

**VOLUNTEER
LAWYERS**
PROJECT

Annual Report 2019-2020



Dear Friends and Colleagues,

In 1977 when The Boston Bar Association launched The Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP), its goal was to meet the needs of low-income residents of the Greater Boston area by partnering with the private bar. When the world came to a halt in March of 2020, VLP was forced to adapt to continue to deliver quality legal assistance to our clients. Within months our clinics transformed into an online format, and our staff updated policies and procedures for working with clients remotely on top of training numerous Pro Bono Attorneys in the new way clinics would be run. Some clinics' virtual transitions have been **so successful** they will continue to be remote after the pandemic recedes.

Prior to the shut down in March, VLP had already made many big changes. In 2019, we packed up and moved offices from 99 Chauncy Street to 7 Winthrop Square, consolidating our physical space so that our office ran even more smoothly and efficiently. We also became a completely paperless office, keeping digital files secured in Legal Server. In 2019-2020 our staff had grown and we were able to expand our pro bono reach to serve and support even more clients. This wide-ranging support enabled us to accomplish **remarkable milestones**, including being chosen by the Governor of Massachusetts to help create and implement a project to prevent mass homelessness in the state through the COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP).

With the help of our pro bono volunteers, we have been able to discharge more than **four million** dollars worth of debt, serve more than 3,500 people at housing court, have our legal help line ERLI provide legal assistance for more than 4,000 people, and continue to be a program with nationwide impact. We cannot accomplish half of what we have over the last two years without the generosity of our volunteer's time, expertise, and financial support. **Because of you**, our volunteers, our supporters, our board, and our staff, forty-four years later Volunteer Lawyers Project continues to carry out our mission of providing equal access to representation for lower income households.

