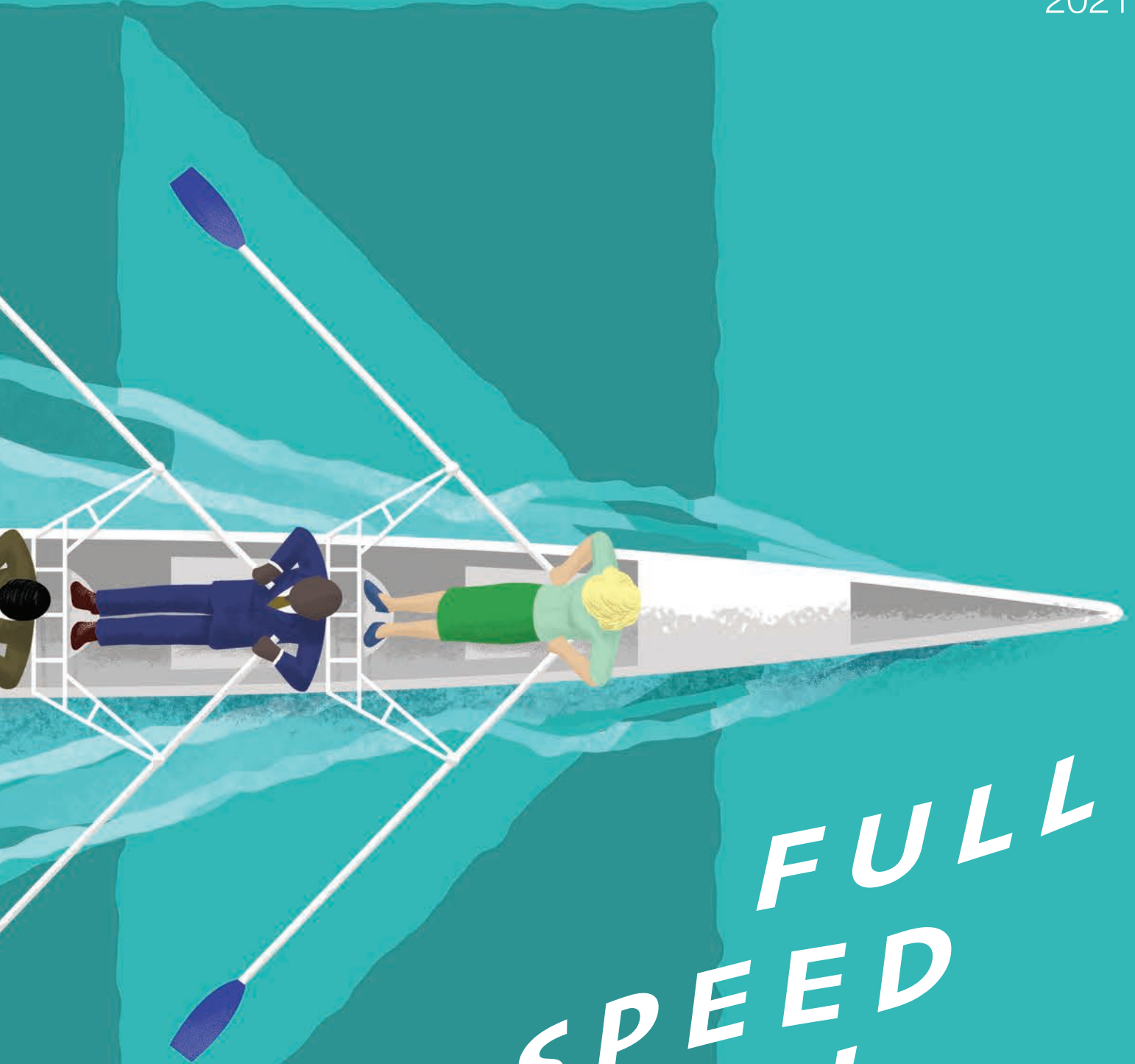


# CONNECTICUT LEGAL SERVICES INC

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021



*FULL  
SPEED  
AHEAD!*

## MISSION

Connecticut Legal Services provides access to justice and protects critical civil legal rights of low-income individuals and families through representation, systemic advocacy, advice, collaboration, and education.

## VISION

Connecticut Legal Services believes that Connecticut can become a state in which all people are heard, are treated fairly, can meet their basic needs, and have equal opportunities to thrive.

