

# Impact Report

2020 - 2021







# Table of Contents

<b>02</b>	<b>A Letter from the Executive Director</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>The BLM Uprisings, Policing, and Criminal Legal System</b> Supporting BLM Activists Police-Free Schools Police Accountability Expungement and Sealing in Virginia
<b>04</b>	<b>Who We Are</b> Our Mission Our Principles Our Programs A Foundation in the Community	<b>25</b>	<b>What Comes Next?</b>
<b>06</b>	<b>Years in the Making</b> A Commitment to Individual Legal Service The School to Prison Pipeline Extractive Fines and Fees Long Fought for Immigrant Rights Affordable Housing in Charlottesville Medical Debt Collection	<b>26</b>	<b>Financials</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Our Response to COVID-19</b> The Immediate Response The Systemic Response	<b>28</b>	<b>John Conover Society</b>
		<b>29</b>	<b>Donors, Supporters, and Partners</b>
		<b>45</b>	<b>Board of Directors, Advisors, and Staff</b>
		<b>47</b>	<b>In Memoriam: Libby Fulcher</b>



# Letter from the Executive Director

Dear friends,

The last two years should be a wake-up call to us all. Preventable tragedies occurred because, long before the coronavirus pandemic, we failed to close gaps in our support systems that leave people one crisis away from becoming homeless, jobless, hungry, and saddled with debt. And because we have not addressed the ways in which white supremacy has been consciously and unconsciously reinforced across all sectors of our nation.

This report is the story of how the Legal Aid Justice Center worked alongside community members and clients to respond to a series of global crises and bring long-term campaigns to fruition, all while adjusting ourselves to the painful realities of work and life during the pandemic.

It is a remarkable story of perseverance, of resilience, of love for community, and of a fierce urgency to respond to the moment we were – and are still – in. As an LAJC supporter, I hope you will join me in taking pride in our response. Without unrestricted support from values-aligned supporters, we would not have had the flexibility to respond as we did.

This report covers the years 2020 and 2021, but the story begins in December of 2019. It was then that our Board of Directors formally approved our last strategic plan.

That plan, for the first time, explicitly named racial justice as a core animating principle of our mission.

It also articulated a goal of building accountable relationships of trust with the communities we serve. We walked into the maelstrom of 2020 with those values as our guiding star, and I am so thankful that we did. Each time we faced a seemingly impossible choice about what to do with limited resources, we relied on those values to find our path forward.

And as you'll read in these pages, in the end, we helped tens of thousands of families avoid or survive tragedies like eviction or job loss, while simultaneously building systems that work better for low-income communities and communities of color all the time, not just during a crisis.

Thank you for being with us in the struggle.

Yours,

**Angela Ciolfi**

Executive Director, Legal Aid Justice Center



# LEGAL AID JUSTICE CENTER

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STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

August 2019 - Final Draft

**BROCADE STUDIO**

1208 Rothesay Circle  
Richmond, VA 23221

# Our Mission & Programs

The Legal Aid Justice Center is a community-centered legal aid organization that combines individual legal representation, impact litigation, communications, policy advocacy, and organizing to achieve community goals.

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## Our Mission

To partner with communities and clients to achieve racial, social, and economic justice by dismantling systems that create and perpetuate poverty.

## Our Principles

We believe that the individual legal problems of our clients are inextricably linked to overarching systems of injustice and oppression.

We believe that legal and organizing strategies can effectively dismantle the social, racial and economic systems that marginalize communities and keep people in poverty.

Because we live in a racially structured society that causes racial inequity across systems, we cannot effectively address poverty without addressing race. Poverty is a racial justice issue.

Creating long-term, sustainable change in communities experiencing poverty is the essential foundation for our impact advocacy.

Direct representation is part of our strategy to fight systems of injustice and oppression.

Viewing individual cases in the context of larger social and political systems enables us to set priorities and deploy our resources for the greatest positive impact.

We commit to continuously examining whether we and the organizations we work with operate in ways that align with the race equity and justice values and goals we support. This commitment includes ensuring that race equity is reflected in policies and practices for recruitment and hiring, work acceptance, priority-setting, governance, organizational culture, communications, and community partnerships and accountability, particularly with low-income communities of color. (Source: This language echoes the commitments made by the Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative)





## Our Programs

### Economic Justice

Strengthening the safety net and opposing exploitation.

### Civil Rights and Racial Justice

Ending the criminalization of poverty.

### Immigrant Justice

Fighting for the lives and livelihoods of immigrants.

### Youth Justice

Building communities where all youth thrive.



## A Foundation in the Community

LAJC's impact over the last two years was built on the foundation of our longstanding relationships in the communities we serve and the critical role we play in the legal advocacy landscape.

We are one of a relatively small number of legal aid programs in the United States that engage in both extensive systemic advocacy and extensive individual services.

We have long believed our commitment to defending the rights of individual people is critical to our understanding of and ability to influence the systems that oppress them.

The last two years have proven us right. Without the relationships we've built through decades of partnership with clients and communities, we could not have done a fraction of what this report describes.



# Years in the Making

## A Commitment to Individual Legal Services

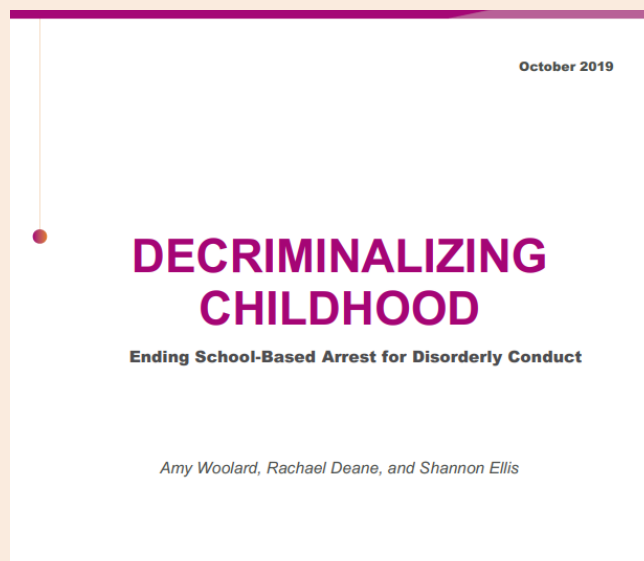
LAJC was founded in 1967 as the Charlottesville Albemarle Legal Aid Society explicitly to help low-income residents with their individual civil legal problems. We remain committed to that work today in the localities around Charlottesville, Richmond, Petersburg, and Northern Virginia.

Between January 2020 and December 2021, LAJC attorneys provided individualized legal services to over 3,000 client households comprised of over 7,500 Virginians. We stopped evictions and illegal lock-outs. We secured release from immigrant detention and helped families establish legal residency. We fought debt collectors and secured stolen wages. We helped families access safety-net programs and find just compensation for labor trafficking and other abuses.

Our individual services helped our clients to access over \$2,454,458 in additional resources and protected an additional \$2,581,250 in assets.

