - Researchers found that the poverty rate increased by almost 2.5 percentage points during the latter half of 2020 as the country continued to suffer the economic impacts from Covid-19.
 - This means an additional 8 million people nationwide are now considered poor.
 - Moreover, the poverty rate for Black Americans is estimated to have jumped by 5.4 percentage points, or by 2.4 million individuals.
- 80% of 9.6 million net jobs lost during the pandemic were people in the bottom quartile of wage earners, and Latino and Black communities were hit hardest by employment losses.
 - Thirty-eight percent of Hispanics and 29% of Black Americans have experienced a layoff in their household at some point during the past year, compared with 21% of white Americans.
 - Even as the economy slowly recovers, unemployment rates among these groups remain disproportionately high.
- Many economists have called this a “K-shaped recovery,” in which:
 - Those with office jobs were able to transition to working from home.
 - Those who worked in hard-hit industries such as entertainment, dining and travel suffered.
 - The poor have struggled to recover financially compared to the wealthy.
 - Black and Latino households haven’t bounced back as well as whites.
- Roughly four in 10 Americans say they’re still feeling the financial impact of the loss of a job or income within their household as the economic recovery remains uneven one year into the coronavirus pandemic.
- Lower-income workers, many of whom are people of color, also were much more likely to get infected. Once sick, people of color were about two to three times as likely to die of Covid as white Americans — in part because of limited access to health care and higher rates of chronic disease.

The Already-High Need for Legal Aid Before the Crisis

- Over 1 million people in Cook County qualify for legal aid, a number that continues to grow as the number of people in poverty increases due to the pandemic.



- Studies have shown that about half of the people who qualify for legal aid will have a legal need over the course of a given year.
 - That translates to about 500,000 low-income people who will have a legal need in Cook County this year.
 - Additionally, tens of thousands of moderate-income Chicagoans struggle to find affordable legal help.
- Fewer than half of the people in need of legal help will be able to get it due to a shortage of pro bono and legal aid resources.
 - As a result, many thousands of low-income and disadvantaged people—more than ever before—are going to court unrepresented.
 - A recent national study estimates that in civil cases, at least one party is unrepresented in 3 out of 4 cases.
- The legal needs of low-income people run the gamut, from very simple questions that can be answered online or by court help desks, to complex problems that require hours of individual, and often specialized, legal counseling and extended representation.
- As the national publication [*Roll Call reported*](#), "civil legal aid groups in the COVID-19 era are among the first responders for Americans who need help navigating the legal system to fight unfair evictions and foreclosures, get domestic abuse protective orders, obtain unemployment or unpaid wages, access health care, or respond to scammers."

Legal Aid's Proven Impact—a Solid Investment

- CARPLS—Cook County's legal aid hotline which receives funding from the Campaign—provided over 60,000 legal consultations last year.
- Illinoisans visited www.illinoislegalaid.org almost 2 million times in 2020. Illinois Legal Aid Online, which receives funding from the Campaign, provides legal information and resources for the public to help people better understand their rights and responsibilities and assist them in navigating the legal system.
- **Having a Lawyer Matters:** Studies consistently show that in contested matters in court, the outcome often turns on whether or not a low-income or disadvantaged person has representation. Some findings from studies include:
 - **Domestic Violence.** Domestic violence survivors represented by an attorney are 2½ times more likely to be successful in obtaining a protective order than those who do not have a lawyer.
 - **Eviction.** Fully represented tenants win or settle their cases 96% of the time. A recent Chicago study found that almost 80% of landlords had lawyers, while only 11% of tenants did.



