2024

ANNUAL REPORT

BECAUSE EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE IS EVERYONE'S FIGHT

CHICAGO VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES

Because equal access to justice is everyone's fight

We are **CHICAGO PRO BONO**.

CHICAGO VOLUNTEER LEGAL SERVICES

Because equal access to justice is everyone's fight

BRIDGING GAPS, EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: CVLS' ONGOING COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

CVLS remains a vital pillar for low-income individuals throughout Cook County and beyond, delivering wide-ranging legal services designed to address the diverse needs of each community we serve. Operating under flexible guidelines, we champion clients often overlooked by other programs—including active-duty military, veterans, immigrants of all statuses, and underserved populations. Through strategic partnerships and a dynamic volunteer network, CVLS ensures that justice is within reach, placing special emphasis on pro bono work to empower volunteers and tackle systemic inequities. Whether guiding tenants through housing challenges or assisting families with unexpected legal hurdles, we remain devoted to bridging gaps in justice. By collaborating closely with committed partners, we continue to refine and broaden our services, reaffirming our unwavering dedication to those most in need and to cultivating a more inclusive, equitable legal system for all.

MISSION

CVLS mobilizes Chicago's legal community to deliver traditional representation and innovative legal solutions to people working or living in poverty. We are **CHICAGO PRO BONO**.

THE ONLY THING CONSTANT IN LIFE IS CHANGE.

Change is hard, whether it's good or bad. But change can be especially difficult for people with fewer resources.

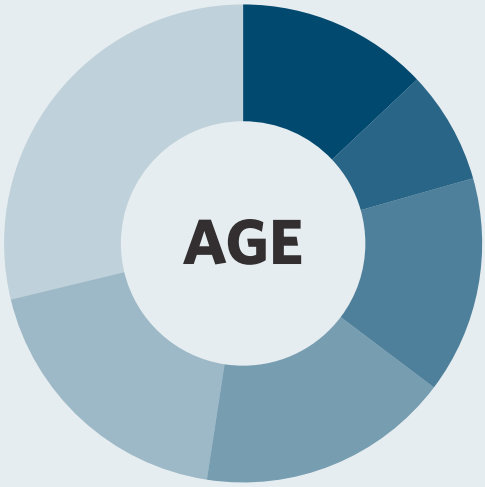
Covid wrought sudden, seismic changes. While many of us quickly learned how to work from home, lower-income workers didn't have that luxury. Whether they worked in grocery stores, hospitals or factories, they had to be on site at work no matter the consequences. Our post-Covid world is bringing more changes, not all of them easy or comforting. Whether it's Chicago's growing low-income housing crisis, stubbornly high, ever-increasing prices for products and services, or shifting government policies, we all suffer. Our under-resourced clients suffer the most.

Since 1964 CVLS has provided free legal services to those who need it. Free. Always have been and always will be. We began as a pro bono organization. Sixty years later our nearly 3,000 volunteer attorneys handle thousands of cases annually, pro bono. We still have community legal clinics but also accept court appointments. We continue to take cases and help populations not served by many other legal aid organizations. We've grown a lot in 60 years, but we remain true to our mission.

In 2024, we completed 3,372 cases. Our pro bono attorneys represented nearly 1,000 of those clients in Cook County's courtrooms. Taking their families into account, pro bono helped 6,800 people navigate our unpredictable, ever-changing world.

Margaret Benson
Executive Director

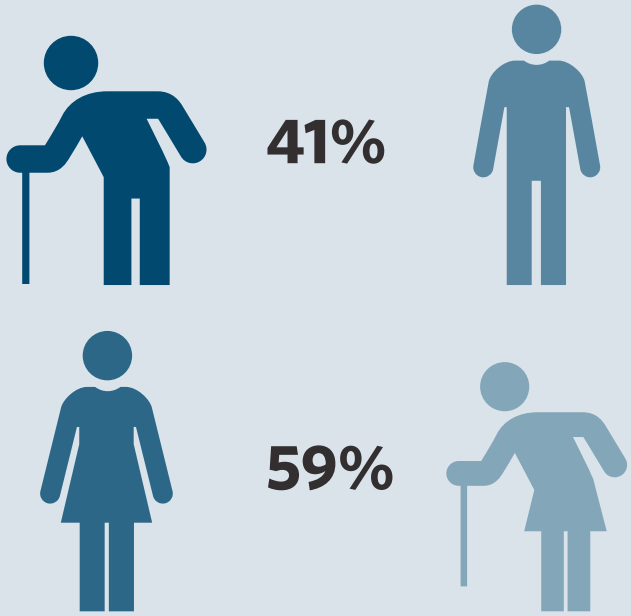
2024 DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT



- <18 (13%)
- 18-30 (8%)
- 31-40 (15%)
- 41-50 (17%)
- 51-60 (19%)
- 60+ (29%)

6,803 Individuals impacted in 3,640 cases.