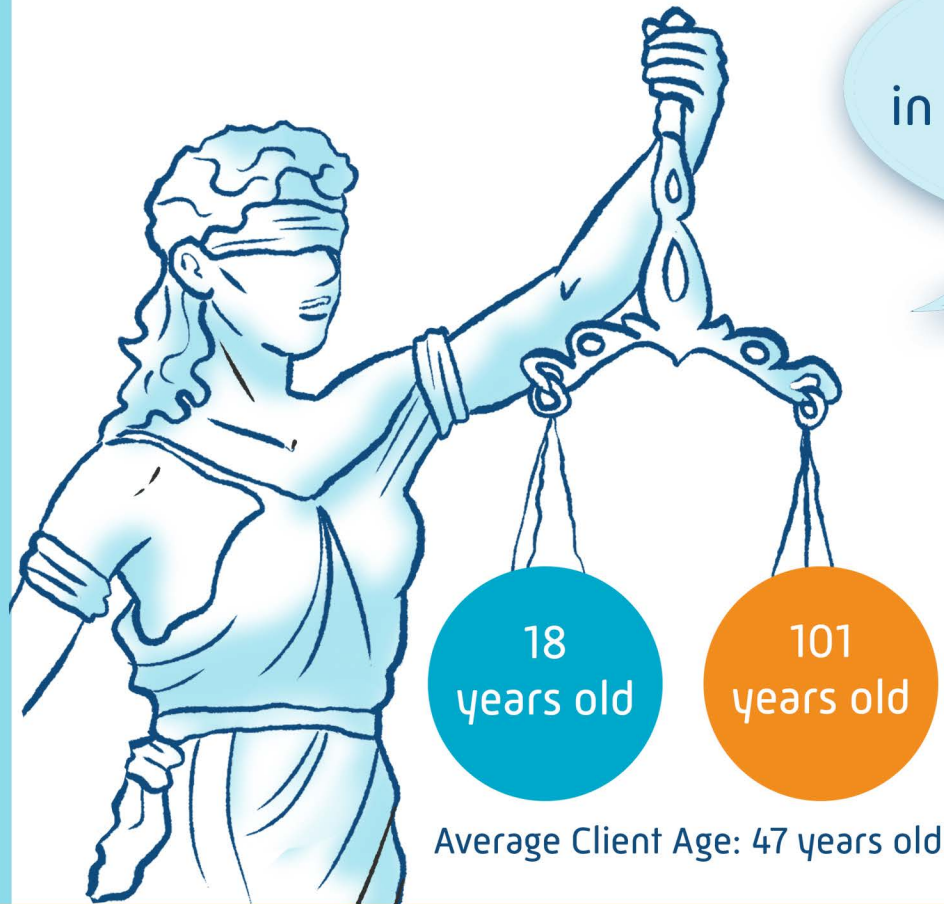
Sincerely,

Joanna Allison Esq.
Executive Director of VLP



Client Demographics

2019 - 2020



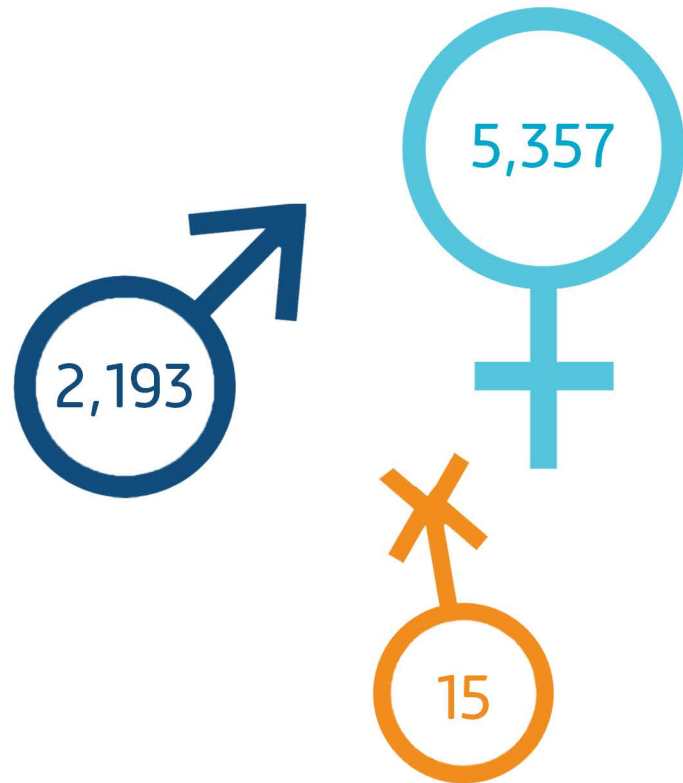
Clients Received Assistance
in Over **61 Different Languages!**

220 Veterans

**1,501 Survivors of
Domestic Violence**

Client Demographics

continued



Success Stories

Volunteer Attorney **Kimberly McIver** won a 1-year restraining order for a 209A Domestic Abuse client. The client reached out to VLP for representation on her upcoming 209A hearing against her husband. Her husband had a history of abuse, intimidation, and controlling behaviors towards the client. He was physically violent with her in front of her children on more than one occasion, and he would drain their shared bank accounts when the client would not do what he said. The client became even more fearful when she found out he put a tracking device in her car so he would know where she was at all times. The final straw was when her spouse threw a lawn ornament through the window of the home where the client and her children were staying.

Attorney McIver usually works on divorce and custody cases for VLP, but she felt compelled to help this client after hearing her story. Attorney McIver represented the client in court and secured a 1-year restraining order that covers both the client and her two children, providing them with the legal protection they desperately need. VLP is so grateful to have hard-working, zealous advocates like Kimberly McIver volunteering with us!

A VLP housing client had a tremendous win in his case thanks to Skadden Attorney **Benjamin Jiang**! The client, a single father of two children, had been living in his apartment for a little less than a year. He faced ongoing issues with bad conditions during that time, including no heat, a leaky roof, and a rodent infestation. There were also issues with the landlord entering the client's apartment without permission and the landlord's dog attacking the client's son! Attorney Jiang accepted this case pro bono and fought hard for the client. In the end, Attorney Jiang was able to secure a \$15,000 payment for the client in waived rent and a cash payment. Attorney Jiang's win is an incredible example of how an attorney can change their client's life. The client expressed his gratitude when he wrote to Attorney Anthony, stating,

"This was such a difficult, scary, and dark time for my sons and me, and because of your willingness to help and your gracious heart, we came out victorious, and we were able to establish a great new life! Thank you, thank you, and thank you!"

VLP is very fortunate to have volunteers like Attorney Jiang fighting for the rights of the underrepresented!

