

VOLS
VOLUNTEERS *of* LEGAL SERVICE



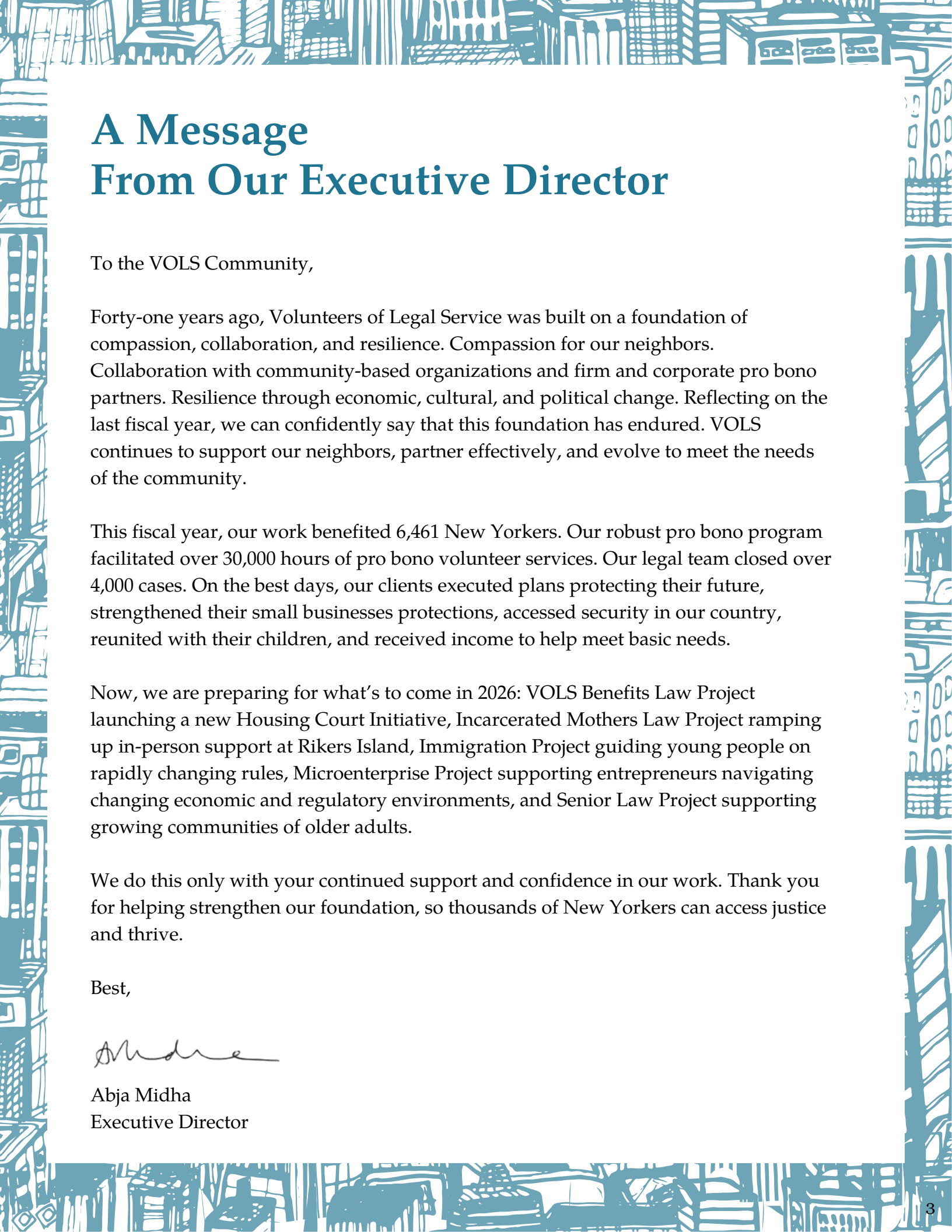
VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE
IMPACT REPORT

FY25

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A Message From Our Executive Director

To the VOLS Community,

Forty-one years ago, Volunteers of Legal Service was built on a foundation of compassion, collaboration, and resilience. Compassion for our neighbors. Collaboration with community-based organizations and firm and corporate pro bono partners. Resilience through economic, cultural, and political change. Reflecting on the last fiscal year, we can confidently say that this foundation has endured. VOLS continues to support our neighbors, partner effectively, and evolve to meet the needs of the community.