## VALUES

### **At Connecticut Legal Services, we believe in**

#### **Justice**

We know all people are worthy of respect, compassion, fair treatment, and equal opportunity.

#### **Excellence**

We strive to deliver high-quality, effective services with integrity and to continually evaluate and improve our work.

#### **Empowerment**

We believe in the power of self-advocacy and strive to foster that skill in our clients and the communities we serve.

#### **Racial Equity**

We strive to achieve and maintain racially equitable practices internally and in our services and interactions.

#### **Commitment**

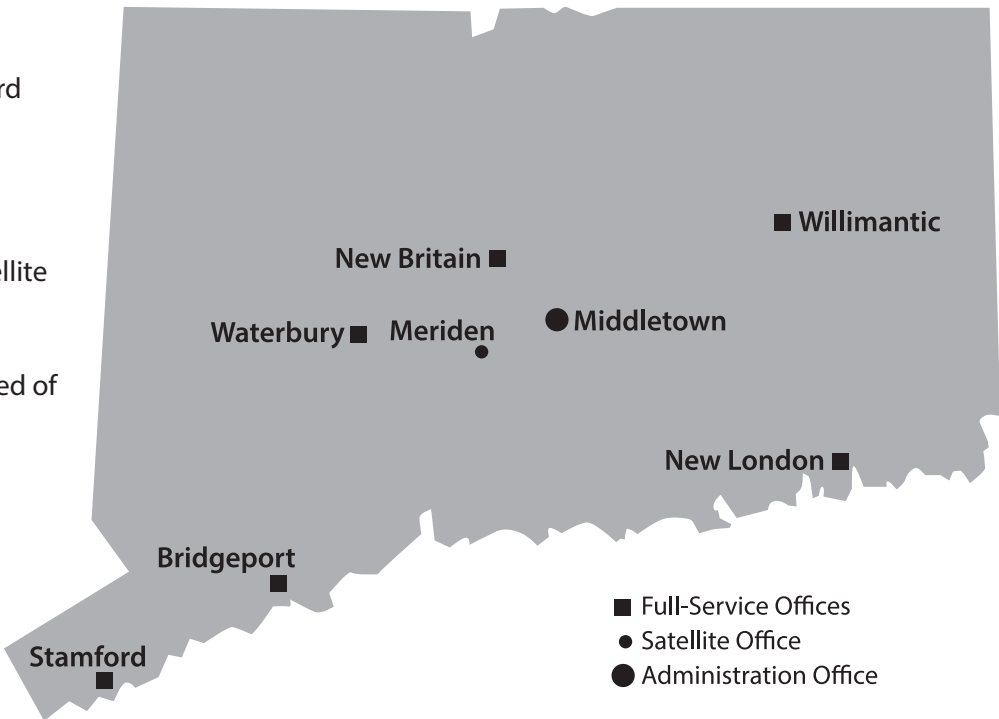
We understand that achieving our mission requires the unyielding commitment of our staff and board to our clients, to our work, and to one another.

# Service Area, Offices, and Staff

In the CLS service area—all of Connecticut except the Greater Hartford and New Haven areas—more than 200,000 people are financially eligible for services (2010 census).

