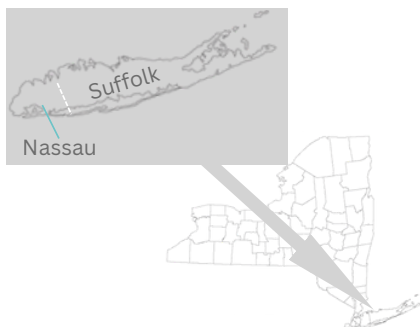


LONG ISLAND ADVOCACY CENTER 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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 every school district, 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. Our primary focus is to assist students, and their families, who are considered “at-risk”. The New York State Education Department identifies the following populations to be the most vulnerable and at-risk: students with disabilities, students whose families live in low socio-economic communities, English Language Learners, and students who are homeless and/or in foster care. These are the students and their families are our target populations, and by far, the families to whom we provide the most assistance. 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.

A major obstacle has been the impact COVID-19 has had on education and the rights of families and students. Since the return to in-person learning, families have struggled with mental health and the impact it has had on consistent school attendance, while schools have struggled with not only how to engage students, but how to most appropriately and effectively support students and their needs. Behavioral difficulties were especially apparent as reflected in the high number of students who were suspended out-of-school. The complexity of the issues we saw has also increased, as such, the challenge for us continued to be leveraging our services to most effectively meet the needs of the most number of families. To address these issues, we continued to improve our website with updated and relevant fact sheets using “parent friendly” language, conducted webinars and presentations, and used our intake coordinators to connect families via referrals to coordinating agencies, when appropriate. The most vulnerable student populations have been the most affected and this has significantly increased the need for advocacy, on the individual level and at the systemic level.



Population Served: Families throughout all of Long Island, including but not limited to: students and individuals with disabilities, families living in low socio-economic communities, English Language Learners, and students who are homeless and/or in foster care.

Total Funding: \$2,738,391

Full Time Staff Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 21.5
- Paralegals/Advocates: 15
- Lawyers: 4.5
- Others: 2

We saw an increase in school failures, truancies, disciplinary problems, and mental health challenges across all students that we serve.

Our attorneys provided legal assistance and/or representation to 633 clients, including:

- 396 clients received brief service; legal counsel and advice or limited action;
- 67 clients received negotiated settlements without litigation; and
- 170 clients received litigated settlements.

We provided advocacy to 1,901 individual clients in Nassau and Suffolk Counties.

Specific case outcomes include:

- 268 students avoided, delayed or reduced the length of their suspensions;
- 68 school-age children overcame a barrier to enrollment in school;
- 831 cases were closed in which students with disabilities obtained an individualized educational program, received appropriate services consistent with special education law, and/or avoided an inappropriate special education classification;
- 2,222 cases were closed in which advice and counsel were obtained on an education matter; and
- 1,775 cases were closed in which non-litigation advocacy services were obtained on an education matter.

Those numbers are more than just specific outcomes. We removed significant financial barriers through our provision of free and low-cost legal services and representation to low-income families. This provided an access to justice that otherwise may not have existed as it eliminated the need to hire private advocates and attorneys. In addition, through our advocacy and representation, students were provided with educational evaluations, including but not limited to psychological evaluations, psychiatric evaluations, and neuropsychological evaluations. These evaluations are crucial in determining the presence and underlying cause(s) of a disability. This year, our clients received approximately six hundred fifty-five (655) evaluations to help determine their educational needs. All of these evaluations came at no-cost to the families. A very low estimate of the payments avoided by our clients, by compelling districts to provide the evaluations, is nine hundred eighty-two thousand five hundred dollars (\$982,500). 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.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Sample Case:

A 1st grade Special Education student, diagnosed with Autism, was being sent home from school almost daily from the beginning of the school year until the middle of November. The school kept calling the parent to pick him up due to behaviors they felt they could not manage. The parent was told to not bring her son back to school. The parent drove right to our office to talk with someone. She was afraid her school would call Child Protective Services (CPS) on her for educational neglect- which they did the year

before for reasons that were not founded. We worked with the parent to gather background information and obtained consent for us to communicate with the school directly and on her behalf. We attended a CSE meeting where the recommendation was to send her son to an alternative school. The parent was not in agreement with the recommendation as we had explained a number of steps and interventions that are required to be implemented before looking to a more restrictive school environment. After the meeting, we wrote a letter to the Director of Special Education outlining the child's circumstances and details about the CSE meeting. We received a response the same day and an invitation to meet with her at the parent's availability. We had that meeting, we discussed the parent's concerns, ideas for recommendations, and collaborated with the school. A week later, he remained in the district, in a different class setting, in a different elementary school- which is exactly what the parent wanted to try before looking at alternative school placements. Since changing schools and receiving more appropriate services, the parent has not received a single phone call asking to pick her son up, he has not had any documented behaviors in school, and good news- he loves his teacher!

6,837

people benefitted from

5,472

legal closed cases

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Sample Case:

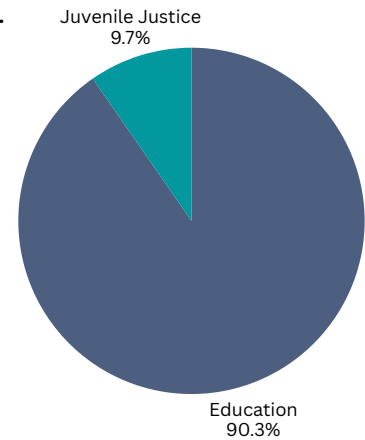
The student was given five days out of school suspension for an incident at school and was referred to a Superintendent's Hearing. The parents retained one of our attorneys for representation at the hearing and the Manifestation Determination Review. The student was charged with four counts of violating the District's Code of Conduct.

- Used language that was profane, lewd, vulgar, or abusive language directed at members of the School District staff, including:
 - asshole!
 - Get my fucking jacket!
 - Fuck you! (exclamation points inserted on the Notice of Charges by the District)
- Physically attacked members of the School staff.
- The student failed to comply with the directives of one or more staff members to calm down and to stop as he was attempting to physically attack one or more staff members.
- The student physically resisted the efforts of School staff to stop the respondent from physically attacking staff members.

The student was found guilty of all four charges and a Manifestation Determination was convened. The Committee determined that the IEP had been fully implemented. The discussion turned to the behaviors from the day of the incident. The Committee determined there was a nexus between the behaviors in Charge 1 (vulgar language) but did not believe the other three charges were a manifestation of the student's disabilities. The Committee did not believe the behaviors in the remaining three charges were a manifestation because they had not seen physical aggression before. The parents stressed several times that the aggression was a manifestation of his disabilities. Between the medication changes and his diagnoses, as well as his disciplinary history which showed physical aggression such as kicking a teacher, the parents provided valuable information for the Committee to consider. The district was adamant that no nexus had been found and the IEP was fully implemented.

The parents and the our attorney strongly disagreed and asked that their objection be entered into the record. Our attorney filed a Due Process complaint with the New York State Education Department for an expedited hearing on the Manifestation Determination. During a Resolution Session to determine if a mutually agreeable resolution was available, the District and the Parents entered into an agreement to resolve the issues. The student returned to school, an updated IEP and behavioral plan were created, and the student has been achieving success in the classroom, academically and behaviorally.

Cases by
Legal Problem Area



OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

We regularly provide information regarding the legal rights of parents and students at community fairs, school SEPTA events, public libraries, community-based agencies, and hospitals. Additionally, we provide training and information sessions wherever parent and/or community groups are comfortable and able to meet.

Our goal in providing trainings is to educate people working with at-risk students in their community to recognize red flags and to know when to refer to us for information, assistance, and representation.

This year, we provided training, presentations, and interactive online presentations for two thousand eight hundred twenty-four (2,824) individuals. Attendees and participants included parents, students, educators/school personnel, education attorneys, mental health professionals, and community-based human services providers. Topics presented included: *What the Judiciary Should Know about Education Law*, *A Parents Guide to Special Education*, *Pathways to Partnership*, *Determined From Day One*, *Removing Barriers to Re-entry: Accessing Education after Placement*, and *Breaking Through Building Capacity for Youth in Extraordinary Circumstances: Serving Youth on the Autism Spectrum*.

