

SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA LEGAL SERVICES

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OUR MISSION

To achieve justice for low-income people in Louisiana by enforcing and defending their legal rights through civil legal aid, advocacy, and community education.



OUR VISION

A society in which equal justice for all is a reality.

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MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

For over 50 years Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) has been a lifeline for vulnerable families in times of crisis. Just as our community began to recover from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricane Ida's devastating impact presented another setback for already struggling families. Every day the SLLS team of dedicated attorneys, support staff, board members, donors, and volunteers are fighting for fairness for the most vulnerable people in our community. Now more than ever civil legal aid plays a critical role in ensuring that no one is left behind in the recovery process.



It will be years before many parts of our community feel "normal" again. Over the past year we have grown to a staff of more than 175 to meet the increasing needs of our community. Just as we did after Hurricane Katrina, SLLS will continue to grow and evolve in the way we deliver services to ensure equal access to justice for all.

I am proud and honored to serve as the SLLS Board President and to present our 2022 Annual Report to you.

Lauren Bridges

President, SLLS Board of Directors

SLLS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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ABOUT SLLS

OUR HISTORY

For over 50 years, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) has provided a legal safety net. We serve 22 parishes covering half of Louisiana's low-income population from our offices in Baton Rouge, Covington, Gretna, Hahnville, Hammond, Houma, and New Orleans. SLLS attorneys and support staff are complemented by pro bono attorneys, law students, and other volunteers. We work in partnership with other community stakeholders. SLLS provides legal help for indigent and other vulnerable people who cannot afford a lawyer. We protect livelihoods, health, housing, and families. Programs like ours are essential to assuring fairness for all in the civil justice system.

OUR PRIORITIES







Protecting Children Preserving Housing and Families

Domestic Violence Family Law Child in Need of Care Elder Law

Eviction Defense Foreclosure Prevention

Landlord-Tenant Succession for Homes Fair Housing Rights

Economic Stability

Employment Law
Public Benefits
Education and Health
Consumer and Tax
Expungements

Legal Help for Special Populations

Homeless Advocacy Rights of the Disabled Disaster Survivors Veterans Projects

AREAS SERVED

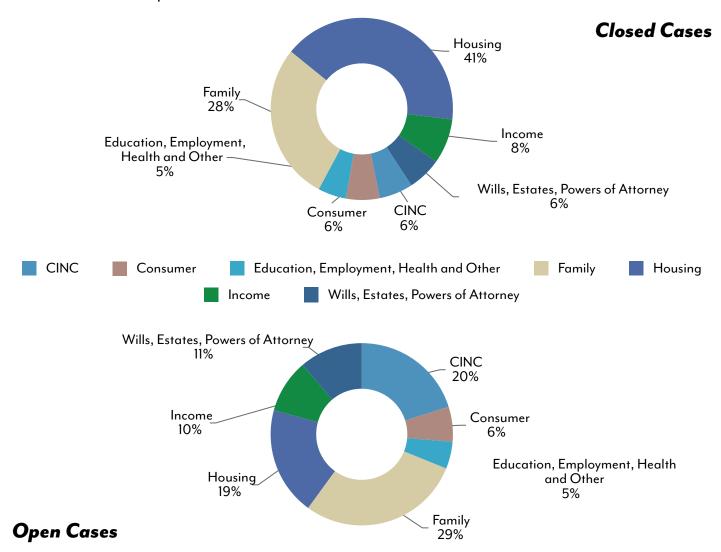


Ascension Parish
Assumption Parish
East Baton Rouge Parish
East Feliciana Parish
Iberville Parish
Jefferson Parish
Lafourche Parish
Livingston Parish
Orleans Parish
Plaquemines Parish

St. Bernard Parish
St. Charles Parish
St. Helena Parish
St. James Parish
St. John the Baptist Parish
St. Tammany Parish
Tangipahoa Parish
Terrebonne Parish
Washington Parish
West Baton Rouge Parish

2022 BY THE NUMBERS

Having an SLLS attorney prevents loss of family, food, shelter, income, medical care, or personal safety. In 2022 Southeast Louisiana Legal Services handled *13,495* cases helping *29,676* people. We closed *9,609* cases. As we headed into 2022, *3,810* cases remained open. The charts below are a breakdown of our 2022 closed and open cases.



