

**LONG
ISLAND
ADVOCACY
CENTER**
2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Long Island Advocacy Center (LIAC) works with families, students, and individuals with disabilities by ensuring the protection of their legal rights within the public education system in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island. We continue to serve low-income families whose children attend public schools and experience school related problems. An area of focus for LIAC continues to be assisting students who are considered at-risk. We provide educational advocacy and legal assistance to families and students across Long Island, to address school related problems, including but not limited to truancy/school avoidance, discipline and suspensions, residency and enrollment, Special Education services, English Language Learner services, and dropout prevention.

The aftermath of COVID-19 continued to exacerbate the problems for these students as the pandemic highlighted the obstacles and poor educational outcomes for at-risk youth. This year marked the return to full time in-person learning on Long Island which brought with it additional obstacles for students. While most schools recognized the additional emotional toll students experienced, many were not equipped to appropriately support the fallout of learning loss and emotional stress. LIAC saw an increase in school failures, trancies, and disciplinary problems across all students that we serve. LIAC continued our outreach efforts by creating and presenting webinars to educate and outreach to parents and community-based service providers regarding the educational rights of families and students during COVID-19 and the return to school.

Throughout the year, LIAC assisted thousands of students and families. Our attorneys provided legal assistance and/or representation to 842 students, including:

- 685 brief service; legal counsel and advice or limited action;
- 57 students received negotiated settlements without litigation; and
- 100 students received litigated settlements.



Population Served: Low Income Children and Families

Total Funding: \$1,733,222

Total IOLA Grant: \$150,000

Staffing Full Time Equivalent:

- Total Staff: 20.32
- Paralegals: 12.57
- Lawyers: 5.25
- Other: 2.5

Our education advocates provided non-litigated advocacy to school-age children in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Specific case outcomes of LIAC legal representation and educational advocacy include:

- 157 students avoided, delayed or reduced the length of their suspensions.
- 60 school age children overcame a barrier to enrollment in school.
- 2510 students with disabilities obtained an individualized educational program, received appropriate services consistent with special education law, and/or avoided an inappropriate special education classification.
- 2123 youth obtained advice and counsel on an education matter.
- 1703 youth obtained non-litigation advocacy services on an education matter.
- 2370 youth obtained other benefits on an education matter.

These numbers show the extent to which LIAC helped low income families save money by preventing the need for them to hire private attorneys/advocates. In addition, by obtaining no cost evaluations and appropriate educational services, families were spared the need to pay out of pocket. During the reporting period, LIAC's advocacy and legal representation resulted in our clients receiving approximately seven hundred twenty-five (725) educational evaluations which were paid for completely by their schools. Receiving these evaluations, at no cost, resulted in approximately one million eighty seven thousand five-hundred (\$1,087,500) in payments avoided by our clients. Obtaining appropriate educational services diverted families from the juvenile justice system and those associated costs. Providing free attorneys and advocates increased the families' access to justice in that it allowed them to enforce education and civil rights laws protecting their rights to appropriate educational services without discrimination.

LIAC continued to improve its capacity to deliver services through the increased and refined use of technology. All staff continue to be provided with agency-issued cell phones with unlimited data; chromebooks, which are cloud-based and allow our staff to continue work in a hybrid capacity without compromising or limiting access to client records/files; and LIAC began using internet-based office phones which sync to staff cell phones. This feature maximizes the reach our staff has and the access that families and community members have to our services. We continue to own and utilize Professional Zoom accounts, which staff use for parent and community training, webinars, and virtual legal representation. LIAC also obtained a Professional Canva account which has enhanced our email newsletters and interactive flyers which are shared with our entire network to inform community members about upcoming events, presentations, etc.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case #1

LIAC was contacted by the parent of a 1st grade student who was being suspended repeatedly for behaviors. The parent had previously requested evaluations for her son as she suspected an emotional disability, however, the district refused to evaluate her son stating he was “too smart” to qualify for Special Education services. A LIAC attorney represented the parent at a Superintendent's Hearing and requested expedited evaluations be conducted, through the Committee on Special Education (CSE), in all areas of suspected disability. The request included a psychological evaluation, an educational evaluation, a psychiatric evaluation, a speech and language evaluation, and a