2 in 5 Clients reported an annual income of $10,000 or less.



41%

59%

<1% Other

Race & Ethnicity

American Indian/ Alaska Native	<1%
Asian	10%
Black/African American	39%
Hispanic	22%
Middle Eastern	<1%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	<1%
Other	6%
Two or more	1%
White	19%

We are proud to serve residents in need of accessible, quality, equitable, free legal services in Chicago and Cook County.

30.5 CLE HOURS

We provide free CLE seminars and hands-on training to keep our volunteers informed, skilled, and confident in delivering exceptional legal support.

335 NEW VOLUNTEERS

CVLS continually grows its volunteer team with monthly orientations and welcomes all licensed Illinois attorneys, offering private law firm sessions upon request.

181 YEARS OF STAFF ATTORNEY EXPERIENCE

The expertise of our seasoned staff attorneys is the backbone of our work, enabling us to train volunteers and deliver exceptional legal service to our clients.

645 NEW COURT APPOINTED CASES

CVLS is a trusted partner of the court, regularly appointed to handle cases that require skilled, compassionate, and pro bono legal representation.

2344 ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS

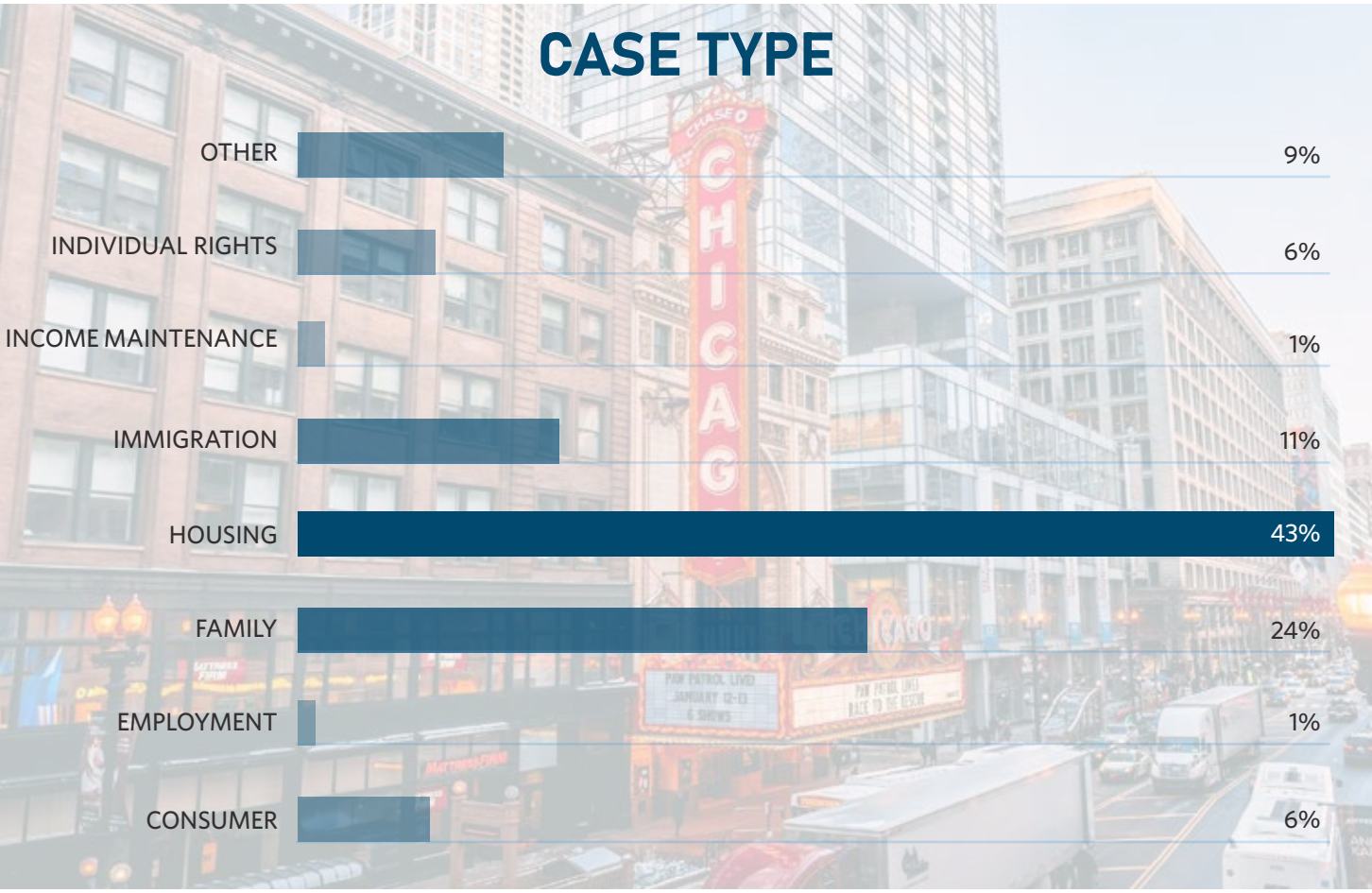
3640 CLOSED CASES

CVLS makes a meaningful and lasting impact in our community, helping individuals and families resolve urgent legal challenges, access justice, and move forward with greater security and stability.

