

# Invest In Justice Today



**Investing In Justice** Campaign 2024  
Justice People Deserve, Not Just What They Can Afford.

## Why Supporting Legal Aid Matters

### Need for Legal Aid

- Over 1 million people in Cook County qualify for legal aid, and about half of them will face a legal issue over the coming year.
- However, fewer than half of the people in need of legal help will be able to get it due to limited pro bono and legal aid resources.
- As the national publication [Roll Call reported](#), legal aid organizations “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

- **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.
  - **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%.

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## Impact Stories

*The six 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.*

### **Creating a Community Where All Students Can Thrive**

Joanna is a sophomore in high school in Chicago who loves art and dancing and has danced in her high school's selective dance program since her freshman year. Her dream is to go to college to study sports medicine or kinesiology and she was working hard to make that possible.

However, a reading evaluation revealed that she was reading at a fourth-grade level and making little progress. The special education services she was receiving were not proving to be sufficient.

With the help of lawyers at the James B. Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Campaign, Joanna was able to successfully advocate for the school to provide intensive, private reading instruction for her. And with these private reading instructions, Joanna is now reading at a 10th-grade level.

Today, Joanna's confidence at school is flourishing. Her goal for this academic year is to achieve a 4.0 GPA – a goal that would have seemed unattainable just one year ago. Joanna is not only confident that she will attend college, but that she has the academic ability to attend the school of her choice.

Through your support of the Investing in Justice Campaign, you are helping ensure more young people in our community like Joanna have access to the education they need to thrive in school and beyond.

### **A Second Chance for a Powerful Violence Prevention Advocate**

Javier is well known and respected in his community as a fierce advocate for nonviolence and a violence interrupter with a proven ability to combat gang violence. When there is a shooting in the area, Javier and his team are the first to be called to manage the crisis. Once a gang member and drug user himself, Javier had a long criminal history and knew all too well how gang violence can derail someone's life. Now, Javier has been sober and out of trouble for years and has been working with nonviolence groups around Chicago, building his reputation as an invaluable member of the community.

So trusted in the community, Javier was called by the local high school to lead nonviolence programming there. Unfortunately, due to his past, he was unable to pass the background check required to work with students. Javier knew it was time to get his record cleared so that he could move on from the person he was in the past and continue to do good work in the community, but he faced a daunting process to do so.

With the help of the CP4P Justice Corps at the Legal Aid Society (LAS), one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Campaign, Javier began the process of having his criminal

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record expunged and sealed. LAS attorneys advocated for the person Javier is now and the important role he plays in community safety.

After a long hearing in which Javier's past mistakes were meticulously examined, the judge was deeply moved and Javier's Petition to Expunge and Seal his criminal records was granted. Now Javier can continue to build on the nonviolence work he is doing and help keep our community safe.

## **Helping a Veteran Stand Up to the Government to Fix a Mistake that Upended his Life**

Horacio, a retired Marine discharged for health-related reasons, now relies on disability benefits to maintain a stable income and health coverage. He was doing okay until he was informed by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that he had been overpaid benefits and owed SSA nearly \$9,000, which left him both mystified and terrified. He was certain this was an error but needed some assistance proving it.

That's when Legal Council for Health Justice, one of the many great organizations you are supporting through the Campaign, got involved. The Legal Council team was able to prove this charge was made in error due to the SSA misinterpreting Horacio's disability payments from the VA as income, and the alleged debt that had upended his life was ultimately erased. Now, Horacio again has a stable income due to his monthly benefits being resumed, and he can access Medicaid benefits for his ongoing care.

## **Justice for a Survivor**

Crystal is a hardworking mother who is raising five young children. She is also a survivor of sex trafficking, having escaped a man who was trying to kill her and is now serving a 50-year sentence in federal prison. Crystal was able to escape her trafficker when a woman saw her running and paid a taxi to take Crystal away. Crystal swore then that she would pay that deed forward.

That day came when Crystal witnessed a man abusing a woman on the street. Crystal yelled at the man to stop and stated that she had a licensed, concealed carry weapon. The man then rushed Crystal, forcing her to shoot him in self-defense. While the man survived, Crystal was sentenced to prison for her role in the shooting. However, during her case, no one shared her history as a survivor and why it was important for her to stop and help the woman being abused.

*I am afraid.  
I wonder if my mom's okay.  
I hear her cries.  
I see her in pain.  
I want her home. I am afraid.*  
- Heaven, Crystal's 13- year-old daughter

Attorneys for the Incarcerated Survivors Program at Ascend Justice, one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Campaign, petitioned the court to resentence Crystal based on her history of gender-based violence with the help of pro bono counsel. Over 40 attorneys and domestic violence advocates packed the courtroom in support of Crystal, and after observing the support of the domestic violence community and hearing Crystal's powerful testimony, the judge reduced Crystal's sentence to the minimum possible and told Crystal that she had reclaimed her voice that day.

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access  
to justice  
for all

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## Helping an Afghan Evacuee Find a New Place to Call Home

Ahmad is a loving husband and father who for over a decade worked as a translator for the U.S. Military in Afghanistan. He played a significant role in helping the U.S. Military's efforts to keep Afghanistan safe during that time.

As the Taliban began to retake control of Afghanistan, Ahmad's U.S. military commander told him he needed to flee the country immediately. While Ahmad was fortunate to get out as part of the U.S. evacuation, he was forced to leave behind his family and the life they had built there.

After arriving in the U.S., Ahmad connected with North Suburban Legal Aid (NSLAC), one of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Campaign, who helped him to apply for the Special Immigrant Visa available to Afghans who worked for the U.S. government. Ahmad worked tirelessly to get a required letter of support, and due to his resilience and connections in the military, his application was ultimately approved. NSLAC then helped Ahmad file for his green card, which was approved in record time due to his resourcefulness and fluency in English.

Now, just a year and a half after he was forced to flee his home, Ahmad is safely in the U.S. and is working with NSLAC to get his wife and children to join him in his new community.

## A Place to Call Home

Jackie is a mother of four and an active youth advocate and leader in her community. As she worked to find safe and stable housing for her family, she was excited to move to a three-bedroom subsidized apartment after spending seven years on the housing program's waitlist.

Unfortunately, less than three months before her current transitional housing lease was set to expire, Jackie was notified that her housing application was denied due to inaccurate information that came up on a private background screening the housing provider had requested.

Frustrated and in a scramble to find new housing, Jackie put in several requests to have the report corrected but all went unanswered. With few options and the fear that this inaccurate report could affect her ability to find other housing and employment, Jackie turned to the Law Project of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and the Shriver Center for Poverty Law, two of the many outstanding organizations you are supporting through the Campaign. With the help of pro bono attorneys, they filed suit on Jackie's behalf and enabled her to advocate for the truth to come out.

After two years of litigation, Jackie was able to obtain a favorable settlement, and she now lives in permanent housing with her family.