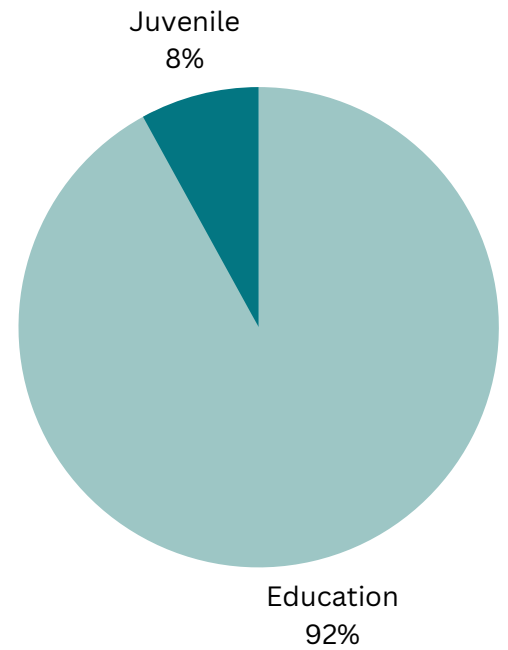
Functional Behavior Assessment. The CSE complied with the request, conducted all evaluations, and reconvened a meeting to determine the student’s eligibility for Special Education services. A LIAC advocate reviewed the evaluative data and reports with the parent prior to the CSE meeting to ensure the parent understood everything that would be discussed and ultimately determine her son’s eligibility. The LIAC advocate also attended the CSE meeting with the parent. The CSE determined that the student was, in fact, eligible for Special Education services under the educational classification of an Emotional Disability. Recommendations and the data analyzed from all of the reports indicated that the student would be best supported in a smaller, more therapeutic setting, one which would focus heavily on the social-emotional well-being of the student, and in turn, help the student to recognize their difficulties and help them to learn coping skills and strategies to help manage their feelings and behaviors within the school setting. Since beginning at their new school, the student has not had any behavioral or disciplinary infractions. Obtaining these evaluations through the school district saved the parent a minimum of \$6,000.

Additionally, every time the student had been previously suspended, the parent needed to miss work because her child was home all day during the suspension. The parent had lost several jobs due to the amount of time she needed to be home. Since her child has been placed in the appropriate educational setting, the parent has not had to ask for any time off and has been able to secure steady employment for the last eight months.

11,349
people
benefitted from
9,680
legal cases
closed

Case #2

A 10th grade student living in a group home residence was referred to LIAC as a JD. Prior to being referred to LIAC, this student was attending school in another district and having behavioral difficulties. He was suspended out of school and placed on Home Instruction for the duration of his suspension. This student inconsistently attended the home tutoring and ultimately stopped attending at all. The student was sitting at home, not receiving any education, and continuing to display behavioral problems. Once he was referred to LIAC, a LIAC advocate attended a CSE meeting for him. The district wanted to recommend home instruction pending his acceptance into an out-of-district alternative placement. LIAC advocated that the district should recommend a different interim educational plan as this student had significant difficulty attending Home Instruction, and as a result, had been home for over a year without receiving any education. Data supported the student’s need to be in a physical school setting with regular and consistent structure and support. The LIAC advocate reminded the CSE that the district has an in-person “Alternative to Home Instruction Program” which seemed appropriate for this student. The district agreed. Additionally, LIAC advocated that a Functional Behavior Assessment be conducted while the student was in the alternative placement to help the entire team better understand the functions of the student’s behavior to then create a Behavior Intervention Plan to help eliminate the problematic behaviors. Although the “Alternative to Home Instruction Program” is only temporary, the district agreed to allow the student to finish the current school year in the program based on his passing grades, academic progress, and significant behavioral improvements. The CSE met to discuss his placement for the following year and all members were in agreement that he would attend an out-of-district alternative academic program for ½ day and a career and vocational training program for ½ day as he is very interested in learning the skills needed to interview for and get a job and then more specific skills in areas of career interest.