For over 60 years, CVLS has built a strong reputation for reliability and integrity, earning the trust of the courts. Judges turn to our attorneys for exceptional legal support—whether advocating for vulnerable children, assisting disabled adults, or helping clients facing foreclosure.

INTAKE TYPE

CASE TYPE



BUILDING JUSTICE, EXPANDING CARE

In 2024, CVLS provided vital legal services to nearly 7,000 people across more than 3,300 cases. But the numbers only tell part of the story. This past year, we expanded our capacity, deepened support for clients and volunteers, and invested in the people and infrastructure that sustain our mission.

With new funding, we hired a full-time bilingual Social Worker, Crystal Barajas, who joined us in March. Crystal brings expertise in trauma-informed care and crisis intervention and supports clients in guardianship, custody, and adult GAL matters. She also assists in housing and immigration cases, connects clients with critical community resources, and leads staff trainings on advocacy, de-escalation, and self-care—ensuring we serve clients holistically and with compassion.

We also strengthened our immigration program by promoting longtime staff member Jennifer Guadarrama. After completing a demanding fellowship, Jen earned partial DOJ accreditation and now serves as our Immigration Paralegal. She screens clients, assists in asylum clinics, and represents clients in affirmative cases before USCIS—a testament to her dedication and our commitment to staff development.

To meet growing administrative demands, we added new staff, including Scott Slein as bookkeeper. With decades of experience, Scott supports our Controller in managing increasingly complex accounting needs. We also welcomed Tina Negron as a new bilingual Intake Specialist, expanding our ability to serve Spanish-speaking clients from their first point of contact.

In a move that balances fiscal responsibility with accessibility, we renegotiated our lease to remain in our centrally located office through 2032. This space, just steps from the Daley Center and other essential services, is ideal for clients and staff alike. By consolidating space and adopting a hybrid model, we're saving money while maintaining a flexible and professional environment.

These changes reflect CVLS' continued growth—not just in size, but in impact. We remain committed to providing thoughtful, high-quality support to the people who need it most.

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Early Resolution Program (ERP)

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Supervising Attorney,
Early Resolution Program (ERP)

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Guardian Ad Litem for Adults
and Decedents Estates Programs

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Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation

Rob Zielinski,
Supervising Attorney,
Child Rep

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Savannah Ayala,
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& Technology

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JOIN CHICAGO PRO BONO

Visit Us

Drop by our downtown office or connect with us at one of our signature annual events.

Share Your Time

If you are an attorney licensed in Illinois, or other professional interested in providing **pro bono services** to low-income residents of Cook County, then you are exactly who we are looking for. Sign up for one of our New Volunteer Orientations and join a team that has a direct impact in the lives of thousands of people each year.

Visit **www.cvls.org/volunteer** to learn more.

Invest In Justice

Community support across Chicago is vital to our mission of delivering top-tier pro bono legal services to those in need. Contribute today at **www.cvls.org/donate** to help sustain this critical work for years to come.

Partner with Us

Each year, CVLS collaborates with hundreds of law firms and corporations. We'll tailor a partnership opportunity that aligns with your team's goals—whether it's event sponsorship or customized volunteer engagements, we've got a plan that fits. If not, we'll create one!

Stay Connected

Follow us on **Facebook**, **X**, **LinkedIn**, and **Instagram** to stay updated on upcoming events, success stories, new volunteer opportunities, and more.

DONORS

The passionate volunteers at Chicago Volunteer Legal Services (CVLS) are tireless advocates for justice, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance in court. Their dedication helps level the playing field for those in need.

The impactful work of CVLS is made possible by the generosity of individuals, businesses, and foundations that believe in equal access to legal services. Their steadfast support allows us to serve countless underprivileged families throughout Chicago. We are deeply grateful for their contributions and proudly recognize our valued supporters below.

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INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

To the Board of Trustees
of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation

Opinion

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation (a nonprofit Foundation), which comprise the statement of financial position as of June 30, 2024, the related statements of activities, functional expenses, and cash flows for the year then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation as of June 30, 2024 and the changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements section of our report. We are required to be independent of the Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation and to meet our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the relevant ethical requirements relating to our audits. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

Responsibilities of Management for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America, and for the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control relevant to the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, management is required to evaluate whether there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation's ability to continue as a going concern within one year after the date that the financial statements are available to be issued.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not absolute assurance and therefore is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control. Misstatements are considered material if there is a substantial likelihood that, individually or in the aggregate, they would influence the judgement made by a reasonable user based on the financial statements.

