

# Rising for Justice

A photograph of the Washington Monument and the US Capitol building in Washington, D.C., taken at sunset. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The Washington Monument stands prominently in the center, with the US Capitol building visible to its right. The foreground shows some greenery and a bridge.

## Annual Report

2022

# Letter from the Executive Director

Friends,

In the course of 2022, Rising for Justice provided critical legal and social services to more than 4,000 low-income District of Columbia residents, trained 65 talented law and social work students in our clinical programs, and engaged with hundreds of local residents to advise them about their legal rights. Those numbers notwithstanding, we continue to face an increasing call for our services.

As the legal challenges confronting our clients have grown, so has our vision to serve them. To actualize that vision, we initiated a strategic expansion in each of our practice areas last year that was tailored to meet some of the most pressing needs of the community.

The Tenant Justice Program saw notable development in both scope and depth. With last summer's launch of an exciting new impact litigation initiative, we can now fight affirmatively to prevent the displacement of low-income tenants on a building-wide or larger scale. As for the program's core practice, we increased staffing levels, which strengthened our ability to provide quality legal services on a daily basis in D.C.'s Landlord and Tenant Court. Overall law student enrollment in our housing advocacy and litigation clinic also received a boost with the inauguration of a summer internship program for law students from local HBCUs.

In addition to those advances, we forged new partnerships with community organizations to more proactively connect us with tenants at risk of eviction so we might extend help early on—an approach that often offers the best opportunity to keep tenants in their homes. And lastly, we established a Client Support Fund to subsidize certain expenses our clients face in bringing or maintaining litigation.

I'm also happy to note that our social work division, which was started in 2017 with only one part-time social worker, grew significantly last year with the addition of several social work and support positions. This expansion allows the social work team to engage with a much greater number of our clients across all practice areas, empowering them to effectively address

circumstances that may have contributed to their legal problems and to move surely and sustainably toward housing stability and economic mobility.

Finally, in both the Expungement Program and our Civil Protection Order Project (CPOP), we leveraged our resources to augment the number and type of pro bono opportunities we offer and provide greater access to counsel for our client community. Over several months, we piloted an associate training program designed to meet two critical needs: the need to provide representation to indigent and low-income respondents in CPO cases and the training need that area law firms have to provide actual in-court trial experience to their associates. In our Expungement Program, we secured the funding to add legal staff as well as dedicated social work support. With this considerable increase in staffing and by expanding our community and pro bono partnerships, we are well-positioned to help the many D.C. residents wishing to remove the barriers to opportunity posed by their criminal records.

This Annual Report describes in greater detail the program initiatives of the year now behind us. With your support, we can sustain our growth and help even more of our neighbors overcome significant hardships in the years to come.

With gratitude,



Grace M. Lopes

*Executive Director*



# Areas of Impact

## Clinical Education

Rising for Justice’s law school clinical program equips students with practical lawyering skills while providing legal representation to low-income D.C. residents. We strive to train each of our students to be the best litigator our clients could have and to instill in them a spirit of public service. The many law students who participated in our clinics and summer internship program acted as direct advocates for our clients in D.C.’s Landlord-Tenant Court under the supervision of experienced clinical supervising attorneys.

## Housing

Most low-income D.C. residents do not have access to an attorney when facing housing-related legal issues with their homes on the line. We address this injustice by providing tenants with same-day representation at the D.C. 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 through building-wide or other high-impact initiatives. Our staff advocates for thousands of D.C. residents in housing matters every year.

## Expungement

Our expungement program is designed to give justice-involved individuals a fresh start by sealing their criminal records and thereby removing barriers to economic mobility, including barriers to employment, housing stability, and educational opportunities. The program provides free legal counsel for low-income D.C. residents who want to eliminate the collateral consequences of a criminal record, but are faced with D.C.’s daunting record-sealing process. Demand for representation is high, and we are one of few local organizations that offer these legal services for low-income residents.

## Civil Protection Order Project

Rising for Justice’s Civil Protection Order (CPO) Project serves respondents in CPO and anti-stalking order (ASO) matters with same-day intake/advice and mediation support. Our staff also provides full representation, often facilitating resolution of serious conflicts, which in turn can assist entire families. Because of our work, there is a greater likelihood respondents will comply with resulting CPOs and ASOs. We are one of the few organizations in the District and the nation, with this distinct focus.

## Social Work

Because we recognize that the legal challenges our clients confront often relate to other aspects of their lives, our Social Work Program addresses each client’s overall circumstances, helping pave a clear path to long-term success. The Social Work Program is a corollary to our law student clinic, by training graduate students pursuing Master of Social Work degrees in the context of a clinical field placement. Our social work staff and students team up with our law students, paralegals, and experienced attorneys to provide comprehensive assistance to our clients.