## The School to Prison Pipeline

Since the founding of our Youth Justice Program in 1998 (then JustChildren), LAJC has fought to end policies that criminalize student behavior. In late 2019, we released a report that showed how Virginia's school systems were disproportionately charging Black students – and Black girls at an accelerating rate – with disorderly conduct, a vague, catch-all law that targets normal adolescent behavior for criminal penalties. In 2020, we led a successful effort to repeal the portions of the disorderly conduct statute that singled out students for prosecution and punishment.





## Extractive Fines & Fees

In early 2020, after more than six years of advocacy, we finally won permanent repeal of Virginia's statute that suspended the driver's licenses of people who could not afford to pay their court fines and fees. Our Drive Down the Debt campaign stretched over five bipartisan bills, two federal court complaints, multiple report releases, and one preliminary injunction. More than 30,000 Virginians had their licenses immediately and automatically restored, many more were reinstated upon application, and hundreds of thousands of people have avoided debts-based suspension each year.

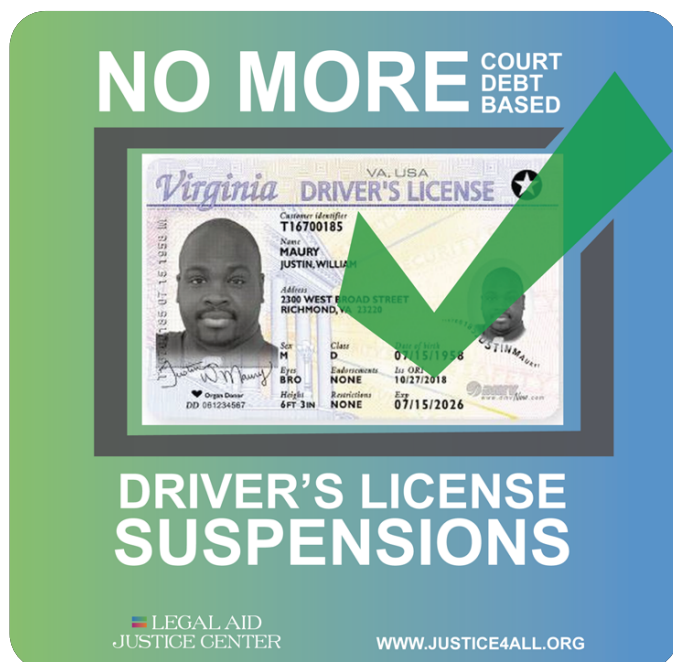
Separately, in 2021, as part of the Juvenile Fines and Fees Coalition, including RISE for Youth, we supported a successful effort to end Virginia's purely extractive practice of charging child support payments to the parents of incarcerated youth.

## Immigrant Rights

Undocumented immigrants lost the right to legally drive in Virginia in 2004 after widespread fear of terrorist attacks made way for anti-immigrant legislation. In 2020 after more than a decade of organizing, the Drive Virginia Forward Coalition and the Virginia Coalition for

Immigrant Rights won back the right to drive through the implementation of Driver's Privilege Cards. Since the law went into effect in early 2021, over 40,000 immigrants have already received the new form of ID.

Also in 2020, a longstanding community-led campaign to establish eligibility for in-state college tuition for undocumented Virginians succeeded with a legislative win. We were proud to be part of that effort. Since then, we've put out guidance on how to assert this right, pushed several colleges to comply with the law, and helped dozens of families navigate the process.

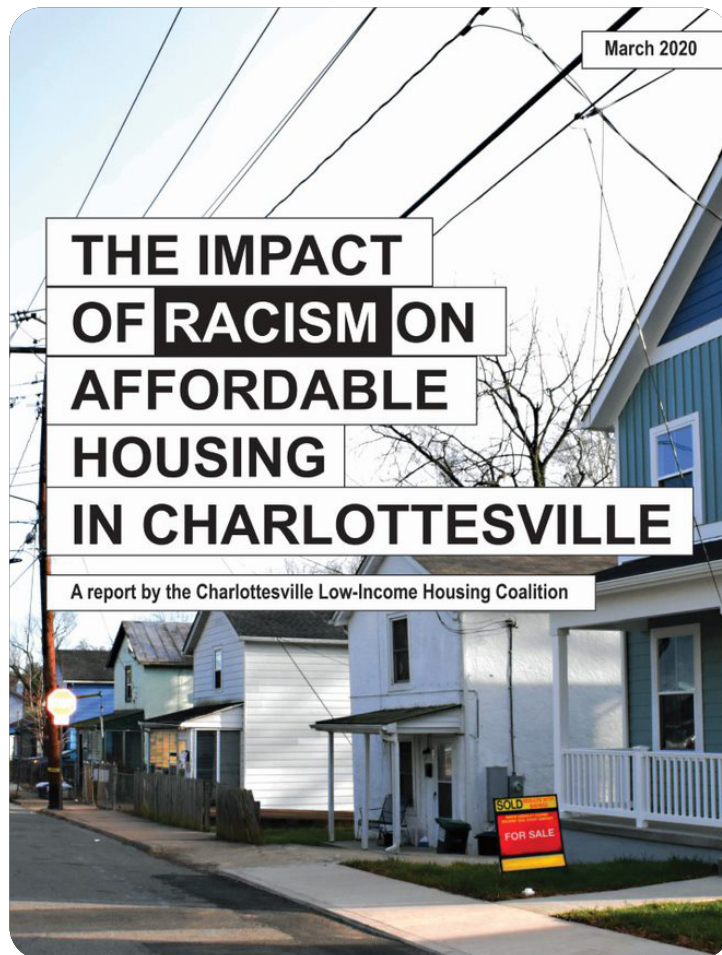


## Affordable Housing in Charlottesville

Our commitment to tenant organizing in Charlottesville goes back over 25 years, and the last two years have seen a number of historic wins to expand affordable housing.

Through support of Charlottesville's Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR), LAJC helped move forward resident-led redevelopment of public housing. In 2021, we witnessed a historic groundbreaking on what will become 161 additional deeply affordable homes with substantial resident input on all aspects of the project.

At the end of 2021, after more than a decade of advocacy by housing activists supported by LAJC, Charlottesville's City Council passed a new comprehensive plan that will increase density citywide (with protections for several historically Black neighborhoods) by calling for the abolition of the use of exclusionary and racist single-family zoning.



## Medical Debt Collection

In Charlottesville over the years, we have defended individuals with medical debt in court, issued public records requests, taken medical students to court to watch the horrors of medical debt collection, pushed for changed legislation, helped resource reporting on the issue, and asked for changes from UVA Health System.

In 2018, Kaiser Health News and the Washington Post released a bombshell investigative report on the ways in which UVA had been suing its patients into financial oblivion for years. In response, UVA put together a council to study the issue and make recommendations. Our staff and Board representatives on that council pushed hard for transformative reform, including by arguing against the legal interpretation that UVA Health was using to justify their aggressiveness in pursuing all debts.