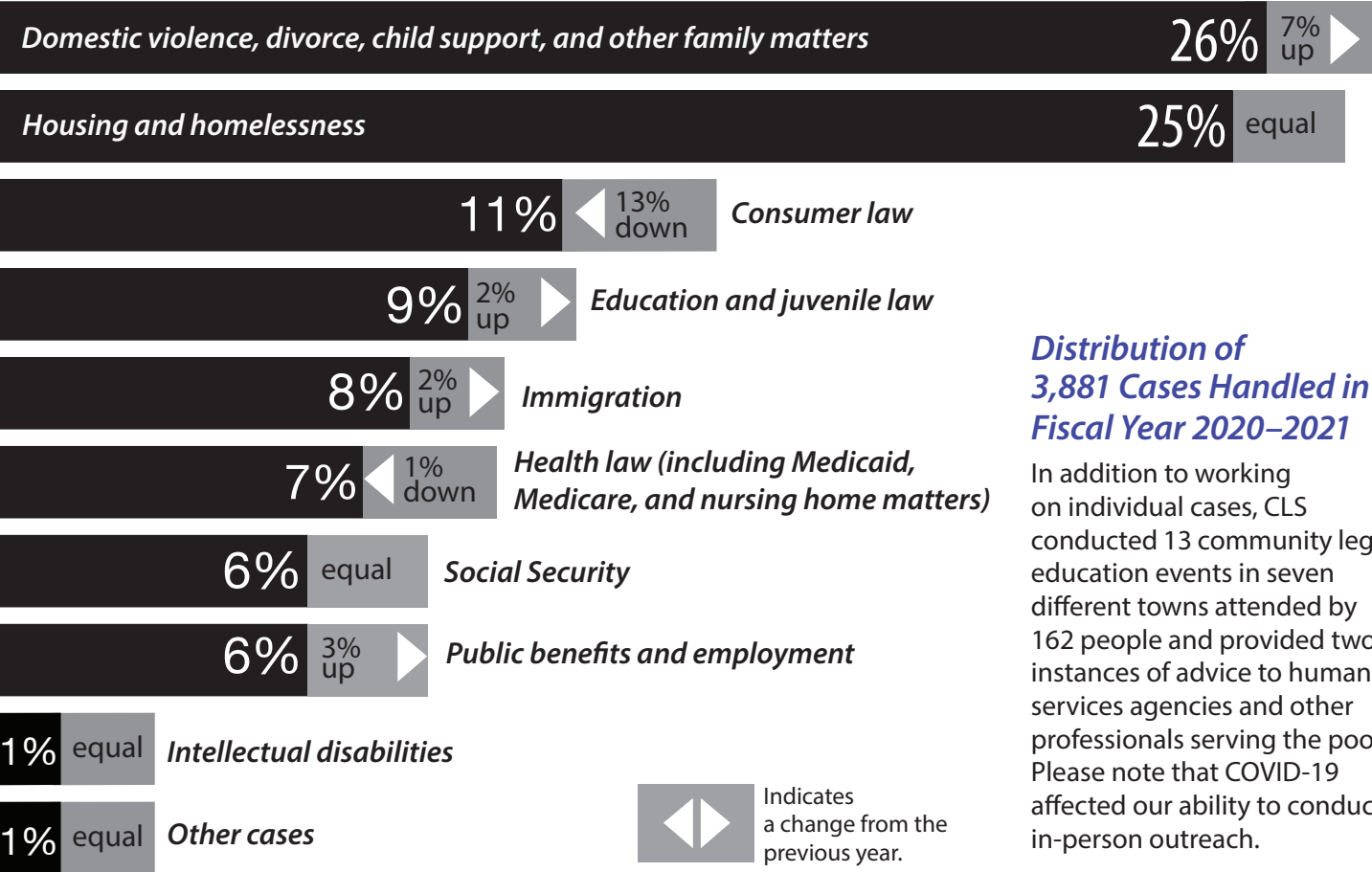
CLS has six full-service offices, one satellite office, and one administrative office.

On June 30, 2021, the CLS staff consisted of  
41.95 FTE lawyers  
9.80 FTE legal assistants  
10.00 FTE administrative staff  
2.00 FTE paralegals  
.55 FTE child welfare advocates.



## Distribution of Cases

In 2020–2021, Connecticut Legal Services received approximately 15,119 requests for service. We responded by opening 1,913 new cases for legal representation and counseling. We also worked on 1,968 cases opened in previous years. CLS services in these 3,881 cases benefited approximately 9,035 household members, which included 3,829 children.



### Distribution of 3,881 Cases Handled in Fiscal Year 2020–2021

In addition to working on individual cases, CLS conducted 13 community legal education events in seven different towns attended by 162 people and provided two instances of advice to human services agencies and other professionals serving the poor. Please note that COVID-19 affected our ability to conduct in-person outreach.

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## 2020–2021 Chief Office Personnel

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Keith Boyce, Financial Director

Nilda R. Havrilla, Litigation and Advocacy  
Director

Astrid Lebron, Director of Development

Avery Lupia, Human Resources Manager

Whit Freer, Information Technology  
Administrator



## CLS helps father who loses his job

David,\* the father of a six-year-old boy, has a severe anxiety disorder. He was working full-time when his employer ordered him to work in close proximity to another employee who had tested positive for COVID-19. The situation triggered an anxiety attack, and David had to leave work. His employer fired him the next day. David applied for unemployment benefits but was denied and sought help from Connecticut Legal Services. David's CLS attorney appealed the denial and represented him at the unemployment hearing. In addition to providing all the information necessary to show that David was eligible for unemployment benefits, David's CLS attorney called David's therapist, who testified that David's anxiety disorder was the reason David left work and that there had been no intentional misconduct on David's part. The appeals officer agreed and found David eligible for state unemployment benefits as well as supplemental COVID-19 unemployment benefits. David is now able to support himself and his son.