This fiscal year, our work benefited 6,461 New Yorkers. Our robust pro bono program facilitated over 30,000 hours of pro bono volunteer services. Our legal team closed over 4,000 cases. On the best days, our clients executed plans protecting their future, strengthened their small businesses protections, accessed security in our country, reunited with their children, and received income to help meet basic needs.

Now, we are preparing for what's to come in 2026: VOLS Benefits Law Project launching a new Housing Court Initiative, Incarcerated Mothers Law Project ramping up in-person support at Rikers Island, Immigration Project guiding young people on rapidly changing rules, Microenterprise Project supporting entrepreneurs navigating changing economic and regulatory environments, and Senior Law Project supporting growing communities of older adults.

We do this only with your continued support and confidence in our work. Thank you for helping strengthen our foundation, so thousands of New Yorkers can access justice and thrive.

Best,



Abja Midha
Executive Director

The VOLS Model

The VOLS Model begins by identifying pressing civil legal issues affecting New Yorkers. We structure our programs, staff, and pro bono resources around these needs. Our approach is continually refined through feedback and guidance from the communities we serve, ensuring our efforts effectively address our clients' civil legal challenges. We are a Pro Bono First Organization – every VOLS project and initiative is designed to maximize support for our clients by incorporating pro bono volunteers from private law firms and companies. **That's how one VOLS attorney becomes many.** We can take more cases, serve more New Yorkers, and tap into more resources for our clients than we could through our nonprofit staff alone.

Pro Bono First

VOLS works with 83 law firms and companies. We connect and support an active network of 1,800 pro bono volunteers who take cases, make community legal education presentations, and help develop up-to-date materials.



Our Team

VOLS' team provides direct civil legal services and recruits, trains, and mentors pro bono volunteers. The team provides accessible community legal education and training.



Community Partnerships

VOLS works with schools, hospitals, older adult centers, community-based organizations, and New York City and State government officials to support our clients. We collaborate on community legal education, identify emerging legal trends and community members in need of support.



By the Numbers

In Our Last Fiscal Year:



6,461

New Yorkers benefited from VOLS' free civil legal services



1,800

Active pro bono volunteers in our network



30,400

Pro bono hours provided through partnerships with 83 law firms & corporations



\$30M

Value of pro bono hours provided benefiting clients

Our Clients



MANHATTAN

44%

BROOKLYN

21%

QUEENS

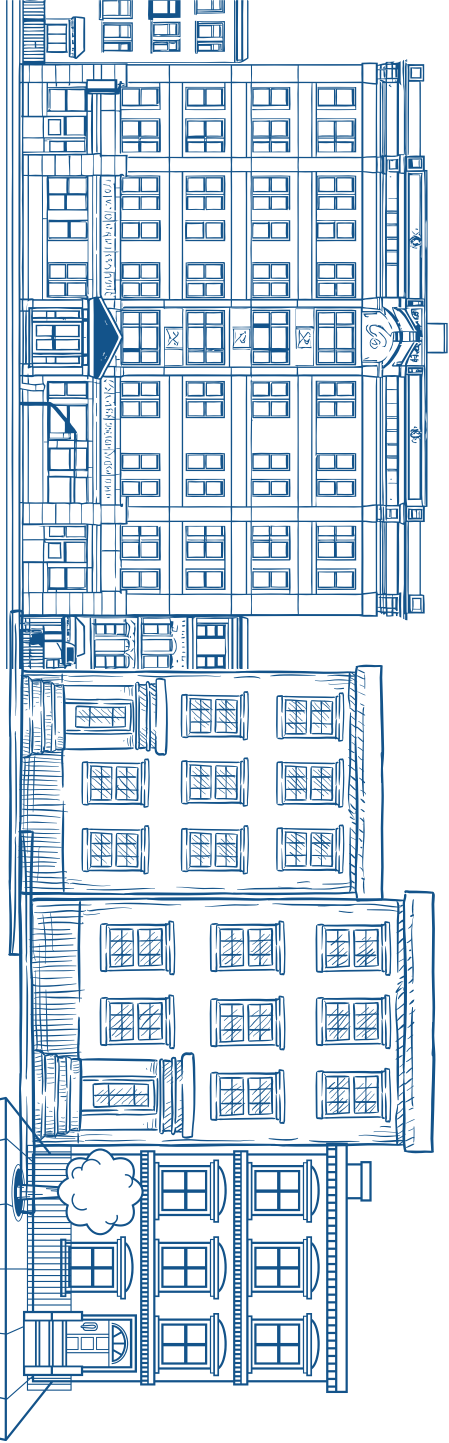
18%

THE BRONX

15%

STATEN ISLAND

2%



More than a Case: A New Yorker

Sadik Topia Back in Business

VOLS Microenterprise Project and pro bono partner Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP assisted Sadik Topia, a newsstand owner who had served his Upper West Side community for years. With his team's passionate advocacy and legal support, Sadik navigated complex regulations and legal challenges. It was a neighborhood celebration when he obtained a new license and retained his family's livelihood. Thanks to free legal services from VOLS MEP and our pro bono partners, Mr. Topia's newsstand is back in business.



"Supporting New Yorkers animates all of our work at VOLS. Our attorneys and pro bono partners know that even one civil legal challenge can have catastrophic consequences. We are never happier than when our clients thrive."

- **Stephanie Taylor, Pro Bono Director**



More than a Case: TP's Story

Incapacity and life-planning provides critical legal protections for older adults and tremendous relief as they navigate life's changes.

VOLS Senior Law Project received a call from TP, an older adult client suffering from gangrene and the declining use of his voice. He urgently needed life planning documents as his health was rapidly declining. TP was determined to make sure his wishes were clearly documented, that his family would be protected in the event of his incapacity or death, and that his chosen caregivers appointed. With the help of his ex-wife, who continues to care for him, we worked closely to understand TP's wishes and prepare the necessary life planning legal documents. Our team took particular care to ensure accurate communications, since TP was unable to speak or write.

Once the documents were ready, our entire team visited his nursing home in the Bronx to complete the signing, with witnesses, a notary, and a physical signer on his behalf. **The finalized documents gave TP a tremendous sense of relief, helped protect his ex-wife and children, and ensured his affairs would be handled according to TP's wishes.**