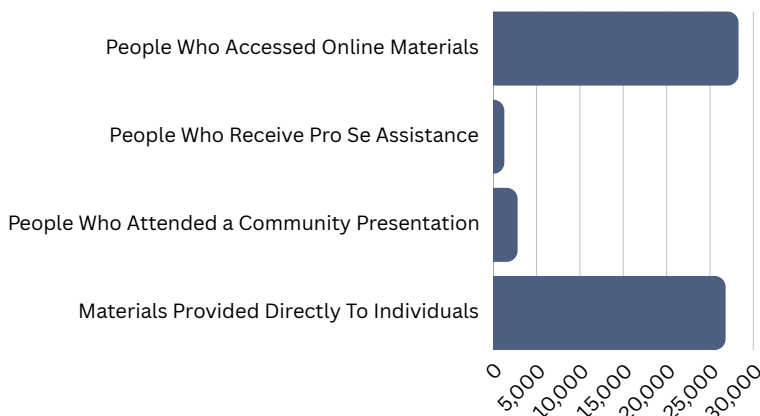
We provided pro se assistance to one thousand two hundred ninety-four (1,294) individuals via workshops, clinics, and self-help materials such as: Committee on Special Education referral and evaluation request letters, DASA complaint forms, NYS Education Department complaint forms, and residency and enrollment packets.

We continue to build our outreach network through our email newsletters as we highlight upcoming events, programs, and presentations for other community-based and collaborating agencies. Our social media presence has expanded our reach; our listserv and newsletter subscribers have increased by 25% over the last six months. Our improved online presence allowed 28,295 people to access materials through our newsletter, website, and/or our social media pages.

59,216

People Served and
Benefits Received from
Services Other than
Direct Legal Services

Number of People Benefitted
from Other Services Provided



COMMUNITY 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 these 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 continued our Pre-PINS Diversion 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. 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.

We also began working on a new initiative with Suffolk County in July 2025. Their Peer Diversion Court offers young people who have committed nonviolent crimes an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions, serve their community, and learn character and career building skills. Every volunteer is trained by Probation and an attorney to take on the roles in the courtroom. Formal training is conducted, and volunteers are supervised every week so that they understand the benefits of restorative justice and the fundamentals of courtroom procedure. Each offense and case referred to Peer Diversion Court is met with some constructive and meaningful type of sanctions and a learning opportunity for all involved.

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 the State of Black Long Island Equity Council (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.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