## Community Empowerment

Rising for Justice provides community legal education events and “Know Your Rights” presentations for community organizations throughout the District to empower low-income individuals to advocate for themselves and increase the chances of fair treatment in the absence of legal counsel. These events connect us with community members who can benefit from our tenants’ rights, record-sealing, social work, and CPO-related legal services.

## Mission

Rising for Justice is a leader in training social justice advocates and representing low-income clients in matters critical to their wellbeing. We make justice a reality for vulnerable D.C. residents by providing free, high-quality legal representation in tandem with social work services to promote long-lasting positive outcomes for our clients. Since our founding in 1969, we have protected the rights of over 250,000 D.C. residents and given thousands of law students hands-on intensive training to prepare them for public interest careers.



# By the Numbers

*In 2022, Rising for Justice:*

**Trained  
65 law &  
social work  
graduate  
students.**

Our talented student attorneys and graduate social work students provide thousands of hours of pro bono services to our neighbors in need, while developing the skills to excel in their professions.

**Provided 4,289  
low-income D.C.  
residents with free  
legal and social work  
services, trainings,  
and educational  
presentations.**

Provided 3,436 clients with direct legal services, offered community legal education trainings and Know Your Rights presentations to 656 attendees, and served 206 individuals and their families with social work services.

**Partnered  
with 162 pro  
bono attorneys  
through our  
expungement  
program.**

Each pro bono partner received training and guidance from our program staff, providing legal advice and representation to 213 clients seeking to seal 1,195 criminal cases.

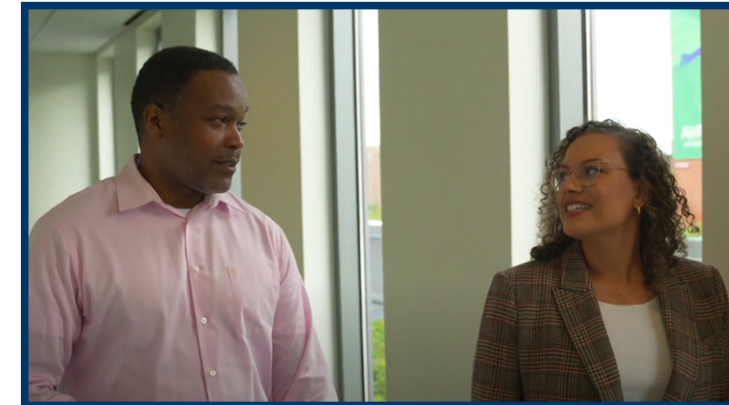
## Client Testimonials

“I built a life for myself and my two brothers (who I have custody over) in our D.C. apartment, which had been severely neglected by the landlord. The landlord would not accept any requests I made for any maintenance – my oven didn’t work, my shower didn’t work, my bathroom had no door, and I had a bedbug infestation. Not only did the landlord refuse to fix the issues, they stopped accepting my rent and told me I had to leave.

The Rising for Justice staff made me feel safe, prepared me for court, and empowered me to speak up for myself. When the judge gave the verdict that we won the case, I was so happy and relieved. My brothers and I have a roof over our heads and we can continue building our lives together. I was so grateful to have Rising for Justice by my side to fight for my rights.”



**Leyli Santos**



**John Murphy**

“In the course of a couple of years, I must have applied for well over forty jobs and didn’t get a call back from any of them. I realized that [my criminal record] was going to forever haunt me, and that’s when I reached out to Rising for Justice. Reaching out [to my attorney] and communicating with her was a life-changing moment for me. She was really the first kind ear that I think I had in this process. It was the first moment that I felt like I had an actual advocate for me.

After my record was sealed, I was ecstatic. It felt like I had a chance to have my life back. I feel very fortunate.”

# Student Clinic Experiences

*The Housing Advocacy and Litigation Clinic gives students an invaluable opportunity to practice law in the context of a dynamic legal services program with dedicated and intensive attorney supervision. The curriculum promotes development of practical and fundamental lawyering skills while providing high quality legal representation to actual clients.*



“If you had told me six months ago that I would be advocating for my own clients several times in front of a judge and negotiating with opposing counsel, I would not have believed it.”

**Natali Collazos,**  
American University  
Washington College of Law



“I love being part of Rising for Justice, which feels like it’s a D.C. institution. And there are so many people I’ve met who are really excited when they hear that I’m part of what was D.C. Law Students in Court. It feels nice to be part of [that] tradition, community.