More than a Case: An Impact

Markey Decision

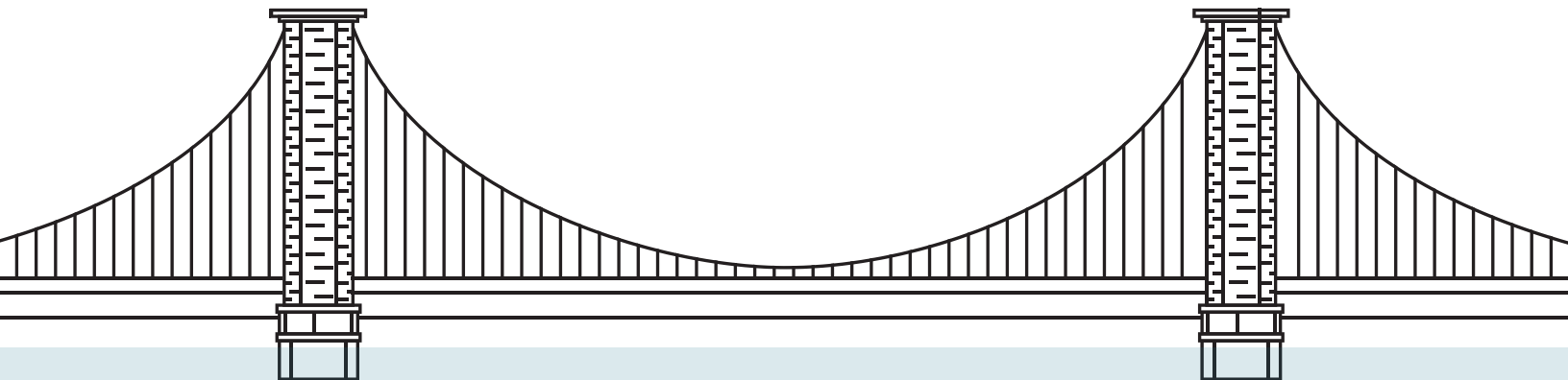
What happens when a New Yorker is forced to sue the government in order to enforce their rights – and wins? Our client Peter Markey, a disabled Navy veteran, sued New York State in 2023 after his application for rental assistance was denied. Soon after filing that lawsuit, the State approved Mr. Markey's benefits. But despite forcing Mr. Markey to take legal action in order to rightfully obtain his benefits, the State insisted it would not cover his legal fees to do so. This year, thanks to the work of VOLS Benefits Law Project and a phenomenal pro bono team at Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP, a New York Appellate Court unanimously decided to close a critical legal loophole so that everyday New Yorkers can recoup attorney fees in prevailing lawsuits against the state. The Third Department held that plaintiffs in an Article 78 proceeding may be awarded attorney fees if they are a prevailing party — even without a court ruling — under the “catalyst theory” within the New York Equal Access to Justice Act. This is a victory for access to justice with significant implications for **all** New Yorkers seeking to enforce their rights.

Ending Discriminatory Practice in Article 17-A Guardianship Applications

VOLS Senior Law Project in collaboration with pro bono partner Linklaters LLP successfully challenged unlawful and discriminatory practices in Queens County's Article 17-A Guardianship procedures. As a result, immigrant families will no longer face an unnecessary barrier when seeking to lawfully care for their adult disabled children.

Group Entity Representation

VOLS Microenterprise Project represented a Brooklyn-based Merchant Association in their effort to gain tax-exempt status under 501(c)(6) of the Internal Revenue Code. The Merchant Association's mission is to support its members, provide goods and services, share resources, encourage commercial district activity, create job opportunities, and raise awareness for the commercial district's growth. The neighborhood has over 326 small businesses and is projected to generate about \$2.6 billion by 2027. This work impacts the entire neighborhood served, nearly 88,000 residents.



VOLS Senior Law Project

VOLS Senior Law Project (SLP) helps low-income older adults make key legal decisions for incapacitation, end-of-life, and posthumous care. Through our life planning services, we help older adults identify what they need and draft and execute their documents and directives, so they can have control over their medical and financial futures.



MM's Story

VOLS' client MM is an older adult living with stage 4 cancer and is hard-of-hearing. When MM felt it was time to draft her key life planning documents, her social worker reached out to VOLS. Understanding the client's needs, and the complexity of her health conditions, VOLS SLP planned a tailored approach. Our team worked with MM over the course of three months, holding weekly phone calls with the assistance of her social worker, to draft her life planning documents. When the time came to finalize and execute MM's documents, VOLS SLP's attorneys traveled to her home in Brooklyn -- a meaningful day that provided our client with much needed peace of mind and protection for the future..



"Having key legal documents in place gives an older person **control over decisions made during their final years**, increases quality of life and supports stability in housing, medical, property, and other basic needs."



VOLS Benefits Law Project (BLP) helps New Yorkers more equitably access essential public benefits that help meet basic needs including Unemployment Insurance, New York Rent Freeze Programs (SCRIE/DRIE), and a range of housing-related public benefits. We assess eligibility, appeal denials, and other issues, and assist with applications, renewals, and recertifications.