*\*Names and identifying information in CLS client stories were changed to protect client confidentiality.*

# Letter from Executive Director and Board Chair

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your commitment to Connecticut Legal Services and its mission to meet the legal needs of low-income people in crisis. As the virus that causes COVID-19 continued its unpredictable spread throughout 2021, CLS again responded to the emerging needs of clients struggling to obtain life's basic necessities in the new reality of a worldwide health pandemic.

During the past year, CLS staff rose to meet the evolving challenges of mounting client concerns while navigating the pandemic for themselves and their families. In the face of personal obstacles—lost childcare, homebound students, and additional personal and health care responsibilities—CLS staffers found new ways to serve a rapidly growing number of clients. In addition, we built on last year's successful advocacy for remote-access revisions to state rules and regulations, ensuring that people in need could access the court system and receive the benefits and protections to which they are entitled.

Our staff managed the political environment and differing responses to the availability of vaccines with respect and dignity. Through legal representation, counseling, and education, we worked to ensure that all our clients could access the social necessities that allow people to live safe, healthy lives, such as housing, food security, medical care, and freedom from abuse.

The needs of our clients are always so much greater than the resources we can provide. This year, the CLS board pledged to enhance our fund-raising capacity so that we may serve more of those in need. We appreciate your generosity now more than ever.

CLS looks to the future with a renewed commitment to making life a little safer for the vulnerable, a little healthier for families, and a little more promising for the children of Connecticut.

Thank you for your commitment to our mission.

Sincerely,



*Deborah  
Witkin*

Deborah R. Witkin  
Executive Director, CLS



*Ann G. Taylor*

Ann G. Taylor  
Chair, CLS Board of Directors



# Financial Support 2020–2021

## Government-Based Grants

Agency on Aging, Senior Resources Eastern Connecticut Area	\$ 35,091
Agency on Aging, Southwestern Connecticut Area	57,465
Agency on Aging, Western Connecticut Area	35,082
City of Middletown	10,000
Community Development Block Grant Program—City of Waterbury	9,874
Community Development Block Grant Program—Town of Fairfield	3,200
Park City Communities	34,147
State of Connecticut Court Support Services Division—Family Matters Training Program	5,000
State of Connecticut Department of Developmental Services	90,219
State of Connecticut Department of Housing	271,629
State of Connecticut Department of Social Services	683,644
State of Connecticut Judicial Branch	26,191
State of Connecticut Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program	500
State of Connecticut Office of the Chief Public Defender	33,750
State of Connecticut Office of Victim Services	2,124,593
Town of Ashford	1,000
Town of Coventry	500
Town of Ellington	2,200
Town of Groton	7,260
Town of Mansfield	6,500
<b>Total Government-Based Grants</b>	<b>\$ 3,437,845</b>

## Private Grants

Community Foundation of Eastern CT	\$ 223,000
Community Foundation of Eastern CT—Women's & Girls Fund	14,000
Community Foundation of Fairfield County	35,000
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Court Fees Grants-in-Aid)	5,303,210
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Interest on Lawyer's Trust Account)	1,207,437
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Judicial Branch Grants-in-Aid)	666,569
Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants	12,995
Frank Loomis Palmer Foundation	6,627
Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation	200,000
New Reach	20,000
St. John's Community Foundation	4,000
The Meriden Foundation	10,000
The Tudor Foundation	75,000
Vera Institute of Justice, Inc.	39,056
United Way, Central and Northeastern Connecticut	15,000
United Way, Greater Waterbury	16,600
United Way, Meriden and Wallingford	10,750
United Way, Northwest Connecticut	1,380
United Way, Southeastern Connecticut	26,729
United Way, West Central Connecticut	\$ 3,538
<b>Total Private Grants</b>	<b>\$ 7,890,891</b>

## Donations and Other Income

Campaign for Justice	\$ 279,672
Donated Goods and Services	131,301
Gain on Extinguishment of PPP Loan	1,674,195
Investment Income	1,678
Program Fees	92,176
United Way Donor Designations	8,048
Other Income	\$ 25,219
<b>Total Donations and Other Income</b>	<b>\$ 2,212,289</b>
<b>Total CLS Income</b>	<b>\$ 13,541,025</b>