\$ ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$35.6 MILLION

Louisiana saw \$35,625,728.60 in economic benefits by providing Civil Legal Aid through Southeast Louisiana Legal Services in 2022

The direct economic impact of our 2022 work for our clients exceeded \$35.6 million. This represents income secured; assets or benefits protected, such as the value of homes saved from foreclosure; consumer debt relief; health coverage obtained; housing subsidies preserved; financial support for hard-working families; and much more. An Economic Impact Study on the value of civil legal aid released in 2022 by the Louisiana Bar Foundation found that for every \$1 supporting programs like SLLS, there is \$17.99 in social return on investment in immediate and long-term cost savings.

JUSTICE FOR ALL: SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY WINS



We expanded our services to include on-the-spot representation to people who would otherwise be self-represented litigants in Baton Rouge City Court, as well as First and Second City Court in New Orleans and the busiest Justice of the Peace Court in Jefferson Parish. An August 2022 White House report and a White House Eviction Reform Summit lauded the New Orleans eviction diversion project's 96% favorable outcomes with 72% wins and 22 % mixed results.

SLLS intervened in the foreclosure of six properties owned by notorious slumlord Joshua Bruno in New Orleans. We represented individual tenants and the New Orleans Renters Rights Assembly in efforts to improve living conditions. Bruno attempted to evade our efforts by filing a Chapter 11 business bankruptcy in 2022, an area outside our expertise. With pro bono assistance, SLLS pursued the case in bankruptcy court. After a four-day trial, the Judge ruled in favor of appointing a Trustee to manage the properties during bankruptcy. SLLS now seeks permanent redevelopment of the properties into safe, affordable housing and compensation for unsecured tenant creditors in bankruptcy.

DISASTER LAW COLLABORATION SUMMIT

Thanks to an LSC Disaster Grant, SLLS partnered with the Louisiana State Bar Association Access to Justice Department to host Louisiana's first-ever Disaster Law Collaboration Summit. Over 200 public interest lawyers, emergency responders, disaster case managers, faith-based partners, librarians, and other community stakeholders came together to share experiences and learn about the critical role civil legal aid plays before, during, and after disasters.



Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards; Frank X. Neuner, Jr., left, member of the Legal Service Corp. Board of Directors; Stephen I. Dwyer, current Louisiana State Bar Association president.



Amy E. Duncan, Louisiana State Bar Association; Laura Tuggle, SLLS; Gwen Collins-Greenup; Alainna R. Mire, Access to Justice Commission co-chair and 2020-21 LSBA president; and Christopher P. Pierce, SLLS.









SLLS IN THE COMMUNITY

Left to Right: Saliyra Gumms, Managing Attorney, and Susie Price, Legal Secretary; Staff Attorney Zachary Williams at Entergy Empowerment Day; Staff Attorney Amythist Kearney at an oureach event; Maureen Morrow, Managing Attorney and Staff Attorney Sam Calvit at an outreach eventl Managing Attorney Mary McMillian at the NACC Conference; Northshore Pro Bono Project "Wills for Heroes" event; Louella Chaisson, Support Staff and Alina Gonzalez Staff Attorney; AARP Legal Clinic in Bogalusa; SLLS Staff at the Baton Rouge One Stop Homeless Services Center.







EGAL SERVICES





National Association of Counsel for Children



r. Kenner lives in rural Hahnville, LA. After Hurricane Ida caused extensive damage to his home, he had to seek other resources to get it repaired because he didn't have flood or homeowners' insurance. Fortunately, a United Way program partnered with Catholic Charities provided him \$16,000 so he could repair his home.

However, Mr. Kenner encountered obstacles establishing homeownership as the property was only titled in his deceased spouse's name. That's when he turned to SLLS to complete a succession. While helping him with the succession, his attorney also found that the property had a lien. His attorney worked with the lien holder on his behalf and successfully cleared the lien before filing the Succession. During this time, he was receiving treatment for an illness at Ochsner's Rehabilitation Hospital in Jefferson, LA. His attorney went above and beyond, continuing to meet with him to review and sign documents while he was in the hospital to ensure the progress on his home wasn't further delayed.

Initially, Mr. Kenner believed his spouse bought the home through inheritance, which, if true, would classify it as his deceased spouse's separate property. It would've been inherited by her children under Louisiana's Succession Laws for an intestate decedent.