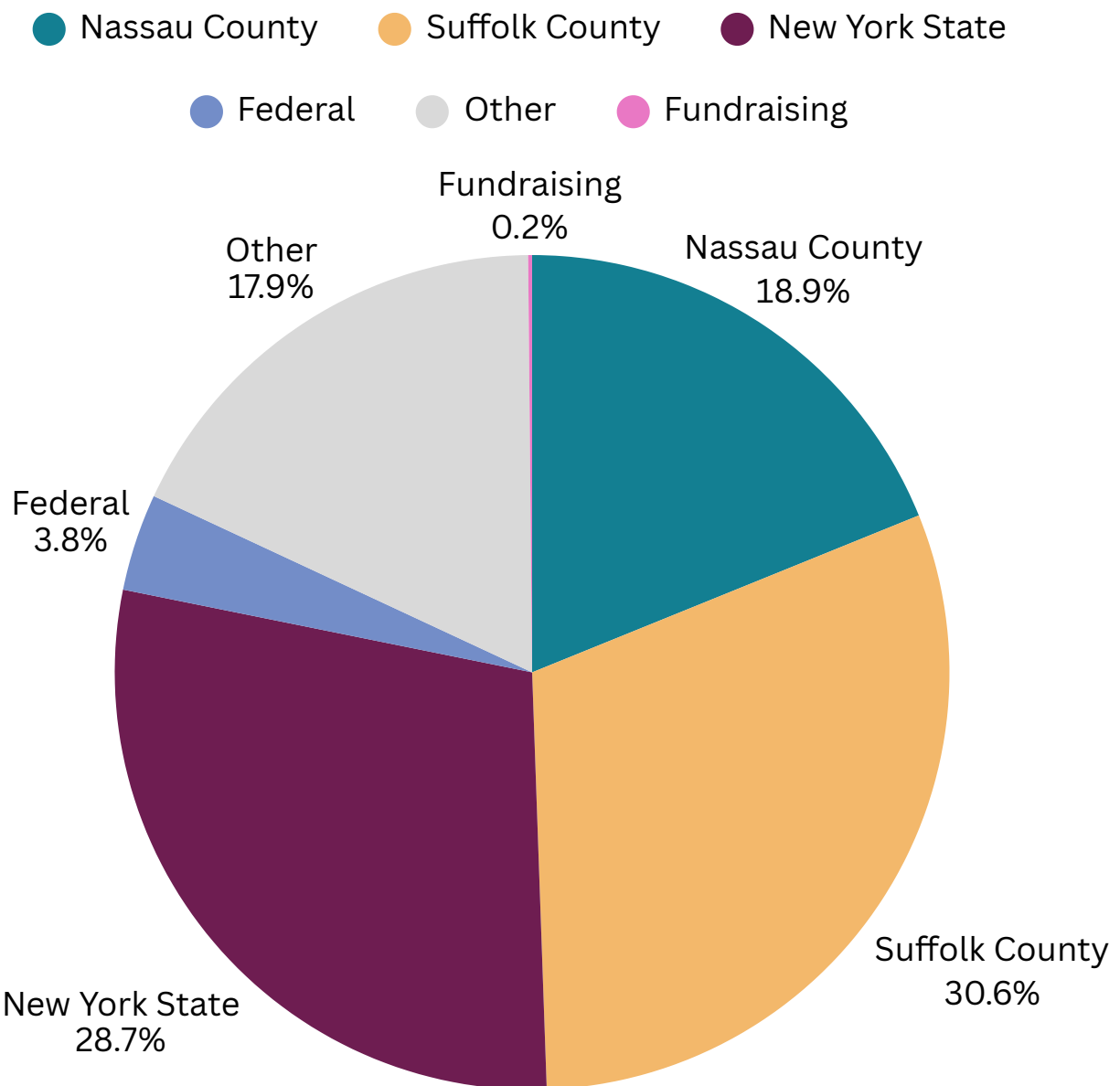
LIAC has also been a member of the Suffolk County Access to Justice Committee of the Permanent Commission on Access to Justice. LIAC has been part of the planning and implementation of the Community Legal Help Project. Other ongoing collaborations this year include the Community Technical Assistance 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.

LIAC 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.

LIAC is a member of the The NY Region 1 Collaborative, a federally funded **Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC)** network, serving families of children with disabilities (ages birth to 26) across New York City and Long Island. In collaboration with INCLUDEnyc, Sinergia, and Advocates for Children of New York, our region's PTIC supports parents to better understand special education processes, including Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans. This is provided through one on one direct consultations, telephone/video calls, and/or email support. Additionally, we host community events, webinars, and training sessions for parents and youth with disabilities.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Long Island Advocacy Center received
\$2,738,391
in total funding this past year.



WHO WE ARE

Board of Directors

Susan Burger

President

Catherine Breidenbach, Esq.

Secretary

Tahmeed Kalam

Treasurer

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Trustee

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Trustee

Administrators

Jen Schwartz

Executive Director

Mindy Turansky

Assistant Director

Victoria Vine, Esq.

Director of Legal Services

Michelle Montenora

Finance Director

Contact Us

Nassau County Location

999 Herricks Road

New Hyde Park, NY 11040

516-248-2222 x 10

Suffolk County Location

490 Wheeler Road

Suite 165C

Hauppauge, NY 11788

631-234-0469 x 10

Website: www.theliac.org

Email: info@theliac.org