# Statements of Financial Position—June 30, 2021 & June 30, 2020

ASSETS			LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
	June 30, 2021	June 30, 2020		June 30, 2021	June 30, 2020
<b>Current Assets</b>			<b>Liabilities</b>		
Cash and Cash Equivalents—Operating Funds	\$4,568,759	\$3,661,489	Accrued Pension Liability	\$3,336,073	\$5,845,256
Cash in Escrow—Client Funds	4,125	3,825	Accounts Payable	413,959	326,152
Short-Term Investments	-	1,199,621	Loans Payable—PPP Loan	-	1,674,195
Receivables			Accrued Expenses	240,558	254,602
Grants and Contracts Receivable	657,830	676,400	Deferred Revenue	61,705	110,266
Promises to Give	1,765,729	1,671,717	Accrued Annual Leave	536,538	548,466
Other Receivables	21,814	19,457	Client Trust Deposits	4,125	3,825
Prepaid Expenses	80,300	101,955	<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$4,592,958</b>	<b>\$8,762,762</b>
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>\$7,098,557</b>	<b>\$7,334,464</b>	<b>Net Assets</b>		
<b>Fixed Assets</b>			Without Donor Restrictions		
Property, Equipment, and Software	\$1,386,175	\$1,728,712	Attributable to operations	\$(784,481)	\$(1,320,528)
Leasehold Improvements	\$311,118	\$311,118	Attributable to pension liability	2,544,259	(867,619)
Total Fixed Assets Before Depreciation	1,697,293	\$2,039,830	Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	1,759,778	(2,188,147)
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(975,709)	(1,245,565)	Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	1,521,970	1,608,679
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>\$721,584</b>	<b>\$794,265</b>	<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b>\$3,281,748</b>	<b>\$(579,468)</b>
<b>Other Assets</b>			<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b>\$7,874,706</b>	<b>\$8,183,294</b>
Security Deposits	54,565	4,565			
<b>Total Other Assets</b>	<b>54,565</b>	<b>54,565</b>			
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$7,874,706</b>	<b>\$8,183,294</b>			

## CLS helps disabled man take care of his family

John, who was raising three children with the help of his young adult child, applied for SSI disability benefits because of his chronic low back pain. CLS counsel represented him at an administrative law judge (ALJ) hearing, and he was denied benefits. CLS represented him before the Appeals Council, where his case was denied again. We then appealed the case to the District Court. The Court sent the case back to the ALJ for another hearing because of errors in the earlier decision. John was assigned a different ALJ at his second hearing; however, the new ALJ denied John's disability benefits again. CLS believed in John's case and his eligibility for benefits and petitioned the Appeals Council and then the District Court. For a second time, the court sent the case back to the ALJ because of an erroneous analysis of the facts in the disability claim. The second ALJ heard the case again and reversed his prior decision. He awarded John five years of retroactive benefits and ongoing SSI cash benefits as well as the medical benefits he needs to adequately address his chronic pain. The ongoing SSI cash benefits make caring for his children possible for John.



# Campaign for Justice Contributors

## **Champions:**

**\$50,000**

The Tow Foundation

## **Trailblazers:**

**\$10,000–\$24,999**

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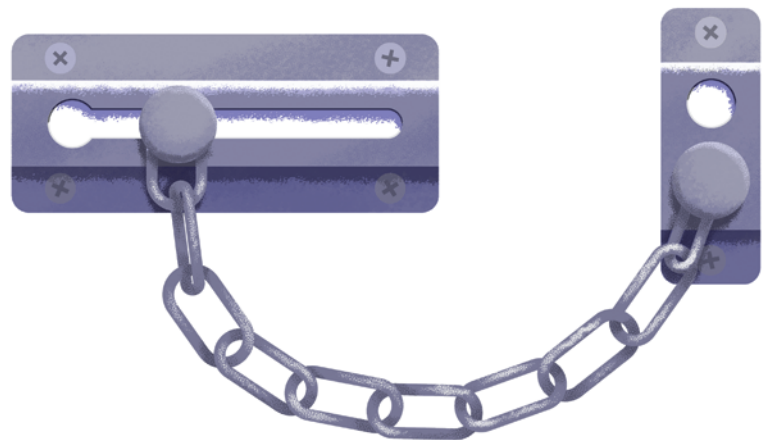
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## **CLS helps violence survivor find safety**