If you are interested in working directly with clients and studying not only the legal issues that affect them, but getting to know what’s happening in our own city, related to the housing crisis, then this clinic is for you.”

**Richmond Blake,**  
Georgetown University Law Center



**Drolma Gesang,**  
George Washington  
University Law School

“This clinic is not like a class with an exam, it’s not hypothetical. This is a real client. For my first case, I spent so much time with another clinic student preparing and poring over the case. After the trial, the client called me and told me that I’m going to be an amazing attorney. That was very special, because I never thought I could be a litigator. This experience has made me realize that I can help people. Even though it was a small case, I feel that I am competent, I have some knowledge, and I have some skills that can be useful in helping others when they’re helpless.”



**Asia Hartgrove,**  
University of the District  
of Columbia David A.  
Clarke School of Law

“Becoming an effective advocate is the core experience of the Rising for Justice clinic. Prior to coming to Rising for Justice, I didn’t have litigation or advocacy experience. Through the clinic, I was able to advocate for my clients before a magistrate judge. This allowed me to gain practical legal experience and develop as a lawyer. I always knew I was going to pursue a legal career and have sought to be a lawyer with the skills to help individuals in tough situations. Rising for Justice empowered me to be that person.”



# Pro Bono Program

*Our robust Pro Bono Program increases our impact by providing legal assistance and representation to D.C. residents who do not have access to counsel. Current pro bono opportunities include representation of clients in our Expungement and CPO Programs, where we provide training and mentoring to attorneys throughout the entire process.*

## Thank you to our 2022 pro bono partners:

**Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton**  
**Community Family Life Services**

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**Covington & Burling**

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**Proskauer Rose**

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**WilmerHale**

**Zuckerman Spaeder**

## Want to help?

*Pro Bono attorneys have the opportunity to represent clients eligible for D.C. criminal record sealing or who are involved in CPO/ASO matters. Rising for Justice provides training and mentoring throughout the entire process. For more information about pro bono opportunities, please visit us at [risingforjustice.org/support/pro-bono/](https://risingforjustice.org/support/pro-bono/)*

“Rising for Justice represents clients with limited financial resources, and who are being pulled into courts that are going to be hostile to their interests from the get-go. It was inspiring to work with Rising for Justice staff – client counsel and guidance were handled skillfully, and we were able to advocate very strongly for the client’s interests. Rising for Justice is a critical organization not only for the community at large, but also for young attorneys. The pro bono program is a real opportunity to develop skills and to help indigent individuals get outcomes in cases where they are facing many barriers. It’s been a privilege and an honor to work with them.”



**Alyssa Howard**

Associate, Zuckerman Spaeder LLP

“Through the Rising for Justice Expungement Program I worked with a client who was a hard-working member of our community, a father, and just an all-around incredible human being. When I was able to call my client and tell him that the bad night he had over a decade ago was something he would never have to tell anyone about again, I could tell it was a huge weight lifted. It was an incredibly powerful moment. He knew that he could apply for a job he was excited about without his record following him.”

**Lauren Taylor**

Associate, Kirkland & Ellis



# Celebration of Service 2022

*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 – the first held in person since 2019 – honored Julie Jacobs, General Counsel of HP Inc., and featured keynote speaker, Eric Holder, former Attorney General of the United States. Our program host was Heather Pinckney, alumna of our law school clinical program, Board member of Rising for Justice, and Director of the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia.*



“Lawyers have to play a significant role in the resolution of the most pressing issues facing our nation, such as systemic racism. If you look at our history, so much of the social progress made in this nation comes as a result of protecting and securing rights and winning cases in court. When it comes to inequities that we still see, whether it’s voting rights or housing insecurity, lawyers can get involved and make a difference.”  
— Eric Holder

For more information visit [www.risingforjustice.org/2022-celebration-of-service/](http://www.risingforjustice.org/2022-celebration-of-service/)



“As a proud alumna, and now Board member, I have seen first-hand how Rising for Justice literally changes lives and serves as a resource for our neighbors who find themselves persecuted or just plain beaten down by our justice system.”  
— Heather Pinckney