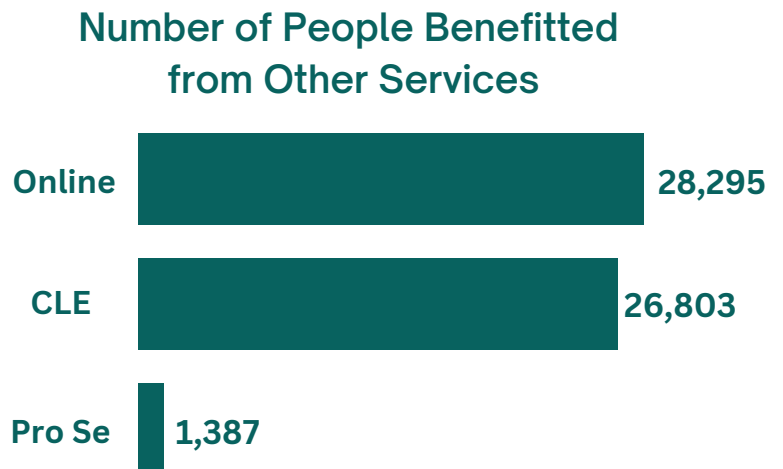
**Cases by
Legal Problem Area**

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

All of our trainings includes Google Slide presentations and/or handouts with information on education law and advocacy techniques. This provides individuals, who may not have access to or an understanding of their rights, with important information regarding the education process and the tools necessary to ensure that their children receive the educational services for which they are entitled. This year, a total of one thousand five hundred three (1,503) individuals including: parents, school personnel, and human service agency providers received training and subsequent materials on education law and student rights. Topics presented included: Education on Education: Dissecting the IEP (Individualized Education Plan); Collaborations in the Community: How Community Partnerships Improve Educational Outcomes for At-Risk Youth; The CSE and Suspension Process for Individuals with Disabilities; Perspectives in Children’s Behavioral Health and Our Schools; Benefits Advisement and Support Eligibility and Non-Medicaid Service Coordination: What Parents of Individuals with Disabilities Need to Know; The ABCs of IEPs; Know Your Rights- School Services/Special Education/School Suspensions; Family Engagement & Cultural Responsiveness; and Cultural Responsiveness in Education.

LIAC provided pro se assistance to one thousand three hundred and eighty seven (1,387) individuals via self-help materials accessed through our website, such as Committee on Special Education referral and evaluation request letters, DASA complaint forms, NYS Education Department complaint forms, residency and enrollment packets. We distributed twenty-five thousand three hundred (25,300) legal education materials and twenty-eight thousand two hundred ninety-five people (28,295) accessed self-help materials through LIAC’s online newsletter, website, and/or our social media pages.

56,485
 people benefitted
 from Services
 Other Than Direct
 Legal Services



OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

Currently, all LIAC attorneys and advocates use Chromebooks, and utilize Google Workspace, to safely and remotely access emails, files, and information. Additionally, all staff members continue to use work-based iPhones, with unlimited data and a personal hotspot, to ease and ensure communication with clients and partnering agencies, regardless of their location, without compromising personal information.

LIAC staff also utilized the Remind app, which allowed staff members to send quick bursts of important information to parents in a way that was easy for them to access. LIAC continued to create and publish an electronic newsletter via email, social media, and our website. In an effort to enhance our newsletter, and the content we distribute, LIAC obtained a Professional Canva account which allows for a more user-friendly and consistent formatting. Additionally, LIAC obtained a bit.ly account which allowed areas of content in our newsletter to be safely and securely hyperlinked. By using these secure hyperlinks, our newsletters reached 99.5% of our intended recipients. The national average for non-profit newsletters shows that there is an average “open rate” of 25.96% and a “click rate” of 2.7%. In the last year, LIAC’s average “open rate” was 60.5%, more than twice the national average while our “click rate” was 5.0%, almost twice the national average.