Financial Outcomes

2019 - 2020



Wages Returned
\$11,849.99

Unemployment Insurance
Approved or Maintained
\$193,565

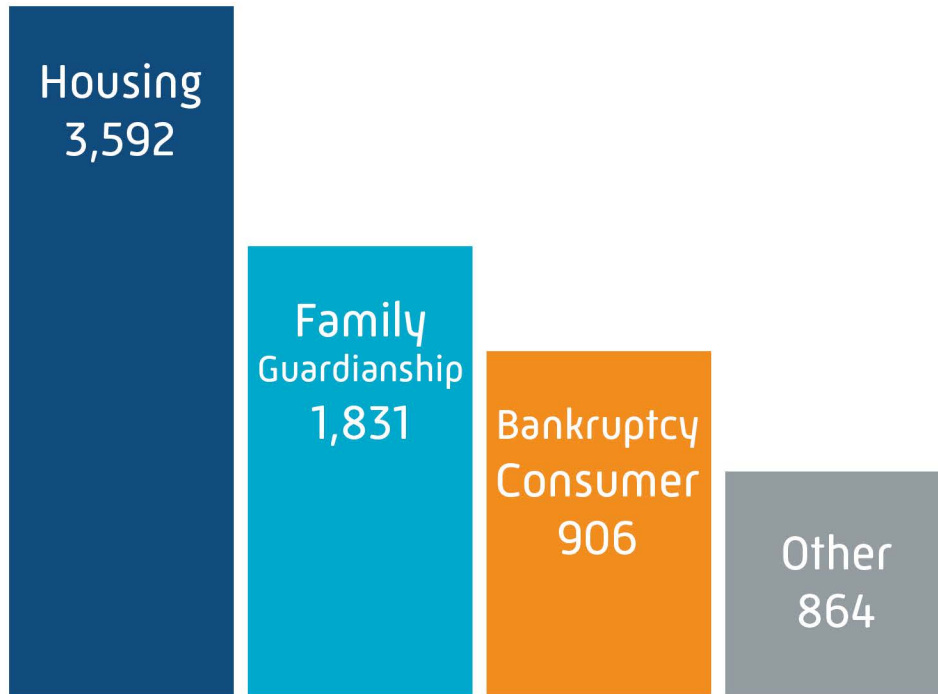
Bankruptcy Debt
Discharged
\$4,171,881

Total Funds Returned
to Clients
\$6,365,358

Volunteer Impact

2019 - 2020

18,449 Volunteer Hours on Cases
5,922 Volunteer Hours at Clinics



Volunteers Provided Assistance to Over **7,000** Clients!

The Covid Eviction Legal Help Project

In October 2020, Governor Baker chose the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) to participate in a statewide COVID Eviction Legal Help Project (CELHP). VLP hired several new staff members to assist in developing and implementing this project. The goal of CELHP is to provide free legal assistance to low-income tenants and landlords across Massachusetts who are at risk of losing their homes due to financial hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to court closures, the CELHP team had to pivot to provide legal and education services virtually. Lawyers from six separate firms joined VLP's Pro Bono team to assist on the tenant side, and CELHP began providing Lawyer for the Day assistance in the Eastern Housing Court every day of the week. In addition to successfully integrating CELHP tenant cases into VLP's well-established processes, new programs to serve tenants were also developed. The new Answer and Discovery (A&D) clinic and the "Tenants' Rights and Protection" training series are two such programs.

CELHP staff went on to develop a separate team tasked with increasing our impact with unrepresented, small landlords statewide. CELHP reached out to community organizations, lawyers, law firms, and each of the six Housing Courts to create an effective and sustainable plan to better serve low-income **owner-occupant landlords**. VLP's CELHP team provided legal assistance, outreach, education, and legal representation to clients who sought assistance. Meanwhile, VLP provided immediate assistance to constituent tenants and landlords during the implementation stages. VLP is now **the first and only** organization under the CELHP program that assists landlords who reside in any part of Massachusetts. We couldn't do this work without the dedication of our staff, volunteers, and partners. Thank you so much for your continued efforts!

New to CELHP? The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) assembled the CELHP Steering Committee in September 2020, in which VLP Executive Director, Joanna Allison, is a member. DHCD started CEHLP on October 16, 2020, to prevent evictions and stabilize housing during the pandemic. DHCD engaged the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) to create a statewide, coordinated method to provide free legal assistance to income-eligible tenants and owner-occupants of 2-3 family homes. MLAC brought on two partners, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) and the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP). MLRI, in partnership with six legal aid organizations, was charged to implement the legal aid component and provide representation for tenants. VLP was charged to implement the pro bono component, serving tenants in the Boston area and serving low-income, owner-occupant landlords statewide.

Awardees

2019 - 2020



Hon. Joan Feeney (Ret.)
Gideon's Trumpet Award
2020



Caryn Mitchell-Munevar, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2020



Joel Gardiner, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2020



Ryan Rosenblatt, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2020



Samuel Bombaugh, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2020



Karen Quandt, Esq.
Gideon's Trumpet Award
2019



Brian Dunphy, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2019



Joel Reck, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2019



Nina Parker, Esq.
Denis Maguire Award
2019



**VOLUNTEER
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LSC | America's Partner
for Equal Justice

LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION



The Mifflin
Memorial Fund

Frank W. and
Carl S. Adams
Memorial Fund

From All of Us at VLP: Thank You!