In 2020, those efforts bore fruit when UVA announced that it was adopting essentially all the council's recommendations for reforming its financial aid, billing, and collections systems. UVA also released nearly all liens held against patients' homes and almost entirely stopped suing patients over medical debt.

To illustrate the impact: In FY20, UVA took 2,164 judgments against patients for a total of \$7,171,166.10. In FY21, UVA took judgment against just two people for \$31,245.64







# Our Response to COVID-19

On March 16, 2020, the Legal Aid Justice Center's physical offices closed to the public. At the same time, our staff switched to remote work and shifted into overdrive.

As Executive Director Angela Ciolfi said in an op-ed that ran in the Virginia Mercury on March 19th, "To put it bluntly: COVID-19 is not just a destructive act of nature. It is also a human-made crisis caused by our collective failure to address gaps in our economic system and social safety net... those gaps existed before COVID-19, but the pandemic will exacerbate and compound their effects, leaving even larger chasms between the haves and have-nots when it recedes — unless we take aggressive action now to prevent the pandemic from having a catastrophic impact on low-income communities."

Driven by that sense of urgency, to both blunt the immediate harm and address systemic inequities, our staff rose to the occasion in the very early days while working to identify big systemic problems and opportunities to fix them.





# The Immediate Response

## The Fight for Emergency Protections

In the first few days of lockdown, LAJC joined community partners all over the state in calling on public officials at the state and local levels to take specific, aggressive actions already within their power to protect low-income Virginia residents and communities of color. We organized and updated those demands online and shared them across networks.

As an example, different school divisions in Virginia interpreted federal regulations around school lunch programs differently as it related to who was eligible for school lunches and how they had to access them. As a result, some divisions would not distribute food to students who were over 18, would only distribute one meal at a time, and/or would require parents to bring every eligible child to the distribution site each time.

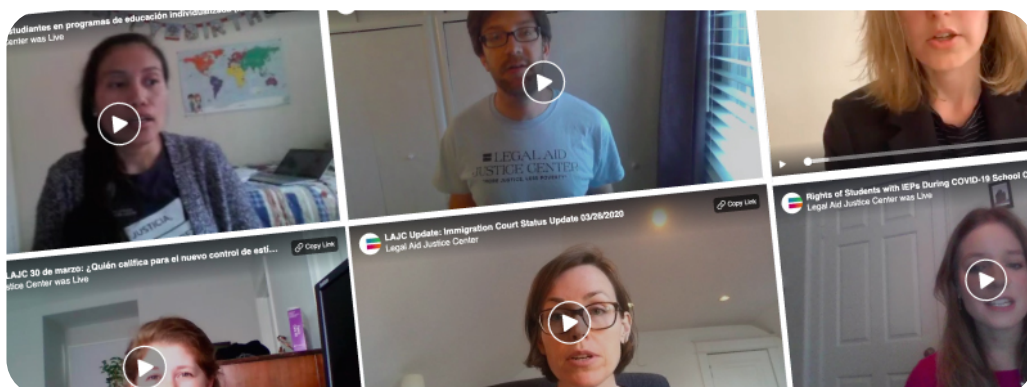
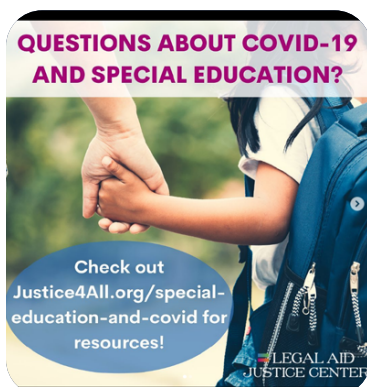
None of these restrictions were supported by the regulations, so we advocated with local divisions to change their reading of the rules while working with national advocates to petition the Federal Department of Education to put out a clarifying statement. That clarification came on March 25, 2020, and we immediately set about contacting school divisions to share the new guidance and demand more flexible meal policies.

## Supporting Mutual Aid

In the first few weeks, we worked with community members to set up and/or support mutual aid networks in Charlottesville, Richmond, and Northern Virginia. Those networks distributed groceries, medicine, and financial support. We helped organize socially distant food distributions and delivered food to the homes of families with COVID positive members. We worked with health officials to facilitate testing sites in communities of color in our service areas and in immigrant communities in Culpeper and Harrisonburg. A year later, we worked with the same communities (plus Galax and the Eastern Shore) to facilitate vaccine outreach to immigrants and farmworkers.

## Community Education

In the first year of the pandemic, eligibility rules for basic services and the means of accessing them changed repeatedly. We responded by creating detailed flyers and a series of over 90 Facebook Live videos in English and Spanish that covered topics such as tenants' rights; price gouging; avoiding scams; unemployment insurance; how to get healthcare without insurance; how to communicate with social security; changes to immigration procedures; and COVID-19 in the workplace. These videos were viewed over 50,000 times in just the first few months.



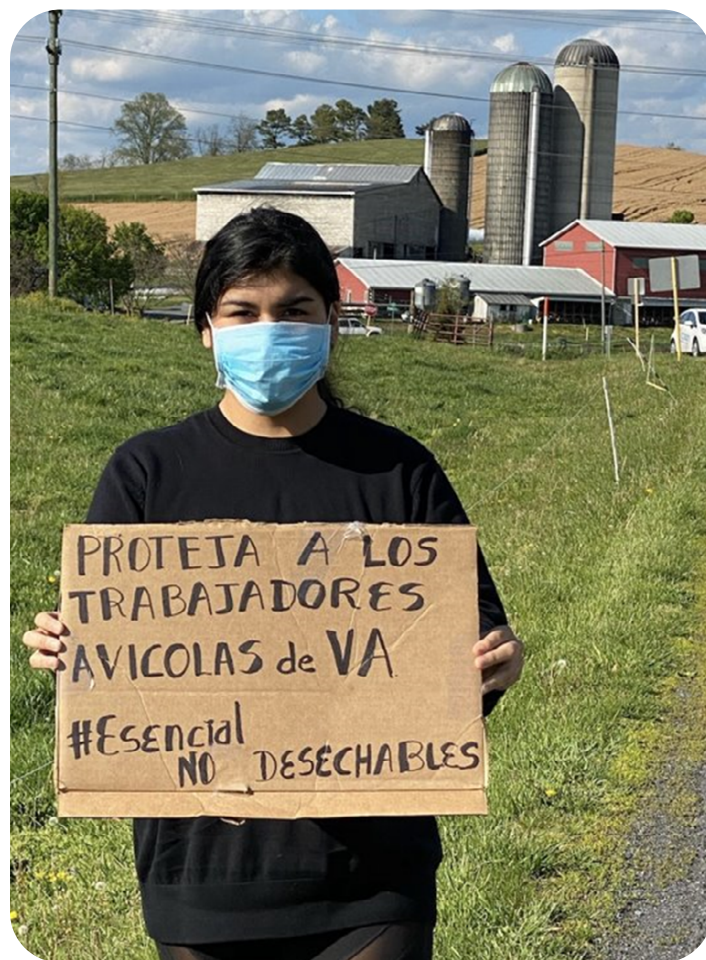
## COVID in Detention

In the very early days of the pandemic, we started hearing from people in Virginia's jails, prisons, and detention centers and from their loved ones about horrible conditions and widespread fear of dying from COVID while locked up.