- **Debt Collection.** A defendant with a lawyer was four times more likely to prevail in a debt collection case than a defendant who was unrepresented. Represented defendants secured a settlement in nearly 25% of the cases, compared to 6.4% for unrepresented defendants.
- **Special Education.** In special education due process hearings without a lawyer, the parent and child won only 20% of the time. With representation, that number rose to 50%.
- **Unaccompanied Immigrant Children.** In almost half of the cases in which a child had a lawyer in immigration court, the court allowed the child to stay in the United States. When children appeared in immigration court without a lawyer, nine out of ten were ordered deported.
- **Asylum.** The single greatest factor that affects whether an asylum seeker wins or loses in immigration court is whether the applicant has a lawyer. Over the course of a year, only 11% of those without legal representation were granted asylum; with legal representation, the odds rose to 54%.
- A [major recent study](#) confirms that legal representation for low-income people has a number of other benefits, improving the experience for the litigants and significantly increasing court efficiency at the same time.
 - In landlord/tenant matters and contested child custody cases, legal representation dramatically improves court efficiencies and outcomes for low-income people. Representation by an attorney significantly increases the likelihood of settlement in eviction cases and the longevity of court orders in child custody cases, resulting in lower court costs and more family stability.
- Legal aid in Illinois produces an almost 2:1 economic return on investment according to a comprehensive Illinois [study](#). The study's limited sampling of organizations alone produced economic benefits of more than \$70 million in a year.
 - By obtaining protective orders, divorces, child custody and legal recognition for domestic violence victims, a sampling of legal aid programs in the study saved \$9.4 million in costs that otherwise would have been required had they not received that legal help.
 - By assisting clients with foreclosures, evictions or other housing issues, just a small sample of legal aid programs avoided \$1.9 million in costs related to homelessness.

The Legal Community's Increasingly Critical Role in Funding

- The legal community's support of legal aid is an increasingly critical source of funding. It has grown significantly over the past 13 years both through the Investing in Justice Campaign and in direct support to the many outstanding pro bono and legal aid organizations serving the community.
 - Since its inception in 2007, our legal community has collectively contributed more than \$18 million to the Campaign to support the work of our community's pro bono and legal aid organizations and their dedicated attorneys.



- Over the same period, contributions from individuals directly to our community's pro bono and legal aid organizations have more than doubled.
- Since the Campaign's inception, the number of individual donors to the Campaign has more than tripled. At the same time the number of individual donors to pro bono and legal aid organizations in the Chicago area has also grown significantly.



Government Funding Not Keeping Up Despite the Growing Need

- While there have been new streams of funding for specific legal needs, the State’s appropriation for broad-based legal aid through the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation is still less than the collective individual contributions to the Investing in Justice Campaign. At just \$1.4 million annually, Illinois is far below other large states like California, Texas and New York.
- While the Legal Services Corporation received an increase in its funding in 2019, since 1981 federal funding for legal aid has been cut in half in real dollars at the same time the need for legal aid has increased by over 50% to almost 60 million people eligible today.

Our Combined Impact through the Campaign

- More than 30 pro bono and legal aid organizations and related initiatives receive funding from the Campaign and are able to help tens of thousands of low-income and disadvantaged people each year as a direct result.
- The Campaign funds a continuum of legal services to help people in need, ranging from web-based information and resources, legal aid hotlines, advice desks and clinics, to extended legal representation and larger impact litigation and advocacy.
- In 2020, pro bono and legal aid organizations funded through the Investing in Justice Campaign helped over 100,000 people in need.
- Last year, almost 13,000 people received brief advice and legal help at court-based advice desks that receive funding from the Campaign.
- Your contributions to the Investing in Justice Campaign leverage more than \$700,000 in support from other foundations and government entities that would not otherwise be available to organizations supported by the Campaign.

Contributions Go a Long Way

- \$100 will help three people get brief advice and assistance at a help desk in the Circuit Court providing remote services.
- \$250 will help seven people get brief advice on the CARPLS legal aid hotline.
- \$500 will help someone in need to get extended legal representation for many typical cases handled by pro bono and legal aid programs.
- \$1,000 will enable a domestic violence survivor to get an order of protection, an important step in providing safety and starting the journey to longer-term stability and independence.



Impact Stories

The five examples below are representative stories from the many thousands of low-income and disadvantaged people who depend on Chicago's pro bono and legal aid organizations to protect their safety and independence. Your Campaign contributions help make that possible through CBF grants to more than 30 pro bono and legal aid organizations and related initiatives, including the ones below.

Protecting and Empowering Domestic Violence Survivors

Ariel came to Ascend Justice as a survivor of domestic violence who was trying to keep her children safe. Her husband had been repeatedly physically, sexually, and verbally abusing Ariel and her four children, and after the most recent incident of abuse, she found a gun in her husband's car. Fearing for her family's safety, Ariel sought an Order of Protection through Ascend Justice's remote hotline. A staff attorney assisted Ariel in receiving an Order of Protection via Zoom hearings to protect Ariel and her children. After more threats from her husband, Ascend Justice quickly filed for further relief including a U visa application, a form of immigration protection for victims of crime that could provide a pathway to citizenship for Ariel and her children.