**After being brutally stabbed multiple times by her boyfriend and spending several days in the hospital, Denise returned to her apartment to find a letter from the property management company threatening her with eviction. Denise's domestic violence advocate immediately contacted Connecticut Legal Services for assistance. The threat to Denise's public housing was circumvented, and her housing lawyer used a federal law that requires property owners to relocate victims of domestic violence to another, undisclosed unit. Denise's lawyer also worked with the management company to adjust her rent because of lost income due to the assault. Denise is now safe from her abuser.**



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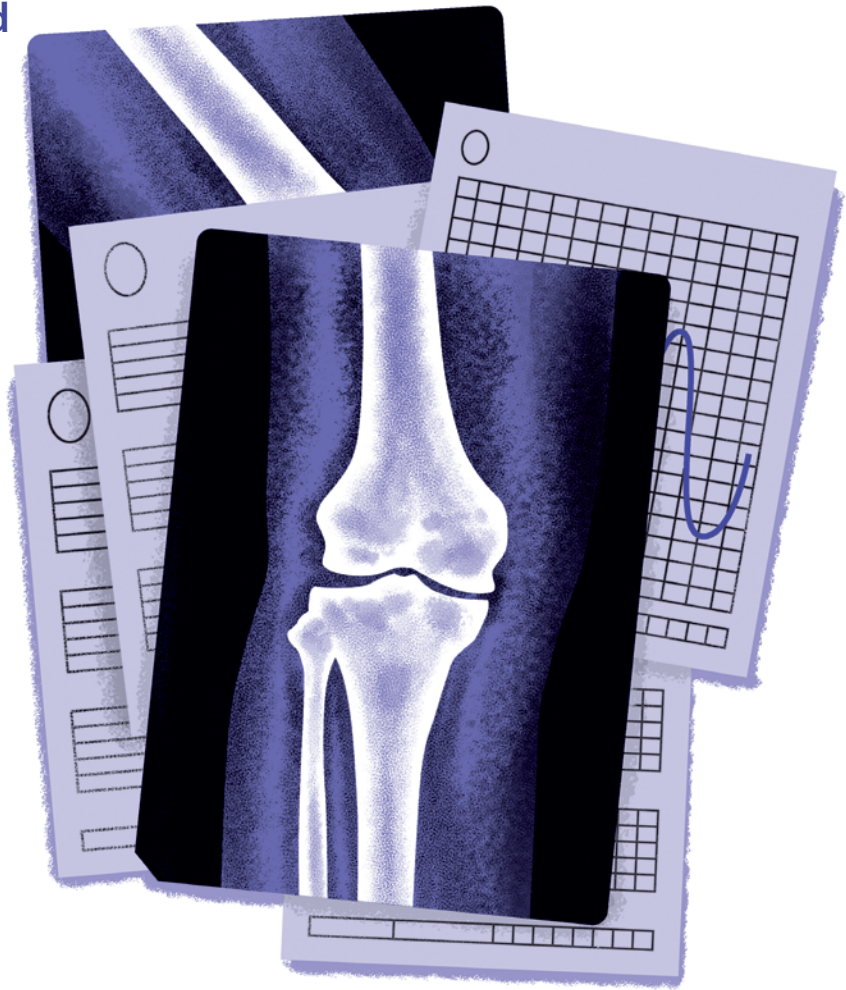
### **CLS helps a young child succeed in school**

Maggie lives with her mother and brother. Her mother is a domestic violence survivor who struggles with Maggie's school behavior. Maggie was identified as needing special education in kindergarten because of global developmental delays and attention issues, and she was sent to a magnet school. Despite intensive intervention, Maggie did not progress academically. Her Connecticut Legal Services attorney advocated for a neuropsychological evaluation, which resulted in very specific recommendations that the school district could not provide. A neighboring school district, however, had a structured literacy team, and the teachers were certified to help children with Maggie's challenges. CLS explained to Maggie's mom the advantages of more-intensive specialized instruction with a very experienced special education teacher. Maggie's mom agreed, and CLS advocated for Maggie to receive those services from the neighboring school district. She now has 45 minutes per day of specialized instruction and an hour and 15 minutes a day of intensive academic support. She also receives one-on-one support throughout the day, occupational therapy services, and counseling services. Maggie's mother is very satisfied with those services and the communication system set up with the district. Most important, Maggie is now doing well and is happy.