To amplify these voices and their demands, we created our **Voices of the Incarcerated** project, in which we shared the stories of people in detention in their own words on our website. We shared these stories and their demands with local and state officials all over Virginia in an effort to convince them to use their existing authority to reduce incarcerated populations.

As members of the People's Coalition, Richmond #FreeOurPeople Coalition, and COVID-19 Justice Coalition, we helped plan car rallies, protests, and other direct actions to demand release, universal testing, and comprehensive COVID-19 response policies from public officials. Due to our efforts alongside community members, both the Albemarle Charlottesville Regional Jail and the Richmond City Jail began publicly releasing COVID testing data.

In a few facilities, including the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail, community groups like the People's Coalition pushed for and won dramatic increases in the use of home detention and ankle monitors as alternatives to incarceration. We worked with local groups like **Lending Hands** to find stable housing for unhoused people when that was the last barrier to their release on home detention.



## Outbreak in the Juvenile Justice System

LAJC provides individual legal representation to youth who are incarcerated, working to support their efforts to secure early release under Virginia law. As a result, we have strong relationships with the family members of those youth. We were alarmed, then, when we began hearing conflicting information about COVID spread from Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) officials and parents. Officials were providing public assurances that there was no COVID outbreak, but parents were telling us about rapid spread and sick youth in solitary confinement.

LAJC went to the media and within days, DJJ officials acknowledged the outbreak and began communicating their mitigation strategies to parents and the public.



# The Systemic Response

## Essential Workers

While much of Virginia's economy was locked down, essential workers were still going to work every day keeping the rest of us fed and supplied.

Almost immediately after lockdowns began, we started hearing from immigrant poultry workers about horrific conditions in their processing plants. They were sent to walk-in refrigerators before having their temperatures checked or given Tylenol if they had a fever and told to re-test. Then they were sent to work shoulder-to-shoulder on the line without adequate personal protective equipment and threatened if they complained.

Alongside poultry workers and allies, we organized simultaneous car rallies outside poultry facilities in Harrisonburg and the Eastern Shore. Hundreds of cars show up to support the workers.

In response to the publicity of these demonstrations, CDC officials came to inspect the poultry facility that was highlighted by the Eastern Shore rally. Within a few weeks, Governor Northam proposed new COVID workplace safety standards.

Our advocates worked countless hours pushing for those standards to be effective and far reaching. When the standards finally passed in mid-July, Virginia became the first state in the nation with enforceable, statewide, COVID-specific workplace safety standards.

In a rare salute, the administration gave advocates credit for pushing them to make the standards apply to all workers and not just the poultry workers that inspired the effort.

## Unemployment Insurance

Within two weeks of the start of widespread lockdowns and layoffs, LAJC staff helped set up a legal aid taskforce to monitor and respond to unemployment insurance concerns. We also set up a hotline, staffed by LAJC attorneys and volunteer law students, which gave out simple advice to hundreds of recently unemployed individuals while tracking the kinds of problems they reported.

In the fall of 2020, as the massive scale of the failures of the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) to administer unemployment payments became painfully clear, we started collecting hundreds of stories from workers who were suffering while their insurance claims languished. (cont'd on next page)



**Virginia's  
Unemployment  
Insurance System  
Is Broken**

**Tell Governor Northam  
to #FixtheVEC now!**

[www.justice4all.org/UI-Action](http://www.justice4all.org/UI-Action)



**A federal judge has ordered the Virginia Employment Commission to end its Unemployment Insurance backlog and fix issues at the agency.**

We then worked with the Virginia Poverty Law Center, Legal Aid Works, Kelly Guzzo PLC and Consumer Litigation Associates PLC to send a demand letter to VEC officials threatening a lawsuit if they didn't address their shortcomings.

The VEC officials promised to make several changes

and bolster their capacity to address their growing backlog of claims, and we held off on the lawsuit until later that spring when it became clear that the VEC's fixes were woefully insufficient.

In April of 2021, we worked with the same legal coalition to file a class-action lawsuit on behalf of five brave, named plaintiffs and others similarly situated. The lawsuit demanded redress for the state's failure to process unemployment insurance claims within the timeframe required by federal law.

With the public outcry about the obvious shortcomings of the VEC officials in the backdrop, the federal court took our lawsuit extremely seriously, pushing the state to the negotiating table where we won a settlement in which the state agreed to resolve its backlog by the end of the summer.

In the course of those negotiations, the state acknowledged that our earlier demand letter had directly led to over 40,000 individuals receiving over \$200,000,000 in "stuck" payments. By the end of 2021, according to the VEC officials themselves, in addition to the many whose UI (**cont'd on next page**)





applications were processed faster than they would have been, the lawsuit directly led to over 132,000 people receiving collectively over \$876,000,000 in stuck payments.

In the first week of 2022, the judge in the case decided that the state had met its obligations under the settlement agreement. We continue to meet with the VEC officials regularly to seek further systemwide improvements in the unemployment system.

## Eviction Prevention

As pandemic-related job losses hit across the country, thousands of tenants statewide suddenly became unable to make rent, turning a pre-existing eviction crisis into a catastrophe.

Legal aid organizations across the state immediately began advocating with local actors to close courts, cease executing writs of evictions, and enforce an ever-changing patchwork of local, state, and federal moratoria.

With a statewide eviction moratorium set to expire in June 2020, LAJC was ready to go to the mat for tenants. With the help of volunteer analysis of mass

data sets scraped from court websites, we published and updated an [Eviction Tracker](#), which quickly became the “go to” source for real-time eviction data, cited by policymakers and publications across the state.

We prepared federal litigation alleging that the courts were violating federal constitutional and COVID measures by proceeding to execute evictions and communicated our legal concerns to state actors. We supported activists in organizing sign-on letters and a Call-A-Thon to policymakers. We published a white paper pointing out that reopening the state courts for non-emergency proceedings without rent relief measures would lead to mass homelessness,



which prompted persistent media inquiries to the Governor’s office. And we joined a chorus of advocates and community groups demanding that the state take aggressive action to prevent an avalanche of evictions that would force low-income Virginians and Virginians of color to search for housing or experience homelessness during the continuing global pandemic.



These efforts, combined with the courage of individual tenants telling their own stories to media and policymakers, finally led to an extension of the moratorium, buying time to advocate for rent relief programs.

During the ensuing special legislative session, we worked closely with other advocates, particularly at Virginia Poverty Law Center, to add several essential protections for tenants, including requiring that landlords work with tenants to apply for federal rent relief funds, offer repayment plans, and give longer notice before filing evictions.

Largely as a result of those protections, Virginia was the top state in the nation for getting rent relief dollars out the door to tenants. LAJC staff helped over 300 families access over \$1.5 million in rent-relief funds in the fall of 2021.