His attorney discovered that the home was bought during the marriage and argued to the court that the house was community property. The judge agreed and signed the Judgment of Possession transferring ownership. Over a year after Hurricane Ida, he can now prove ownership of his home and awaits the contractors, hoping to regain a sense of normalcy soon.



At the age of 66, Mr. Reynolds*, who had lost his vision in 2017, found himself facing multiple challenges. He was unable to access medical care through the VA, obtain VA benefits, or secure a VA home loan. In addition, he received a notice about a student loan debt that he couldn't afford to pay because of his disability. Our Veterans Justice Fellow worked to upgrade his VA discharge status, ultimately paving the way for Mr. Reynolds to become eligible for a broader spectrum of veteran benefits.

After several months of diligent efforts, we were thrilled when the VA approved the upgrade of his discharge status. Subsequently, we guided him through the process of applying for financial support from the VA through a pension, assisting him in gathering the necessary records to substantiate his

claim. As a result, Mr. Reynolds was approved for a monthly VA pension of \$1,114.

We also worked with Mr. Reynolds to address his outstanding student loan, which had rendered him ineligible for a VA home loan. Our investigation revealed that this student loan debt was co-signed by Mr. Reynolds for his daughter, who had fallen behind on payments due to the impact of COVID-19. We successfully secured his discharge from the \$35,527 student loan debt due to his disability.

Today, Mr. Reynolds has an ongoing income, essential for his survival, access to VA medical care is eligible to apply for a home loan, and is no longer burdened by student loan debt. Relieving this burden has granted both him and his wife a newfound sense of peace and security.

STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Ms. Martinez*, a single mother supporting her nineyear-old daughter, faced a lot of setbacks during the pandemic as her job in the hospitality industry was significantly limited. Initially, unemployment benefits helped with expenses, but when she returned to work at reduced hours, her income wasn't enough to cover the rent, and she fell behind.

Hurricane Ida exacerbated her challenges. When she evacuated, she owed almost \$5,000 to her landlord. Her apartment took on extensive damage from the storm. Shockingly, her landlord had entered the unit without notice, throwing out her water-damaged personal belongings and gutting the unit.



Ms. Martinez was displaced to a FEMA-paid hotel

for two months. When she returned home, the landlord demanded the outstanding rent, threatening eviction. Unable to meet this demand, she faced an eviction notice and sought assistance through SLLS via our Right to Counsel program. We worked with the City to expedite her rental assistance application of \$4,778 in collaboration with the City to help her get caught up on her rent and negotiated with the landlord to get him to accept it. Ms. Martinez's eviction was dismissed, and her past-due rent was approved. Now, she and her daughter can recover the personal items they lost during Hurricane Ida without the added trauma of housing instability.



Mr. Mitchell*, a 50-year-old Veteran, was residing in a homeless shelter while on the path to recovery from drug addiction. He was burdened by a substantial tax liability of \$139,000 stemming from the sale of his late mother's estate several years prior. Whenever he tried to secure stable employment, it would result in wage garnishments because of how long it would take to pay the debt off.

Fortunately, an SLLS Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic volunteer attorney was able to help. This attorney prepared and submitted an Offer in Compromise on behalf of Mr. Mitchell. Remarkably, the tax liability was successfully extinguished in exchange for a nominal payment of just \$1. This incredible outcome not only alleviated Mr. Mitchell's substantial financial burden but also presented him with a newfound sense of hope and the opportunity to rebuild his life without the looming threat of wage garnishments.



The New Orleans Family Justice Center (NOFJC) referred Angie* to SLLS after she unsuccessfully tried on her own to get a protective order against her abusive husband. Our on-site partnership with NOFJC enables us to provide holistic legal services to survivors of domestic violence through coordinated services. Angie desperately wanted to break free from her abuser. She was concerned that she would lose her housing if she filed for divorce because her husband was

also on her Section 8 voucher. A team of SLLS attorneys worked to get her protective order granted, filed her divorce, and successfully advocated with the Housing Authority to have her husband removed from the housing voucher. She is now able to move on with her life. As a result, she can now take significant steps forward in her life. She is free from the threat of her abuser, and her housing situation is secure and stable.