Our website continues to run quite successfully and is updated regularly with new content and resources for parents and community members on various topics such as education law, suspension, diploma options, CPSE, bullying, and much more. LIAC staff also updated the website with critical information related to COVID-19 including New York State guidance, and Regents Examinations/Exemptions and the effect on students completing high school. We continued to update information regarding support for English Language Learners, Transitioning from High School into the Postsecondary world, and information for parents who are navigating the Committee on Pre-School Education (CPSE) and the transition from CPSE to CSE. We created a QR code that instantly connects people directly to our website so people can access all of our information electronically.

Our internal system of using Google Workspace to manage our intakes and share resources between staff has impacted our ability to be more efficient in addressing clients needs and supporting each other. We regularly use Google Meet to connect in small groups to discuss cases and office procedures.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

Professional Development for our staff and Board is ongoing. Our staff continued to attend webinars and conferences that focused on the impact COVID-19 had on students and school, and to keep up with the guidance coming out of the State Education and the Federal Education Departments. Additionally, we continued to focus on issues of equity and disparate treatment within educational systems. LIAC staff attended webinars and trainings that focused on marginalized and at-risk populations.

In addition, LIAC provided a staff-wide required training, Creating Inclusive Communities for LGBTQ+ Students, presented by a NYS Licensed and Certified Social Worker who specializes in working with LGBTQ+ youth and their families. Topics covered included: social constructs, gender vs. sexuality, gender identities, microaggressions, how to educate others to create and support inclusive spaces, and best practices regarding language and pronouns when working with individuals within the LGBTQ+ community.

Our attorneys attend PLI (Practicing Law Institute) Continuing Legal Education webinars in a variety of subjects including diversity, inclusion, the elimination of bias, and ethics. Additionally, our attorneys participated in local Bar Association trainings as well.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

4 Law Students volunteered 480 hours

3 Other Volunteers volunteered 100 hours

Law Students from local law schools routinely work at LIAC as interns and externs. LIAC participates in Job Fairs at the local law schools to recruit new interns. In addition, LIAC has postings in the Career Centers at the law schools. Potential interns are interviewed by LIAC attorneys; once hired, law students assist LIAC in expanding our mission to reach greater numbers of clients. Interns are trained by LIAC attorneys

in basic Education Law and have the opportunity to shadow LIAC attorneys. Under the supervision of LIAC attorneys, law students assist with research, client interviews, client follow-up, outreach, and trainings. Our law student interns also attend CSE meetings with advocates upon client approval. This year we were able to once again have law students in our office for internships.

LIAC also hires college student interns who assist our advocates with a variety of tasks, dependent upon staff needs. LIAC had a college student who interned this year to assist with general administrative tasks, social media development, and website maintenance.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

LIAC has continued a significant collaboration with the Suffolk County Probation Department this year by providing educational advocacy and attorney representation for at-risk and court involved youth. Through our collaboration with the AFY, PINS Diversion, JD, and Raise the Age programs, LIAC has been able to significantly impact the educational services for these youth. LIAC ensures that our students receive appropriate educational evaluations and appropriate educational services and programs. LIAC represents youth facing out of school suspensions and compels schools to provide appropriate interventions instead of excluding them from school.