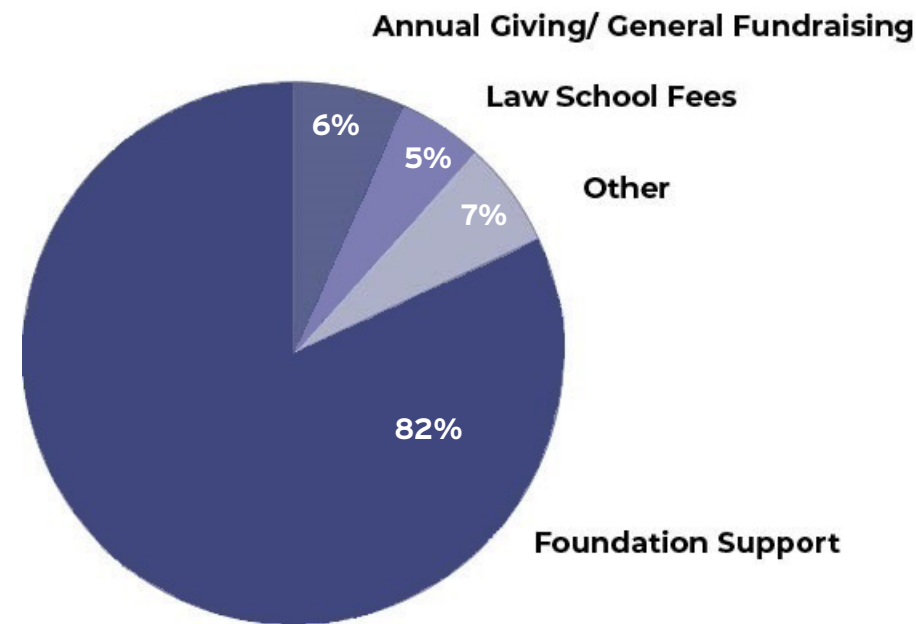
*Thank you to our gracious Board of Directors, Host Committee, and sponsors, whose efforts helped raise critical funds needed to support our multifaceted programs that build equity and justice for all people in Washington, D.C.*

“The Celebration of Service spotlights what really matters: empowering our community members, leading with compassion, and inspiring others to do the same. Rising for Justice reminds us to lead and work with compassion and care for those around us.”  
— Julie Jacobs

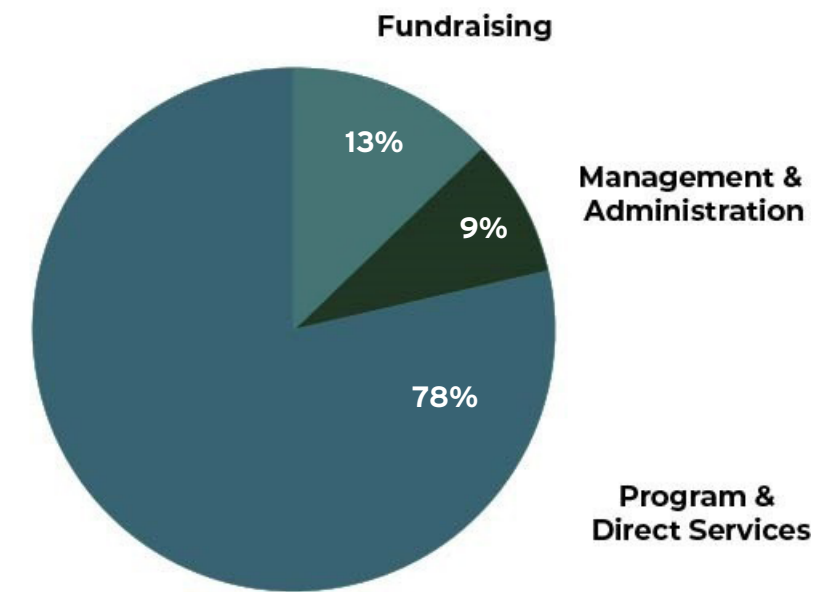


# 2022 Financials

## Revenue



## Expenses



*Data based on unaudited financials. Revenue in 2022 totaled \$6,180,422 and expenses totaled \$3,508,608.*

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For the past five years I have had the privilege of working closely with Rising for Justice’s exceptional staff and Board of Directors, who inspire me with their talent, dedication, and care in service of others. I thank them sincerely for their efforts in making the District a better place for all of us.

In 2022, Rising for Justice tackled some of the most vexing challenges facing our community, while continuing to improve the lives of our most vulnerable neighbors across the District. In addition to helping to keep families in their homes and carrying on the long-standing tradition of training the next generation of social justice advocates, Rising for Justice staff continue to remove barriers to employment and other opportunities, enforce due process principles, promote long-lasting solutions, and give a voice and expertise to those who have no place else to turn.

To all of our supporters, we at Rising for Justice express our profound gratitude for all that you do. Our ability to fight and ensure justice for our community members is possible because of you.

Helen Dooley  
*Board President*

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