After dropping out of school in 11th grade, Mr. Davis* earned his GED and worked as a dedicated pipefitter for 32 years. He began experiencing heart failure in his early 50s, leaving him unable to work. His living and medical expenses quickly depleted all of his savings, leaving him homeless in 2019 without any source of income. While he was homeless, Mr. Davis received care from a doctor at the Homeless One Stop Primary Care clinic, who referred him to our Homeless One Stop Legal Clinic for assistance in obtaining disability benefits.



Recognizing the severity of his illness, our staff began working on his case immediately. His attorney asked for expedited consideration of his disability claim. We worked closely with volunteer doctors, secured medical records, and submitted the claim, ultimately securing approval for \$26,031 in retroactive disability benefits and an additional \$1,768 in monthly benefits.

These essential resources have allowed Mr. Davis to secure stable housing, escape homelessness, and better name and his heart condition.

STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS



Ms. Anderson*, a 60-year-old tenant with a disability, relied on housing vouchers to make her home affordable. She found SLLS at our Eviction Help Desk as she faced the imminent threat of eviction due to unpaid rent. Her only source of income was disability benefits, which made it extremely challenging to cover the two months of overdue rent. To make matters worse, her grandchild, who lived with her, had recently lost her job, adding to their financial difficulties.

Ms. Anderson's SLLS attorney quickly identified a critical issue—the calculation of Ms. Anderson's tenant share of the rent was incorrect. Her attorney

referred her for rental assistance to help pay the landlord the amount she was allegedly behind. Subsequently, the Housing Authority adjusted Ms. Anderson's tenant share to an amount she could afford, providing much-needed relief. Her application for two months of rental assistance was approved, allowing her to settle her overdue rent, and her attorney successfully had the eviction dismissed. With the threat of eviction lifted and her rent adjusted, Ms. Anderson can now breathe a sigh of relief. She has long-term housing stability thanks to the rental support and legal assistance she received



Two Pro Bono attorneys assisted a devoted wife in the challenging process of interdicting her husband. He developed rapid-onset frontal temporal aphasia, a disease that has devastating impacts. The husband's abrupt loss of verbal and written communication abilities left his wife unable to manage his escalating medical and financial needs.

The pair of volunteer attorneys navigated the legal process quickly and secured an interdiction judgment. The client was deeply relieved to have the tools in place necessary to provide her husband with the care he deserved and keep him in the comfort of their home, where she wanted him to stay.



Ms. Foster*, a 73-year-old disabled woman living with her grandson, feared she would be homeless soon. Her landlord suddenly refused to accept her timely cash rent payments, instead insisting on money orders or certified checks. She never received notice that this change was coming, nor did her lease require her to make payments that way. Getting a money order was challenging due to her disability, but after receiving an eviction notice, she got one and tried to pay again. Her landlord rejected her payment and moved forward with the eviction process.

Unaware that free legal assistance was available to her, Ms. Foster discovered our services at our 6th District Justice of the Peace Court Eviction Desk in Jefferson Parish. Swiftly, we conducted an intake, and an attorney conducted an interview. Ms. Foster. expressed her desire to remain in her home and fulfill her rent obligations. We represented her in court and were successful in winning her case. After court, she promptly paid her rent, finding relief knowing she wouldn't be forced to relocate. In the end, Ms. Foster's successful case not only ensured her ability to remain in her home but also spared her from the significant hardships associated with a hasty eviction, granting her stability and peace of mind.



A Pro Bono attorney worked with Ms. Warren* to successfully recover her security deposit and the excess rent she had paid to her landlord. The volunteer drafted the required initial documents and pleadings and secured a \$10,000.00 judgment for the landlord's willful failure to refund her security deposit. The judgment included Ms. Warren's security deposit plus statutory damages of two times the amount of the deposit and the excess rent.

Then, the attorney began the judgment collection process to ensure that Ms. Warren received the funds rightfully owed to her. This victory stands as a compelling illustration of how the involvement of a probono attorney can profoundly impact the life of someone who might otherwise have been overlooked.

STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS



Ms. Turner*, a young working mother raising two minor children, endured life-altering domestic violence that forced her to flee her home. The escalating abuse and threats of harm from her youngest child's father made her fear for her life and her children's safety. She temporarily moved in with her family and urgently contacted SLLS for help obtaining a protective court order.