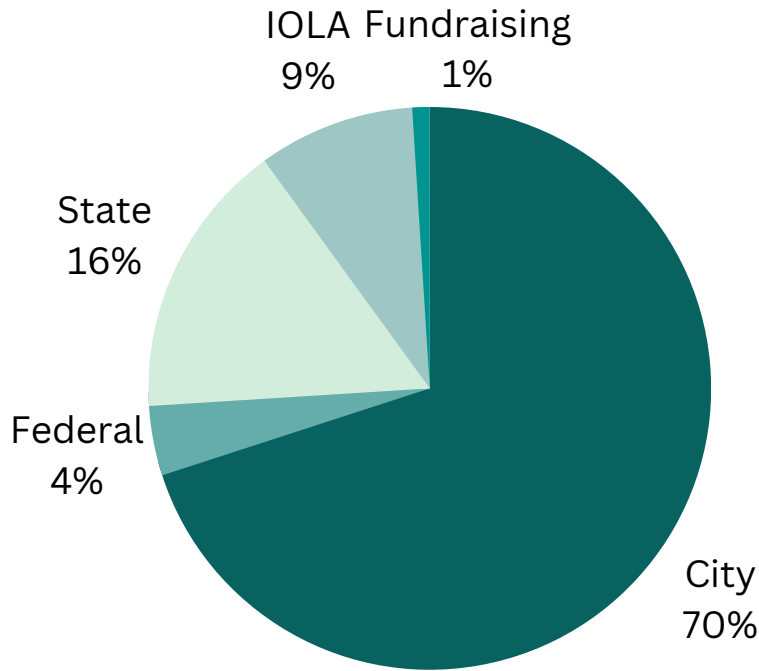
This year we completed our Pre-PINS Diversion pilot program in Suffolk County which allows LIAC to provide educational advocacy to students referred by schools to PINS Diversion before they are sent to PINS Diversion and assigned a Probation Officer. This program allows LIAC to advocate for the student's educational rights and hopefully divert the student from moving forward to PINS Diversion. The pilot program was a success and Suffolk County has renewed the program for an additional year.

LIAC has continued to network with other organizations state-wide that align with the mission to address the disproportionality of exclusionary school discipline in an effort to affect change in public policy. This collaboration (Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition) remains focused on proposed legislation, bringing new allies to the table, and accessing those who may help shed light on the need for State level public policy response to the issue of disparities in school discipline. Meetings are convened to strategize the implications of existing regulatory language in light of proposed statutory changes but also to recognize the current altered education landscape and how education is delivered to students. Conversations center on

meeting the existing needs, recognizing budget priorities, and reframing existing needs within the bandwidth of the audience's priorities. We have joined learning and advocacy communities with the Social Racial Equity Committee of Council of Parent Advocates and Attorneys as well as CLASP (Center for Law and Social Policy). These opportunities permit us to take a deeper dive into national trends as well as NYS practices and policies in the wake of recovery aid. In addition, we have continued to maintain and build our relationship and collaboration with NYS centered organizations, both those that have direct ties to our client population and those that focus on broader advocacy initiatives. In addition, our work with JD cases impacted the sentencing for youth which included the prevention of out-of-home placements and violations of probation. The Raise the Age legislation has led to an increase in the number of our JD clients this year. Similarly, LIAC collaborates with the Nassau County Department of Social Services, the lead agency for the Nassau County PINS Diversion program. LIAC is able to divert cases from Family Court by advocating for appropriate educational services and by defending students accused of school misconduct at school discipline hearings. LIAC also collaborates with the Nassau County Office of Youth Services working with families of at-risk youth. LIAC continued its collaboration with SOBLI and the Urban League to address the disparities in school discipline as it affects minority youth. Similarly, our collaborations with MLK Center of Long Beach and Rockville Centre, EOC of Nassau County, Littig House, Choice for All, Hispanic Brotherhood of RVC, Hispanic Civic Association, Safe Center/Child Advocacy Center, Safe Haven/Homeless Youth, Long Island Progressives, Legal Aid Society, Make the Road New York, Erase Racism and STRONG/Uniondale have continued. LIAC has also been a member of the Suffolk County Access to Justice Committee of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. LIAC has been part of the planning and implementation of the Community Legal Help Project. Other ongoing collaborations this year include the Community Technical Assistance Center of New York, Families Together New York State, ACCES-VR, , EAC Dispute Resolution, Suffolk OMH System of Care, IDD subcommittee of the Suffolk County Division of Community Mental Hygiene Advisory Board, OPWDD, SEQA, NYSDRA, NYS DCDT and The Self Advocacy Association of NYS (Long Island Chapter), and the Nassau County OMH Interagency Committee.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Long Island Advocacy Center received
\$1,733,222
 in total funding this past year



IOLA Grant	\$150,000
City and County Funding	\$1,219,757
Fundraising	\$11,000
Federal	\$74,890
State Funding	\$277,575
Total	\$1,733,222