## Campaign for Justice continued

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### CLS persists to help woman get the benefits she needs

Vicky moved from Puerto Rico with her young daughter to access better medical treatment for musculoskeletal injuries. While pursuing medical treatment and rehabilitation services, Vicky applied for SSI disability benefits. She was twice denied and requested a hearing before an administrative law judge. Prior to the hearing, she appealed to Connecticut Legal Services for help. Vicky's CLS attorney obtained and submitted updated treatment records and medical opinions from her treatment sources. Despite severe impairments that included osteoarthritis in both knees, degenerative disc disease, morbid obesity (exacerbating knee pain), asthma, and depression, Vicky was again denied benefits. Her CLS attorney, believing that the decision was incorrect, appealed. Vicky's case was scheduled for a hearing; however, in the time it took for that to happen, Vicky had continued with medical and rehabilitative services that allowed her to return to work in a job requiring much less exertion than her prior position. Although this meant that Vicky was not able to receive benefits going forward, she was eligible for benefits covering the time she had been unable to work, known as a "closed period of time." Vicky's CLS attorney pursued these benefits, and the court awarded retroactive SSI benefits Vicky desperately needed to meet basic expenses, including housing. She had been facing homelessness, and a CLS attorney helped with her housing issues. Because CLS intervened, Vicky is able to meet basic needs for her daughter and herself.

### ***In memory of***

Roy F. Brown  
Gladys Davis  
Robert G. Fracasso, Sr.  
Judge Joseph Goldberg  
Laurence K. Hoffman, Esq.  
Dick McCarthy  
Ed McCarthy  
Sheldon A. Mossberg  
Judge Thomas J. O'Sullivan  
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Basam (Bas) Nabulsi  
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Quinnipiac Law Legal Clinic faculty  
Debi Witkin

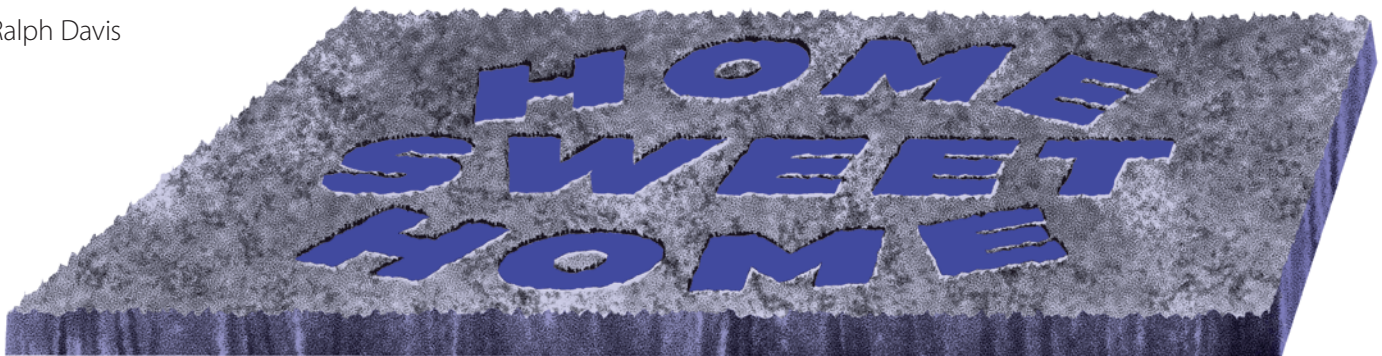
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David Swerdloff  
Dennis Updegrove  
Domenico (Nick) Zaino

### ***In honor/ appreciation of***

Administrative Professionals Day  
Jean Mills Aranha  
Ralph Davis

### ***In-kind gifts and services***

Eric Alltholz  
Sam Baldwin  
Brian Calabrese  
Katie Driessen  
Robert Foxworth



### **CLS helps mother and her children avoid homelessness**

Trina, a single mom with two children, sublets a single room in an apartment. The primary tenant left the apartment after Trina repeatedly complained that houseguests took her children's food from the common refrigerator. Once Trina was on her own, she was responsible for the full rent, which she could not afford. The landlord started eviction proceedings against her, alleging serious nuisance.