Through it all, LAJC attorneys and organizers worked with volunteer court watchers, tenants unions, and mutual aid organizers to help scores of individual tenants fight to stay in their homes. We distributed know-your-rights information, fought against informal evictions, and, when the courts opened back up, defended our clients' rights in court.

## Education Funding

LAJC's pandemic-related education funding advocacy happened in the context of the Fund our Schools Coalition, which was launched in December of 2019. Fund Our Schools is a diverse, statewide coalition of parents, students, teachers, and organizations who believe that every child in every zip code across the Commonwealth of Virginia should have access to a high-quality public education. LAJC helped establish the Coalition, provides much of the technology and communications infrastructure, is part of the steering committee, and provides dedicated year-round staffing.







Fear of the pandemic's impact on Virginia's budget created a difficult environment in the Coalition's first budget cycle in early 2020, but Fund Our Schools managed to win an increase in the number of school counselors and ESL teachers, more funds for students from low-income families, and a pay increase for teachers and certain designated staff.

During the special session in the summer of 2020, Fund Our Schools helped prevent over \$500 million in funding cuts that otherwise would have happened if the State had cut funding based on pandemic-

related enrollment declines. The coalition also produced materials to help members and other activists to lobby their local governments to allocate pandemic stimulus funds to local schools.

In the next budget cycle in early 2021, Fund Our Schools won a bill that requires at least three school support positions—like school nurses or school social workers—for every 1,000 students in Virginia's public schools, a significant increase in the prior ratio.

We also won \$50 million to fund the School Equity and Staffing Act, \$40 million for methods to remediate lost instruction time, and improved teacher salaries. Fund our Schools' primary demand is that Virginia fully and fairly fund our public schools. We have a long way to go to achieve that demand amid new and continued attacks on public education, but we are boldly in the fight.

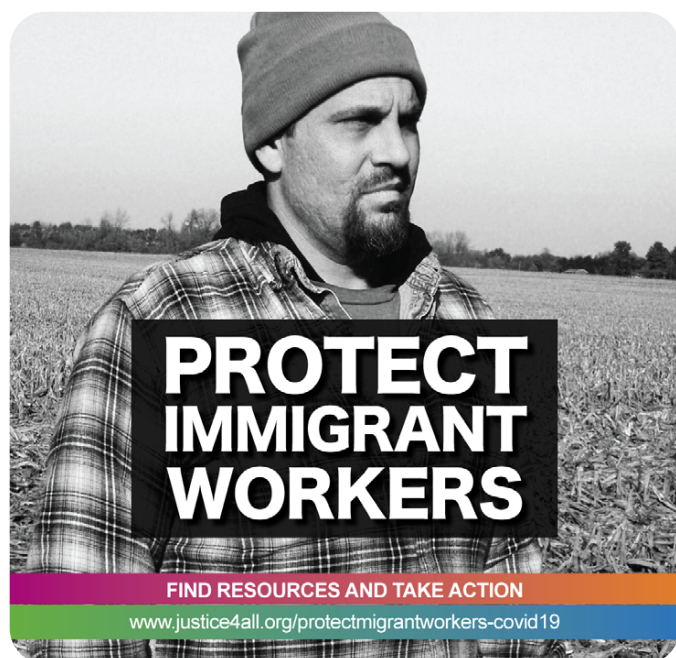
**You can join the Fund  
Our Schools Coalition here.**

## Protecting Medicaid Home Health Care

Prior to the pandemic, Virginia's Department of Social Services (DSS) started to contract with private insurance companies to manage Virginia's provision of Medicaid for home-health-aids. These caregivers are often the only alternative some people with severe health challenges have to avoid becoming institutionalized. Often a family member is able to receive this Medicaid funding to essentially be compensated for caring for their loved one.

Soon after DSS officials stopped managing the program themselves, we started hearing from individuals who were having their compensated care hours dramatically reduced with no medical justification given. When they appealed these decisions being made by the insurance companies, they found the process impossible to navigate.

As the pandemic started, our staff, who had been working on this issue, sent a demand letter to DSS officials pointing to the horrific outbreaks happening in nursing homes and other congregate settings and demanding a moratorium on these insurance companies unilaterally cutting hours.



In response, DSS officials agreed to work with us to reform their appeal process giving caregivers and patients a real, substantive opportunity to fight back and keep their income.

We continue to monitor this issue, taking individual cases and working with DSS officials to ensure they are able to hold these insurance companies accountable.

## Campaign to Close Farmville Detention Center

In the summer of 2020, as racial justice protests spread nationwide, the worst COVID outbreak in any immigrant detention facility nationwide exploded at the Farmville Detention Center. We responded by joining together with allies to [file a lawsuit](#) asking for an injunction preventing the federal government from transferring more people into the facility.

As we litigated, the government's filings revealed a horrifying fact that connected the outbreak to the police violence against anti-racist protestors in Washington D.C. The Trump administration wanted to bring ICE agents to DC to help quell protests, but federal rules said that ICE agents couldn't be flown via special charter flights unless they were transporting detainees. In order to get around that requirement, ICE transferred dozens of immigrants from places with active outbreaks in Florida and Arizona into Farmville. The ICE agents who accompanied them were then involved in the violence by federal officers at Lafayette Square and the infamous photoshoot at St. John's Cathedral.

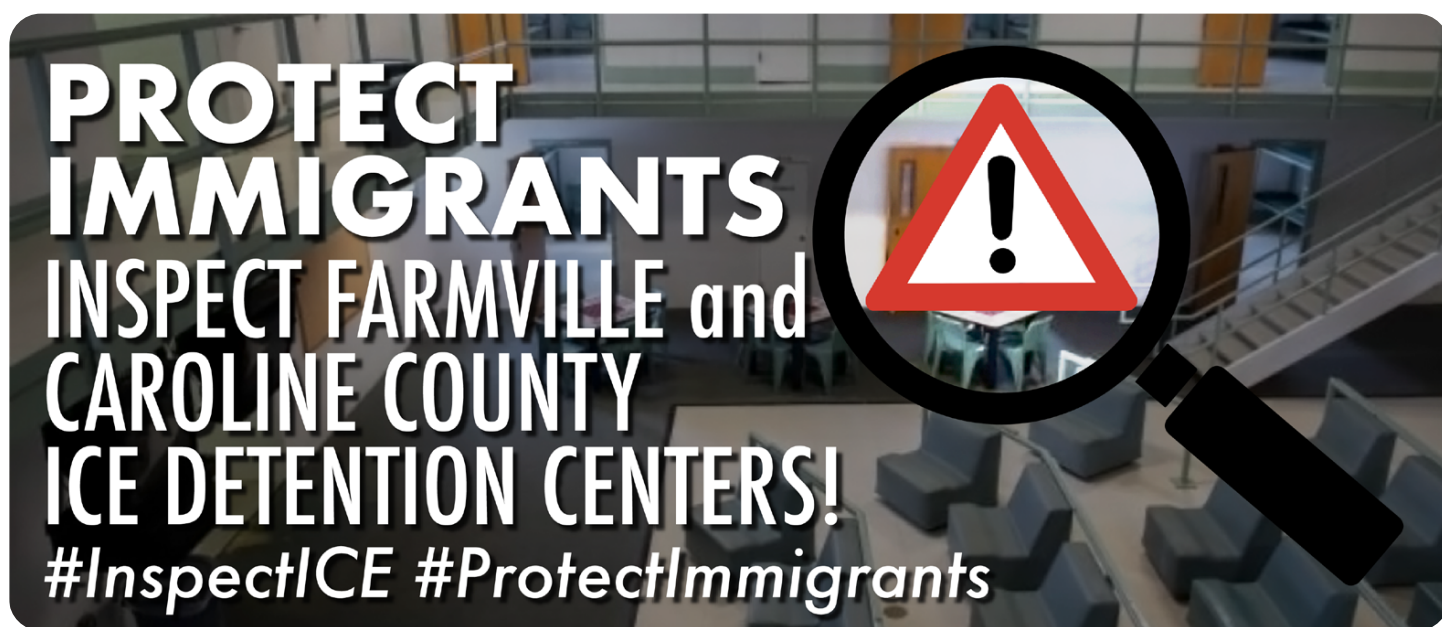
In August 2020, our injunction request was granted. At the time, there were over 300 people detained at Farmville. Over the course of the next two years, the population in the facility gradually decreased until there were zero people detained inside. As the population dwindled, LAJC staff worked to support the Free Them All VA coalition in their longstanding campaign to convince either Federal officials or the Board of Supervisors of Farmville to close the facility