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In performing an audit in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards, we:

- Exercise professional judgment and maintain professional skepticism throughout the audit.

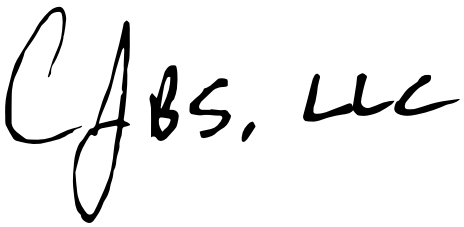
- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, and design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks. Such procedures include examining, on a test basis, evidence regarding the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements.

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation's internal control. Accordingly, no such opinion is expressed.

- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluate the overall presentation of the financial statements.

- Conclude whether, in our judgment, there are conditions or events, considered in the aggregate, that raise substantial doubt about Chicago Volunteer Legal Services Foundation's ability to continue as a going concern for a reasonable period of time.

We are required to communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit, significant audit findings, and certain internal control related matters that we identified during the audit.



Northbrook, Illinois
December 4, 2024

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	June 30, 2024
ASSETS	
Current Assets:	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	$ 1,714,885
Restricted Cash - Client Deposits	87,331
Short-Term Investments	2,393,069
Contributions and Grants Receivable	764,448
Prepaid Expenses and Other Current Assets	146,340
Total Current Assets	5,106,073
Property and Equipment:	
Furniture and Equipment	179,533
Leasehold Improvements	46,367
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	(209,308)
Total Property and Equipment - Net	16,592
Other Assets:	
Long-Term Investments	1,254,621
Operating Lease Right-of-Use Asset	990,910
Finance Lease Right-of-Use Asset	139,446
Total Other Assets	2,384,977
TOTAL ASSETS	**$ 7,507,642**
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	
Current Liabilities:	
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	$ 119,938
Current Portion of Operating Lease Liability	168,760
Current Portion of Finance Lease Liability	28,310
Deferred Revenue	41,579
Client Deposits	87,331
Total Current Liabilities	445,918
Long-Term Liability:	
Operating Lease Liability	875,540
Finance Lease Liability	112,490
Total Long-Term Liabilities	988,030
TOTAL LIABILITIES	**1,433,948**
Net Assets:	
Without Donor Restrictions	
Undesignated	5,467,794
With Donor Restrictions	
Restricted in Perpetuity	326,549
Restricted by Purpose and Time	279,351
	605,900
Total Net Assets	6,073,694
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	**$7,507,642**

STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 2024

CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	
Change in Net Assets	$ 1,163,741
Adjustments to Reconcile Change in Net Assets to Net Cash Provided by (Used In) Operating Activities:	
Depreciation	6,774
Amortization	15,494
Non-Cash Lease Expense	218,076
Gain from Partial Termination of Lease	(25,158)
Donated Stocks	(9,975)
Net Unrealized and Realized (Gains) Losses on Investments	(109,036)
(Increase) Decrease in Assets:	
Contributions and Grants Receivable	45,726
Prepaid Expenses and Other Current Assets	27,297
Increase (Decrease) in Liabilities:	
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	19,096
Operating Lease Liability	(261,584)
Deferred Revenue	23,647
Client Deposits	(297,378)
Net Cash Flows Provided by Operating Activities	816,720
CASH FLOWS FROM INVESTING ACTIVITIES	
Proceeds from Sales and Maturities of Investments	64,669
Purchases of Investments	(802,079)
Net Cash Flows Used in Investing Activities	(737,410)
CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES	
Principal payments on finance lease	(14,140)
Net Cash Flows Used in Investing Activities	(14,140)
CASH IN CASH, CASH EQUIVALENTS, AND RESTRICTED CASH	**65,170**
CASH, CASH EQUIVALENTS, AND RESTRICTED CASH, BEGINNING OF YEAR	**1,737,046**
CASH, CASH EQUIVALENTS, AND RESTRICTED CASH, END OF YEAR	**$ 1,802,216**
NON-CASH INVESTING ACTIVITIES	
Donated stocks	$ 9,975
NON-CASH FINANCING ACTIVITIES	
Partial termination of operating lease liability	$102,968
Remeasurement of operating lease liability	$758,981
Right-of-use assets obtained in exchange for operating lease liabilities	$154,940

See accompanying notes and independent accountant's compilation report located in the full audit.
The accompanying notes are an integral part of these financial statements.
Full audit can be viewed at www.cvls.org/audit2024

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