Our attorney quickly filed a protective order, recognizing the urgency of the situation. We also connected her with the Metropolitan Center for Community Advocacy, where she could receive additional support with safety planning, counseling, and housing assistance. After several attempts, we successfully served the adverse party, and

the protective order was granted, covering both Ms. Turner and her children. This crucial step ensured the children's safety, preventing the father from attempting to take them from school or daycare without consent. With the protective order safeguarding her family, Ms. Turner feels secure returning to her home and workplace. This added protection remains in place for 18 months, providing her with the peace of mind and safety she and her children deserve.

Mr. Calvin* came to SLLS through our Baton Rouge One Stop Homeless Legal Clinic, where SLLS has staff onsite to provide legal assistance. He was recently released from prison after ten years and had a crushing child support debt of over \$30,000 that had continued to grow while he was incarcerated.

In 2020, a new law went into effect which required DCFS to suspend monthly child support obligations for people incarcerated more than 180 days until 1-month post-release. His SLLS attorney quickly determined that based on this new law, Mr. Calvin was wrongfully charged



nearly \$3,000 in additional child support payments due to a failure to communicate between DCFS and the Department of Public Safety and Corrections. He met with the ADA and the child's other parent. He was not only able to have the wrongful debt forgiven but also negotiated a lower continuing monthly obligation and reduced his prior debt by over \$15,000. Mr. Calvin can now make his monthly child support payments and continue to make progress in rebuilding his life.

SLLS HONORS

Pro Bono and Children's Law Awards Ceremony Ceremony Ceremony Control of the c

SLLS Staff Attorney Mary Ann McGrath Swaim received the LSBA Children's Law Award, accepted on her behalf by Child in Need of Care (CINC) Managing Attorney Josephine Vanderhost, and Staff Attorneys Kirby Kenny and Natalie Paul.

SLLS received the 2022 Ascension DePaul Foundation Inspired Cross Award.



SLLS received Capital Area United Way's 2022 ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed).



SLLS Executive Director Laura Tuggle received the Mark Moreau Award for Public Interest Law, presented by the New Orleans Bar Association and the New Orleans Bar Foundation.



SLLS Staff Attorney Hannah Adams received the 2022 National Housing Law Project's Housing Justice Award.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PRO BONO



804 Cases Closed



7668
Hours of Service
Donated



PROBONO PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS:

SLLS Incubator Programs

Pro Bono Innovation Fund Security Deposit Theft Project

Pro Bono Project Subgrant

Informa Pauperis Clinic

Low-Income Tax Payer Clinic Project

SLLS Northshore Pro Bono Project

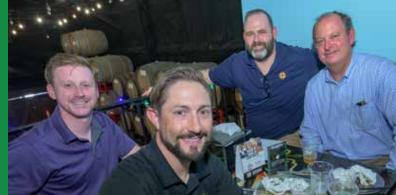
Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Subgrant

LAW CLERKS MAKE VITAL CONTRIBUTIONS

SLLS is fortunate to have law clerks assisting in delivering civil legal aid from Loyola, LSU, Southern, and Tulane Law Schools. Going virtual has also allowed us to host law students nationwide. In 2022, law students and other student volunteers provided an estimated 10,000 hours of service valued at \$150,000. We appreciate these dedicated future lawyers and their schools for helping us to advance our mission to serve vulnerable clients.























"THE BAR EXAM"

Presented by: LISKOW&LEWIS







Left to Right: Barrasso Usdin Team; Mouledoux, Bland, Legrand & Brackett Team; Adams and Reese Team; Simon Peragine Smith & Redfearn Team; Hinshaw & Culbertson Team; Liskow and Lewis Team; The Honorable Bernette J. Johnson, ret. Supreme Court Chief Justice; Hancock Whitney Team; First Place and Best Team Name Winners Robert Knights, C.C. Kahr, Chief Justice Johnson Kim Marshall, Roxanne Newman; Runner Up, Phelps Dunbar Team; Entergy Team.



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Allies of Justice













CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF JUSTICE LEADERS

With generous support from local and national organizations, SLLS offers year-long fellowships for recent law graduates to respond to urgent community needs and develop future justice leaders. Current initiatives include a Veterans Justice Fellowship, Domestic Violence Fellowship, Social Justice Fellowships helping people with housing and incarceration challenges, and Disaster Legal Fellows assisting Hurricane Ida and COVID-19 survivors.