entirely. We are actively supporting a campaign led by the #FreeThemAll Coalition to convince the town of Farmville and the federal government to cancel the contract for the facility itself.

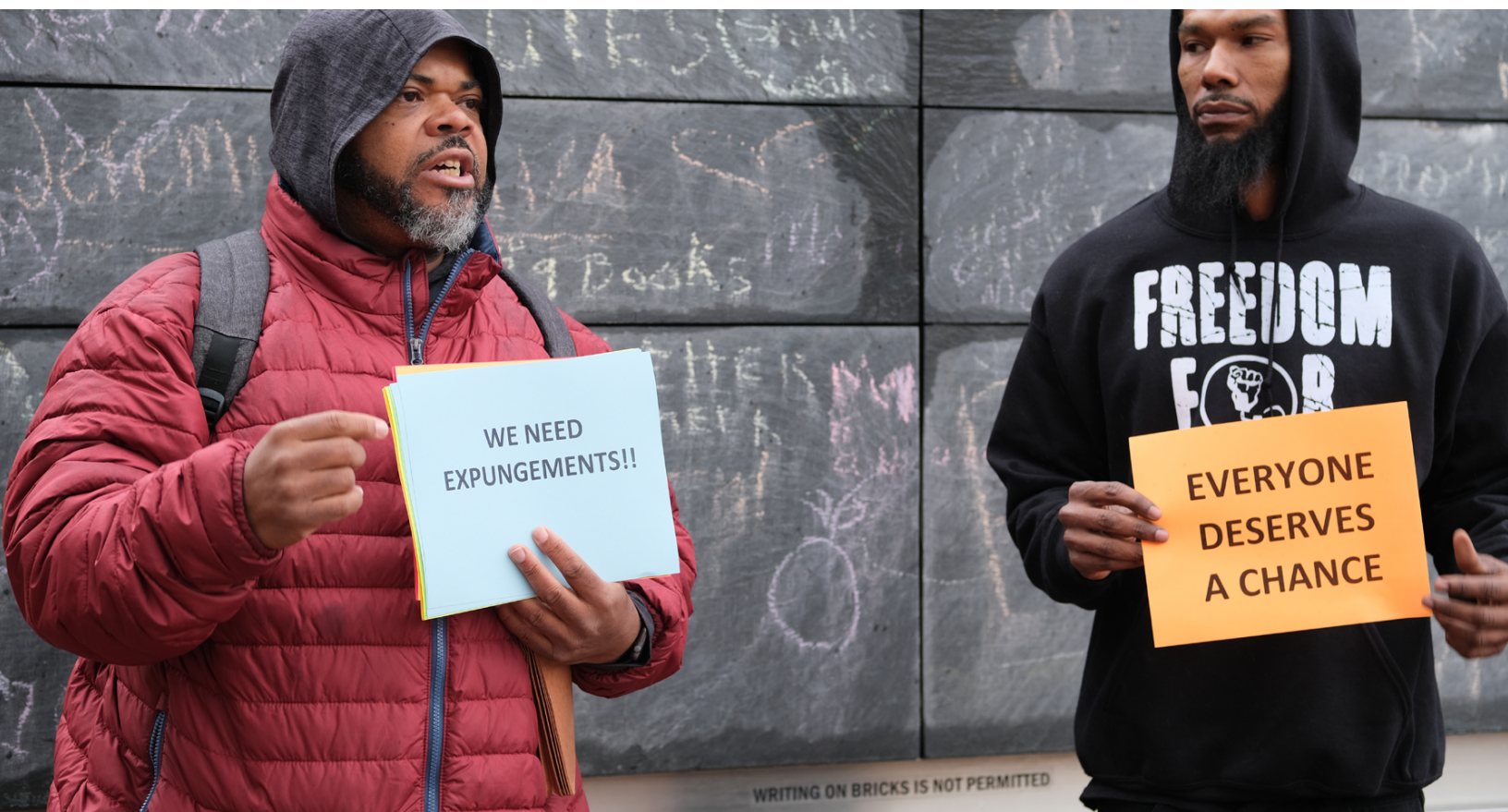
#### UPDATE

In July 2022, prior to publication of this report, our clients accepted a settlement agreement that paid them damages and limited the facility to operating at 25% capacity or less with strict rules about the process for incoming transfers until the public health emergency is over. The fight to close the facility permanently continues!





# The BLM Uprisings, Policing, & Criminal Legal System



If you or someone you know has been arrested during the recent actions in memory of George Floyd  
help is available

## RICHMOND AREA ATTORNEYS

PRO BONO AND SLIDING SCALE

### Supporting BLM Activists

In the summer of 2020, as communities all over the country rose up in response to the murders by police of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Marcus David-Peters, and countless others, our staff mobilized to help. For example, after over 230 people were arrested in Richmond in just one evening, our staff supported local criminal defense attorneys in developing a pro bono/low bono defense network, disseminating its information to those who had been arrested.

We also connected those attorneys to our partners at University of Richmond School of Law and Capital One's Pro Bono Council, who provided invaluable assistance reviewing body camera footage and supporting other aspects of defense strategy.

### Police-Free Schools

The uprising for Black lives inspired youth all over Virginia to demand that their communities rethink school-based policing. These young people asked school officials to disinvest in School Resource Officers and invest instead in mental health and other student supports. Our staff supported youth-led efforts in Charlottesville, Albemarle, Arlington, Richmond, and Harrisonburg.