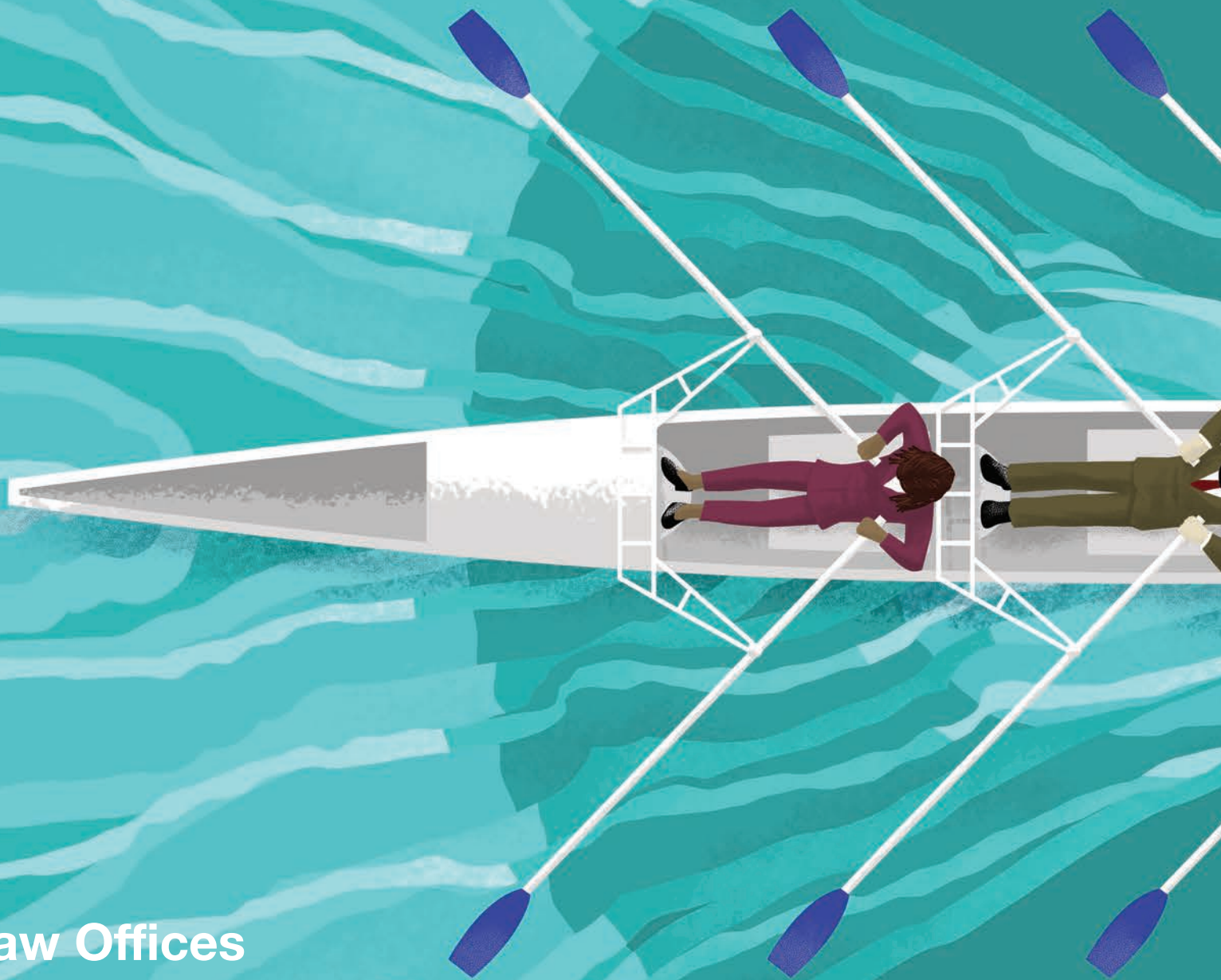
Trina did not understand the nuisance accusation, particularly because she was busy with two young children and pregnant with her third. As Trina tried to resolve this, she experienced a serious breakdown in communication with the landlord over the security deposit, utilities, and unit repairs. The landlord also complained to the police, claiming an unidentified male he associated with Trina was harassing him. By the time Trina was referred to Connecticut Legal Services, she had a pending eviction case in court. She had already attended an unsuccessful remote mediation proceeding on her own and needed representation for a remote trial.

CLS agreed to represent Trina. Her attorney did not hear any grounds for a claim against her and filed a motion to dismiss. Less than 24 hours before the remote trial, the court assigned the case to mediation. At the remote mediation, the parties agreed that Trina would remain in the apartment through the end of the year. That gave her much-needed time to tend to her third child, who had been born prematurely during this time and was in the care of a NICU. It also gave Trina a chance to follow up on her applications for more-affordable housing.



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