VOLS Benefits Law Project

VOLS stands up for New Yorkers when wrongful denials threaten access to the critical benefits they need and deserve.



~135,111 households were eligible for the NYC Rent Freeze Program [in 2019], with only 75,515 actually receiving benefits.

DG's Story

VOLS' client DG is a disabled, low-vision tenant living alone in southern Brooklyn, struggling to afford the rent of his longtime apartment. In spring 2025, he applied for a rental assistance benefit called the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). Despite meeting all of the program requirements, the city refused to approve his application, claiming he failed to provide enough documents and accusing him of misrepresenting his income. DG reached out to VOLS, despondent and afraid. VOLS immediately intervened, visiting DG in his home, assisting DG to secure additional documents impossible for him to access on his own, and challenging the city's assessment of his income. The city reconsidered his application and approved DG for DRIE and retroactive benefits due to their delay. Without VOLS, DG would have most definitely lost his chance at this benefit, but he now has a clear pathway to remain in his home.

VOLS Immigration Project

VOLS Immigration Project (IP) provides free immigration legal services to young people and their families that support their security and education and employment opportunities. Our model is designed to adapt to the evolving needs of the immigrant community, ensuring we're prepared to address changes as they develop.

31% of all students enrolled in higher education were first and second-generation immigrants



AD's Story

Fostering relationships with our young immigrant clients is key to providing the support they need and deserve. The immigration legal system can be extremely challenging—even a single missed hearing can cost someone their status and result in their removal from the United States. Such was the case for AD, a teenager applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a form of protection for immigrant youth who have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by one or both parents. One missed hearing put in place an order for him to be removed from the United States, which would have created catastrophic consequences for this young man. Assigned to this complex case, VOLS IP's team was persistent. We successfully argued for the removal order to be overturned. Now, AD has an approved SIJS petition and can remain in the country, putting him on the path to becoming a lawful permanent resident. As they work on the final step of ending AD's removal proceedings, AD and his pro bono attorneys remain close. When AD graduated from high school this year, his lawyers were in the audience, cheering on his future.

93% of New Yorkers “believe that access to attorneys for all people, including those in immigration court, is (somewhat or very) important”

VOLS Microenterprise Project

VOLS Microenterprise Project (MEP) provides transactional legal services to new and existing low- to moderate-income small business owners and acts as a vital resource through our community legal education workshops and clinics to provide legal information on emergent issues.

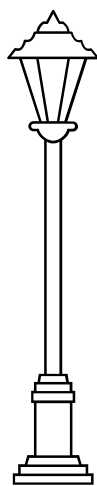
Rouguiatou Diallo is the founder of SLM, an up-and-coming beauty tech brand developing sensor-based skincare products that adapt in real time to each user's skin needs. SLM's story starts with Rouguiatou's own journey with acne and hyperpigmentation, which led her to dedicate more than seven years to researching the skincare industry. When it was time to launch her business and bring her vision to life, Rouguiatou reached out to VOLS. VOLS MEP and pro bono volunteers are supporting Rouguiatou in preparing the key legal documents needed to launch and safeguard her business. She also received intellectual property advice through a VOLS legal education workshop and clinic.

"VOLS is helping me protect my brand and bring my vision for inclusive, tech-driven skincare to life," said Rouguiatou.

62% of small business owners said they "lack the tools and resources to address the challenges their businesses face."



VOLS MEP provides free legal support on transactional matters including, advice on legal entity selection and formation, creating and maintaining governance documents, drafting and evaluating contracts, reviewing compliance with employment laws, and protecting intellectual property.



VOLS Incarcerated Mothers Law Project

VOLS Incarcerated Mothers Law Project (IMLP) provides family law advice, advocacy and education to mothers and parents in and recently released from women's prison and jail in New York State. Most of the mothers we see have no other access to family law attorneys or legal advice. We help protect parental rights, arrange care for children, maintain family ties, and plan for successful reunification.