For example, we provided considerable legal support to youth organized by Tenants & Workers United in Alexandria. We conducted advocacy trainings with several Alexandria youth, including a "budget advocacy 101" workshop; assisted with legal research and budget advocacy; met with School Board members; secured testimony from national partners; and made public comments at Alexandria School Board and City Council meetings.

After months of these efforts, the Alexandria City Public Schools voted to end its School Resource Office (SRO) program, and the Alexandria City Council voted to re-allocate \$800,000 in city funding for the program out of the police budget and into the school system budget to provide more mental health supports for students.

Our staff are committed to supporting student-led efforts to replace punitive responses with solutions that keep all students safe and supported.

## School Resource Officers and Virginia Law

a fact sheet from the Legal Aid Justice Center



## Police Accountability

Since 2018, LAJC staff have been supporting Charlottesville's People's Coalition and the Richmond Transparency and Accountability Project (RTAP) in their efforts to build formal and effective structures for civilian-led police accountability. Those efforts often ran into conflict with the Dillon Rule, which prevents localities in Virginia from passing local ordinances outside of those explicitly given to them by the state legislature.

In the summer of 2020, Governor Northam called for a special session of the Virginia legislature, in part to respond to massive protests demanding an end to police violence against Black people. We worked closely with the People's Coalition and RTAP members to use what they had learned to fight for meaningful criminal legal system reforms.

At the center of that fight was whether the legislature would pass enabling legislation or whether it would mandate the creation of police civilian review boards in every locality in Virginia. LAJC successfully supported enabling legislation, recognizing that in communities where activists were not ready to fight

for an independent board, those institutions were very likely to co-opted by police proponents and give lip-service to true accountability. The resulting law created the potential for robust civilian oversight of police, including review of both individual complaints and systemic issues, subpoena power, and final disciplinary authority.

That fight was prescient, as even in Charlottesville and Richmond, it has been a struggle to establish local bodies with true independence from police control.

We continue to support our allies in Charlottesville and Richmond as well as new groups in communities across Virginia in response to police violence..

## Expungement and Sealing in Virginia

Having a criminal record has been likened to the civil death penalty—it creates barriers to employment, housing, education, voting, transportation, and more. Virginia has one of the most unforgiving record clearing laws, making it nearly impossible to recover from any kind of contact with law enforcement and the courts. In fact, until 2021, Virginia's law had not been meaningfully amended since 1977!

As we added capacity to our Civil Rights and Racial Justice Program in 2020, we knew that we wanted to try to improve Virginia's criminal records laws. Together with our community partner, **Nolef Turns**, we helped convene the Expungement Council, a space for directly impacted community members to share their experiences and priorities for reform, as well as build their own collective power to make change at the state level. Along with our individual representation of clients, the Expungement Council helped LAJC understand what transformative reform would require.





During the special session of the Virginia legislature in 2020, we pushed hard for free, automatic, and far-reaching expungement/sealing of arrest and conviction records. With those provisions, hundreds of thousands of Virginians would experience liberation from criminal records. Without them, only those privileged enough to have access to the funds and the legal expertise to manage a petition-based system would get help.

When the special session ended without agreement on a bill, we were undeterred. We worked with Nolef Turns and the Expungement Council over the following months to educate legislators and pushed again for free, automatic, and far-reaching expungement/sealing in the 2021 General Assembly Session.

It required a special reconciliation negotiation, but, in the end, the General Assembly passed groundbreaking legislation establishes a **system of automatic criminal record sealing**. When the new law takes effect in 2025, Virginia will automatically seal misdemeanors that were dismissed or dropped, as well as nine different misdemeanor convictions,





preventing the public and government actors from viewing the records, except in very limited situations.

Individuals will also be able to petition to seal convictions for other misdemeanors and low-level felonies such as larceny and drug possession. Finally, the bill forces private companies that profit from the sale of criminal records to delete records the state has sealed and allows individuals or the attorney general to sue these companies if they do

As good as it is, the new law does not go far enough, fast enough, and we are committed to working to improve the statute over time to ensure more Virginians can benefit from this extraordinary relief and sooner.

## A Criminal Record is its Own Criminal Sentence



### The Case for Automatic Expungement in Virginia



# What Comes Next?

We are enormously proud of the impact described in this report and enormously grateful to our supporters, past and present, who have invested in us and our capacity to achieve justice alongside communities in Virginia.

As we look forward, we have big plans to continue to grow our impact in partnership with the communities we serve. We're excited to share that those plans have been accelerated by a transformational \$10MM gift from long-time supporter, Sonjia Smith, who asked us to put the money to work addressing urgent and longstanding needs in low-income communities and communities of color across Virginia.

Over the next few years, we hope to expand geographically to Hampton Roads where we've been asked by local groups to come and support their efforts. With that expansion, LAJC would have staff located in Hampton Roads, Charlottesville, Richmond, Petersburg, Northern Virginia, Galax, and the Eastern Shore.

We plan also to launch a new program focused on worker's rights statewide, to invigorate our health justice work, and to continue to develop our distinctive brand of community-centered legal aid that defends people's legal rights in their struggle to survive while integrating legal, organizing, communications, and policy strategies to achieve lasting justice.

We are excited for the future. While the last couple of years have been difficult for all of us, and the road ahead will bring more challenges to our work, **we are truly heartened that people like you have stepped up to partner with us in this fight.**

Thank you again for supporting racial, economic, and social justice with your donations, partnership, and personal advocacy. We hope that you will continue to invest in the impact we can have supporting communities throughout Virginia. **We look forward to what we can accomplish together next!**





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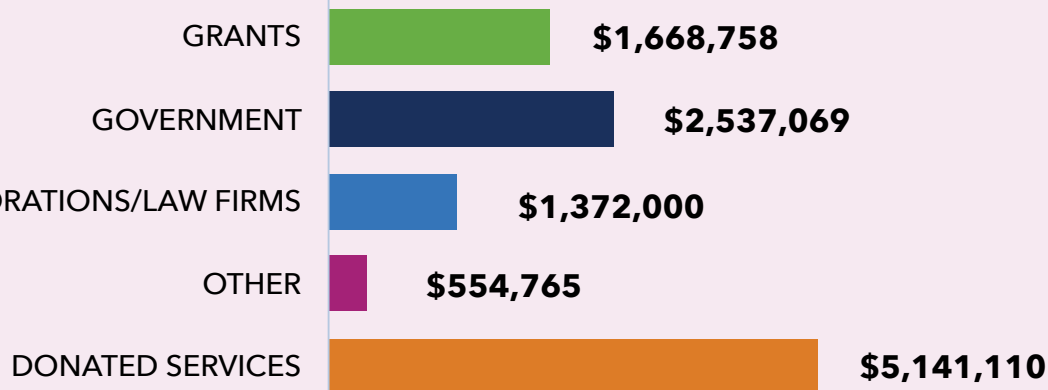
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## Revenue