2022 FELLOWSHIPS:

Equal Justice Works

Disaster Resilience Fellowship, Rural Justice Fellowship, Design Your Own Fellowship

Loyola College of Law Gillis Long Social Justice Fellowships

New Orleans Bar Assocation (NOBA) & NOBA Foundation

Public Interest Law Veterans Justice Fellowship

Tulane Law School Lutz Fellowships Domestic Violence Fellowships

THE MONICA AND MARK SURPRENANT **GRADUATE AWARD**

The Mark and Monica Surprenant Graduate Award is a partnership between the Gillis Long Poverty Law Center and SLLS. This award, made possible by the generosity of Monica and Mark Surprenant, former SLLS board president, bolsters the Fall Gillis Long Social Justice Fellowship at SLLS by enhancing the fellow's salary. We extend our gratitude to the Surprenants for their invaluable support and commitment to the fight for fairness.

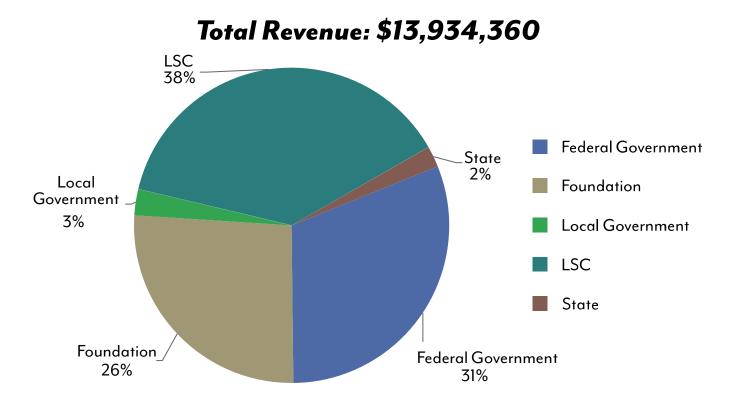
Pictured Right: Former SLLS Board President Mark Surprenant



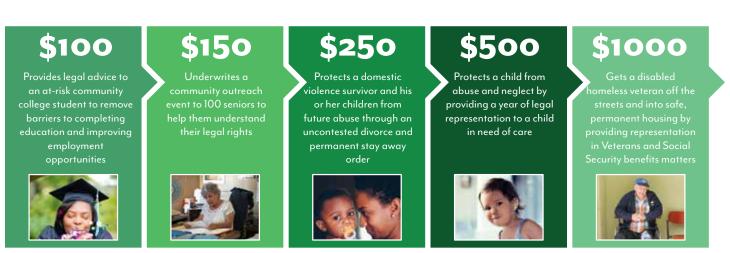
FINANCIAL RESOURCES

2022 FUNDERS

For every \$1 invested in civil legal aid in Louisiana, our communities receive a \$17.99 social return on investment. This includes emergency services, law enforcement, healthcare, justice returns, and other public cost savings. That is why strong support from our funders and donors is so important. Because of you, we were able to improve the lives of thousands of vulnerable people across Southeast Louisiana in 2022.



How Does Your Contribution Support the Fight for Fairness?



AARP Foundation 24th Judicial District Court Baton Rouge 19th District Court Baton Rouge Area Foundation **Bayou Community Foundation Bob Woodruff Foundation** Capital Area Council on Aging Capital Area United Way Capital One City of Baton Rouge City of New Orleans East Baton Rouge Council on Aging East Baton Rouge Parish Family Court Equal Justice Works Gillis Long Foundation Greater New Orleans Foundation Hancock Whitney Hope Center Inc. Huey and Angelina Wilson Foundation Internal Revenue Service lefferson Parish Office of Community Development Kresge Foundation Louisiana Appleseed Lafourche Council on Aging **Legal Services Corporation** Livingston Council on Aging Livingston Parish Clerk of Court Louisiana Bar Foundation

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The "Circle of Justice" comprises some of the strongest individual supporters of civil legal aid. Our Circle of Justice donors have made an annual contribution of \$1,000 or more to support the fight for fairness.

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Mr. James Weiss

Phu Ho

Thank you to all of our 2022 donors for your generous support! Your support in the midst of crisis helped thousands of families struggling to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida. Please accept our apologies for any omissions.

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