Ms. A's Story

VOLS IMLP's lawyers and pro bono partners can be a mother's only link to enforcement of her parental rights. Ms. A had sole custody of her child before she was incarcerated. She wished to continue the relationship with her daughter, which she was fully entitled to in a court order. Indeed, she was entitled to in-person visits, weekly video/phone calls, and independent access to medical and educational providers. Despite this, Ms. A was NEVER informed about where her child attended school or the name of her daughter's pediatrician. She received no updates on her child and has not had a call in almost two years. Our team is meeting with Ms. A regularly to work on enforcing her parental rights and working with her social worker to provide holistic care. Families like Ms. A and her daughter benefit significantly from having access to a family lawyer who can guide them through this process toward reunification.



VOLS IMLP is the only program in New York State that provides a full range of free family law support to help mothers access their rights and help families stay connected.

"It is estimated that 62% of incarcerated women in New York State are mothers of minor children (half of whom are nine years or younger)."

VOLS Children's Project

VOLS Children's Project (CP) provides pro bono partner law firms with school- and hospital-based legal support to low-income children and families. Matters typically involve housing, public benefits, and immigration challenges that interfere with the child's health or education.

VOLS advocates for tenants when difficult landlords refuse to improve dangerous living conditions.

A young family from The Bronx had a child receiving treatment in the hospital when they met with the VOLS Children's Project clinic about their apartment. They weren't sure what to do—their apartment was filled with mold, leaks, and had a dangerous risk of lead poisoning for their child. To make matters worse, their landlord was on the city's notorious "Worst Landlord Watchlist." Although the family had pressed their landlord to resolve these serious health and safety concerns, the landlord claimed that the family had not allowed workers into the apartment.

The pro bono team at Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP connected with VOLS' in-house housing expert. VOLS provided crucial advice and preparatory material as the pro bono team diligently planned to take the landlord to court. The team's advocacy was so successful that the judge ordered the landlord to make the repairs after just the first hearing.

"Working with pro bono on Children's Project cases allows a family to address multiple issues at once. In this recent case involving a family's landlord, the judge was so compelled by our team's presentation on what had happened. We were so glad to help bring this family relief,"
Jean Stevens, Director of the VOLS Benefits Law Project.



Pro Bono Leadership

Pro Bono Dean's List 2025

VOLS Pro Bono Dean's List celebrates the memory of William J. Dean, VOLS' former Executive Director of 25 years, by recognizing hardworking and dedicated individuals who have made a tremendous impact in helping VOLS' clients. This year's list:

[Sierra Acosta](#), Associate, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP
[Jared Bobrow](#), Partner, & [Rene Kathawala](#), Pro Bono Counsel, & [Parth Sagdeo](#), Senior Associate, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP

[Jennifer Cowan](#), Global Pro Bono Counsel & Director of Corporate Philanthropy, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

[Amy Danzis](#), AVP & Assistant General Counsel, MetLife

[Sophie Gandler](#), Associate, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP

[Steven Haber](#), Litigation and Pro Bono Counsel, Bloomberg

[Lexi Michaud](#), Associate, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP

[Margaret O'Connor](#), Associate, Kirkland & Ellis LLP

[Christopher Palmese](#), Partner, Seyfarth Shaw LLP

[Amadeu Ribeiro](#), Partner, & [William Kirton](#), Associate, DLA Piper LLP

[Hannah Sosland](#), Associate, HSF Kramer LLP

[Victor Wu](#), Associate, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP

[Jenny Zhang](#), Of Counsel, & [Mohammed Jagana](#), Associate, Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP



VOLS Pro Bono Partners Convening

VOLS kicked off the year with a full house of New York City's pro bono leaders from law firms, companies, and legal services organizations at the VOLS 2025 Pro Bono Partners Convening. Co-facilitators led a series of frank conversations on anticipated trends, priorities, opportunities for support, and how to maximize the impact of pro bono under the new federal administration. We are grateful to our pro bono partner Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP for hosting the event.