FISCAL YEAR 2020

TOTAL

**\$11,273,702**

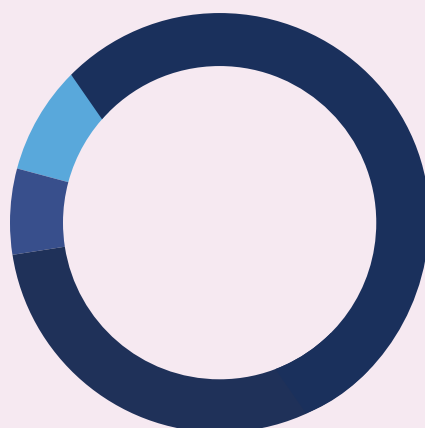


## Expenses

FISCAL YEAR 2020

TOTAL

**\$11,307,023**



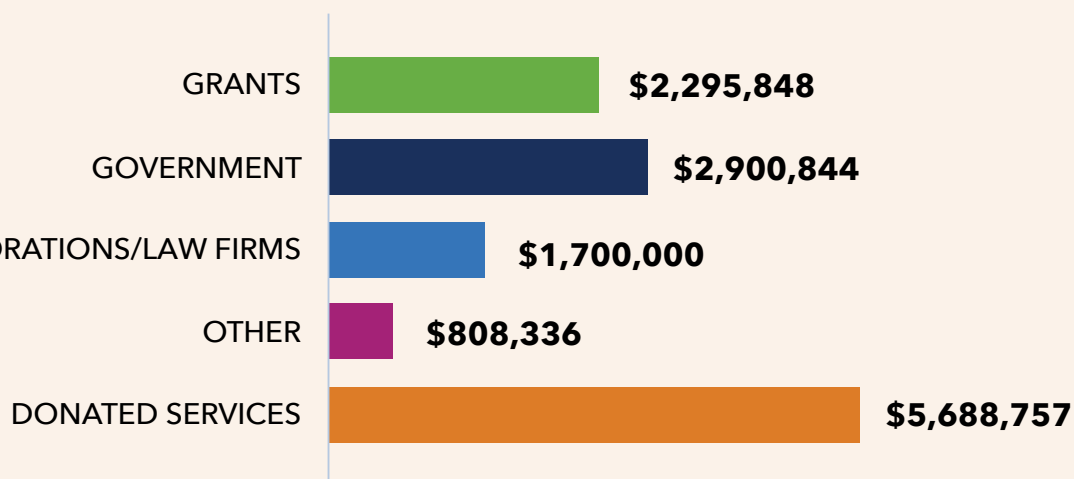
PROGRAMS	\$10,140,822
FUNDRAISING	\$563,088
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## Revenue

FISCAL YEAR 2021

TOTAL

**\$13,393,785**

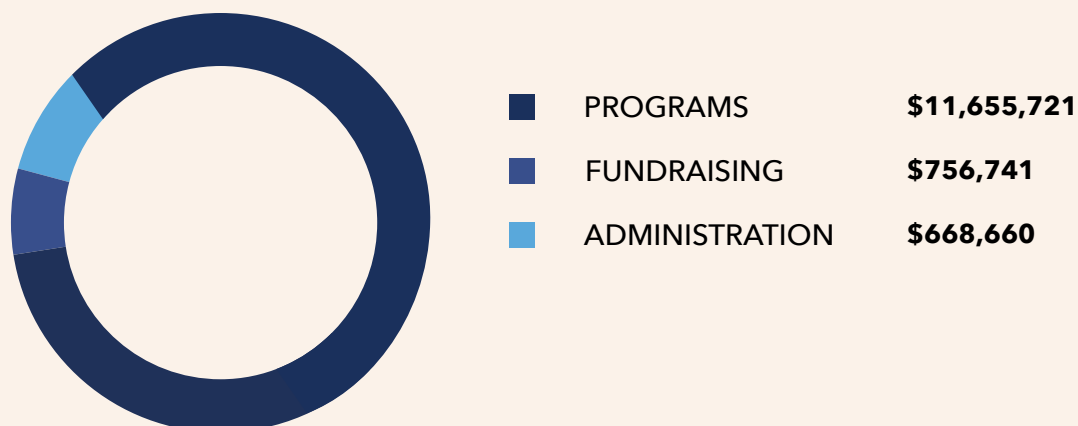


## Expenses

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TOTAL

**\$13,081,122**





# Introducing the John Conover Society

We are honored to name the planned giving society at LAJC after John Conover, a beloved friend, mentor, and colleague to many of us at LAJC and a favorite instructor to hundreds of LAJC clinical law students. John passed away on Sunday, October 4th, 2020. He wrote his own obituary which can be found on LAJC's website at the QR code below.

John joined our staff as an attorney in our Charlottesville office and worked alongside us for 15 years. He was usually one of the first people you met after starting work at LAJC, and he had a Gandalfian way of showing up in your life when you least expected and most needed it.

John was also a generous donor and a volunteer on our Charlottesville Advisory Council where he helped us conceptualize a planned giving society for LAJC. Whether it was our planned giving society, the Rivanna Trail, or his wonderful family, John was fully invested in the things he helped to build. He left LAJC a meaningful bequest.

For several years, we have been trying to think of a name for our planned giving society, but nothing really made sense, until now.



WE ARE PROUD TO LIST OUR FOUNDING

## John Conover Society Members

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John Conover and Virginia Daugherty

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For more information about the John Conover Society, please contact [developmentteam@justice4all.org](mailto:developmentteam@justice4all.org)

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We are grateful to the following people for their support.

Your commitment to building a better Virginia and belief in us is an inspiration.

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*In Memoriam*

# Libby Fulcher



**This year we said a tearful goodbye to a strong, huge-hearted, and all-around beloved human, Libby Fulcher.**

Libby was born in Cantera, Puerto Rico. She was driven to live a life of meaning and accomplishment, obtaining her college degree at age 47 and learning to play the violin at age 55. Libby died of pancreatic cancer on June 2, 2022.

When Libby arrived at LAJC in 2014, she was a godsend. She transformed the front desk in Charlottesville into a powerhouse of efficiency, caring, and cheerfulness, a feat no one thought possible. She charmed clients and staff alike with her warm smile, guffaw-worthy spunk, and no-nonsense competence. She later brought her can-do spirit to our finance and administrative team, sharing her incredible skills with the whole organization, before being promoted again to become the first Office Manager in our Richmond office.

In addition to the formal roles Libby occupied at LAJC, she played many informal ones as well, and there seemed to be no problem she wasn't game to solve. She served as Spanish teacher, storyteller, listener, prankster, mender of dresses, and "fixer" of broken faucets and broken hearts. We will never forget all the fun and creativity she brought to everything she did, from organizing easter egg hunts and office clothing swaps to hosting Halloween costume contests.

Libby danced into all our lives in ways that will not soon be forgotten. She brought her full self to the work, sharing equally both the joys and heartbreak of carrying out our mission in fellowship with each other. We will hold LAJC's "Luchadora" in our hearts forever.