Throughout the entire legal process, Ascend Justice's Client Support Coordinators offered Ariel emotional support by attending her Zoom hearings with her, and they also worked alongside her attorneys to help her get back on her feet. They were even able to provide her family with Christmas presents through the support of generous donors. Without organizations like Ascend Justice that you are supporting through the Investing in Justice Campaign, the myriad issues domestic violence survivors face may seem insurmountable. However, with comprehensive legal and social services, survivors like Ariel and her children are empowered to move on from their abuse and have a chance to live happy and safe lives.

Empowering Veterans and Others Hit Hard by the Pandemic

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Emilio, a veteran, lost his job and quickly found himself at risk of losing his home. He called CARPLS in a panic, and a staff attorney was able to walk Emilio through his mortgage forbearance options and guide him through the process. Emilio reported that "When my call ended, I felt a peace of mind and knew what I needed to do to move forward."

Like Emilio, so many people have reached out to CARPLS throughout the pandemic to ask which bill to pay first to preserve their homes and livelihoods, and what happens to them next will depend on whether they have access to competent legal assistance. This could mean the difference between shelter and homelessness; medical assistance



and unnecessary physical suffering; food on a family's table and hunger; economic stability and bankruptcy; productive work and unemployment. Through the guidance of organizations like CARPLS that you are supporting through the Investing in Justice Campaign.

Empowering Parents to Advocate for their Children

"Marie," the mother of a three-year-old with down-syndrome, just wanted what was best for her child. When she learned that her child's school district was considering moving her child to an overly restrictive self-contained special education program several miles away from her home school, she was concerned for both her child's education and safety. She contacted Equip for Equality (EFE) prior to an Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting with school officials. EFE sent advice and resources to assist Marie in preparing for the meeting, including helping her develop arguments related to the student's right to receive services in the least restrictive environment possible.

Empowered by the assistance she received, the IEP meeting was a success. The school district did not proceed with changing the student's school placement. In fact, they agreed to support the student in attending the regular preschool program one day a week with push-in support from the speech language pathologist. Marie expressed gratitude to EFE by noting that her daughter had "already shown improvements with slight modifications in the classroom."

An IEP meeting can completely alter a child's educational trajectory and it is crucial that organizations like EFE, one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Investing in Justice Campaign, are there to support families in advocating for their child. Beyond education, this type of legal assistance creates more pathways for people with disabilities to be fully included in their communities and to live to their full potentials.

Protecting and Empowering Homeless Students Amidst the Pandemic

As the pandemic took hold of our daily lives and required schools to shift to remote learning, the adjustment to remote learning was difficult for all families, but the change most negatively affected Chicago's most vulnerable students: those experiencing homelessness. In response, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Investing in Justice Campaign, formed the CPS Focus Group, a committee of parents and grandparents with lived experience of homelessness whose children or grandchildren attend Chicago Public Schools.



The CPS Focus Group led tremendous advocacy for the rights these students during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that *all* students had access to the resources needed to receive an education remotely. Because of the Focus Group’s hard work, CPS responded by distributing hotspot devices and computers to families in need and worked with the City of Chicago to implement the Chicago Connected program to provide free internet to students, prioritizing students experiencing homelessness. The Focus Group even gained national attention leading to the donation of 31 laptops and more than \$1,395 in gift cards. Without the efforts of CCH and the CPS Focus Group, Chicago students experiencing homelessness would have been left behind in the transition to remote learning. However, through advocacy and education, these students were able to receive the education they not only deserve but are legally obligated to receive.

Protecting and Empowering a Teen Starting a New Life Here

Mehari came to the United States with his aunt after they fled their home country of Eritrea and lived in an Ethiopian refugee camp for several years. The Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC) contacted Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS), one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Investing in Justice Campaign, for help filing a guardianship petition for Mehari’s aunt to obtain legal guardianship over him. The Court’s Guardianship Desk staff prepared the guardianship petition and related documents for Mehari’s aunt, with help from a case manager and interpreter from ECAC.

However, when the case went to court, the judge continued the case and appointed CVLS as guardian ad litem (GAL), because Mehari had told the judge that he did not want to live with his aunt because she frequently yelled at and hit him. Fortunately, CVLS attorneys located a couple that was mentoring Mehari at school who were willing to serve as his guardians and the aunt agreed to withdraw her petition in favor of them. Mehari successfully shaped his own future with the assistance of the CVLS GAL, and his new guardians were able to find the support they needed to help this now 15-year-old refugee transition to his new life in the United States.