With immigrant parents and no lawyers in the family, I understood growing up how impenetrable the legal system can be for ordinary people. Especially because of that experience, I have found it meaningful to have focused my pro bono practice on issues of fairness and due process for underserved communities. - Parth Sagdeo, Associate, Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP



Seeing a client's relief when benefits are secured or when they feel heard makes clear that pro bono has an immediate and human impact. - Lexi Michaud, Associate, Fried Frank



Supporting small-scale entrepreneurs in launching and developing their businesses has allowed me to use my skills in a tangible, immediate way that empowers individuals and communities. - Sierra Acosta, Associate, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP



Pro bono cases stand out because they are usually profoundly personal. I have found that pro bono work often reminds me of some of the fundamental values that underpin the practice of law and require not just strong advocacy and legal practice skills, but also patience and empathy - William Kirton, Associate, DLA Piper

Events at VOLS

VOLS New York Together Gala

A beautiful, meaningful night for New Yorkers. Against a glorious sunset, and with over 300 of our community present, we honored Dietrich L. Snell, Partner, Proskauer Rose LLP and past VOLS Board member, Greystar, accepted by Laura Mutterperl, Senior Managing Director and General Counsel, and Founding Firm and Visionary Sponsor Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP. The Gala raised a record-breaking one million dollars for our work.



TCS New York City Marathon

VOLS was an Official Charity Partner of the November 2024 TCS New York City Marathon. Team VOLS included amazing and dedicated staff, pro bonos, and friends who ran triumphantly to help close the access to justice gap for New Yorkers in need of civil legal services. Our runners raised \$15,175 for our programs and services!

VOLS PBAC Summer Picnic

We had a lovely evening at our annual VOLS Pro Bono Advocates Council (PBAC) Summer Picnic in July. The weather meant we brought the fun indoors as we welcomed PBAC members, firm associates, summer associates and friends to chat about our work and all things pro bono. The event was sponsored by Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft, Davis Polk & Wardwell, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, Latham & Watkins, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, and Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom.



Leadership Team

Abja Midha

Executive Director

Amy Bonderoff

Director, Development & Communications

John Holt

Director, Senior Law Project

Keighly Newcomer

Director, Immigration Project

Adrian Smith

Director, Microenterprise Project

Jean Stevens

Director, Benefits Law Project

Stephanie Taylor

Pro Bono Director & Director, Incarcerated Mothers Law Project

Amma Woods

Director of Operations

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Director – Counsel, Internal Investigations, Société Générale

Isabelle Glimcher, Co-Chair

Associate, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP

Deniz Gurbuz, Co-Chair

Associate, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP

Sierra Acosta

Associate, Davis Polk & Wardwell LLP

Asia Archey

Associate, Nixon Peabody

Allison Berkowitch

Associate, Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP

Dyllan Brown-Bramble

Counsel, Financial Institution

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Associate, Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP

Minsun Cha

Associate, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP

Victor Celis

Associate, Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP

Erica Clark

Partner, Kirkland & Ellis LLP

Rita Celebrezze D’Souza

Special Counsel, Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer LLP

Victoria Fydrych

Counsel, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

Sophie Gandler

Associate, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP

Dora Georgescu

Counsel, Vinson & Elkins LLP

Morgan Hagenbuch

Associate, Latham & Watkins LLP

Michael Harris

Christine Isaacs

Associate, Ford O’Brien Landy LLP

Alexa Kissinger

Associate, Kirkland & Ellis LLP

Yuliana Kletsun

Enterprise Data Counsel, Bloomberg

Alena Markley

Counsel, Faegre Drinker LLP

Lexi Michaud

Associate, Antitrust and Competition, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP

Nathan Noh

Of Counsel, Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP

Cindy Pan

Senior Associate, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale & Dorr LLP

Jennifer Rabbino

Associate, Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP

Peter Rosenberg

Associate, Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP

Gordana Vasic

Assistant General Counsel, Financial Lines Insurance, AIG

Alexandria Vasques

Associate, Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP

Diane Xu

Associate, Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP

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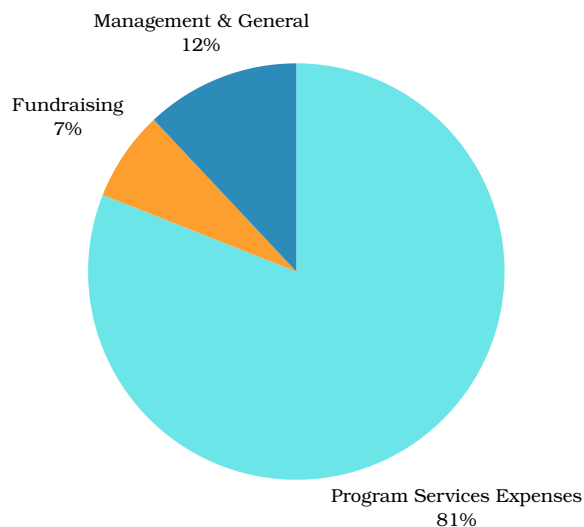
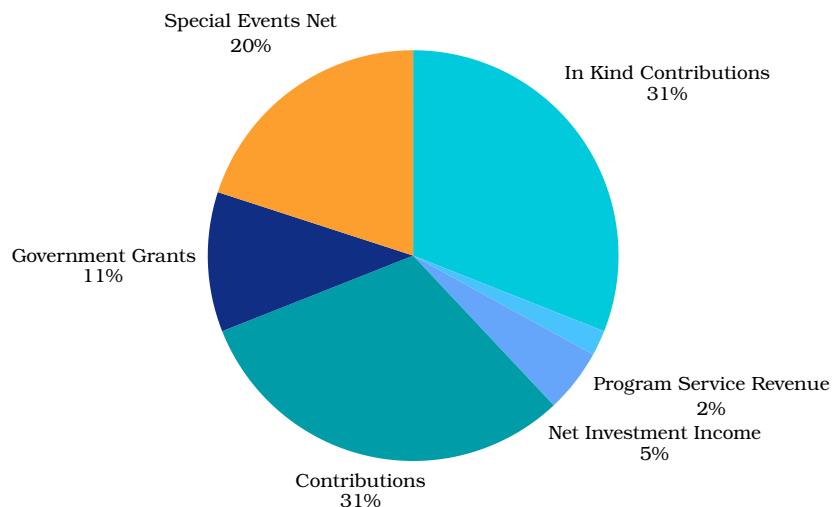
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Jenner & Block LLP
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Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP
Slarsky LLP
Societe Generale
Thomson Reuters
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP
Wells Fargo
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP
Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP
Winston & Strawn LLP

Financial Information

REVENUE	FY24-25
Contributions	\$1,282,985
Government Grants	\$459,247
Special Events Net	\$828,512
In Kind Contributions	\$1,287,667
Program Services	\$93,767
Net Investment Income	\$178,895
Total Revenue	\$4,131,073
EXPENSES	
Microenterprise	\$1,283,143
Immigration	\$653,433
Senior Law	\$887,887
Benefits Law	\$335,256
Incarcerated Mothers	\$367,150
Other Projects	\$99,444
Program Services	\$3,626,313
Management & General	\$544,185
Fundraising	\$287,034
Total Expenses	\$4,457,532



Source: FY25 Audited Financial Statement



Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) partners with New York City's community-based organizations, law firms and corporations to help low-income New Yorkers access justice for their civil legal challenges. Through direct services, community partnerships, and our robust pro bono program, our legal projects support older adults, veterans, small business owners, individuals seeking public benefits, immigrant young people, incarcerated mothers, children and their families through legal advice, representation, and education.



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