



2025 | ANNUAL REPORT

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***"Together, we are
building a future
where safety, dignity,
and justice are within
reach for all."***

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEAR FRIENDS,

Every day, survivors of domestic violence and vulnerable children turn to Volunteer Legal Advocates during some of the most challenging moments of their lives. They are navigating fear, uncertainty, and complex legal systems while trying to build safer futures. They should not have to face those challenges alone.

This report tells the story of what is possible when volunteers, supporters, and advocates come together in service of justice. You'll meet clients like Priya, Rosa, Naomi, and Eden, whose lives were made safer through our Domestic Violence, Immigration, Child Advocacy, and Maryland programs.

You'll learn how our legal clinics, Client Advocates, and policy efforts are expanding access to justice and creating lasting change. You'll also meet some of the remarkable volunteers and fellows who make this work possible. Their generosity, expertise, and commitment allow us to reach more survivors and children than ever before, and to deepen the support we provide.

In 2025, Volunteer Legal Advocates served 3,194 survivors and children across Washington, DC, and Montgomery County, Maryland. Our volunteer attorneys donated 42,000 hours of service, providing more than \$23 million in free legal assistance. And as we turn every \$1 donated into \$5 of legal services, we demonstrated the extraordinary impact of a community committed to justice.

Thank you for standing with survivors and children. Through your time, resources, partnership, and support, you've played a role in every story and every outcome. Together, we are building a future where safety, dignity, and justice are within reach for all.

With gratitude,

Sara B. Tennen

**Sara B. Tennen, Esq., MSW
Executive Director**



OUR MISSION

TO ADVOCATE for domestic violence victims, at-risk children, and other vulnerable individuals through comprehensive pro bono legal services;

TO EMPOWER victims with knowledge, resources, and ongoing support; and

TO BROADEN OUR IMPACT by engaging, training, and supporting a strong and diverse network of volunteer lawyers and community volunteers.

OUR VISION

We believe that a life free of violence and abuse is a basic human right.



FROM CRISIS TO SAFETY

Our Domestic Violence Program helps survivors move from fear to freedom.

Volunteer Legal Advocates supports survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other forms of gender-based abuse with trauma-informed legal representation. We handle protection orders, custody, divorce, and related legal issues. Through a holistic model, our attorneys work closely with trained Client Advocates who provide safety planning, emotional support, and referrals.



516

Protection Order & Family Law cases



97%

of clients felt safer after services



PRIYA'S STORY

After surviving a brutal knife attack by her former partner, Priya turned to Volunteer Legal Advocates for help securing a Civil Protection Order (CPO).

When the order neared expiration, our attorneys sought an extension to maintain her safety. After her abuser violated the CPO by confronting her in public, we successfully held him accountable in court.

The judge extended Priya's protection for another two years, helping ensure her safety as she continues rebuilding her life.



SAFETY SHOULDN'T DEPEND ON YOUR STATUS

Our Immigration Program helps survivors seeking humanitarian relief pursue a future free from abuse.

We provide trauma-informed legal representation to immigrant survivors and vulnerable children seeking humanitarian relief. Our attorneys ensure clients feel seen, heard, and protected, because justice should never be out of reach.



211

immigration
cases handled



41

languages spoken
by volunteers

ROSA'S STORY

Rosa's abuser used her marriage-based green card to keep her trapped in a violent relationship.

When she came to a Volunteer Legal Advocates clinic, she was ready to leave but didn't know how to safely move forward.

Our pro bono attorneys quickly stepped in, helping her secure a divorce and creating space from her abuser. They then began the process of applying for a battered spouse waiver, allowing Rosa to pursue permanent status without relying on him.

As delays stretched on, our attorneys identified a new path, guiding Rosa through the naturalization process when she became eligible. By pursuing multiple avenues of relief, they ensured her safety and long-term stability.

Today, Rosa is a U.S. citizen, free from her abuser, and building a safe, independent future.



A VOICE FOR THE VULNERABLE

Through our Child Advocacy Program, we represent children in high-conflict custody cases involving domestic violence, abuse, or neglect.

Our attorneys serve as court-appointed Guardians *ad litem*, representing each child's legal voice and best interests, conducting in-depth investigations and advocating in court for safe, stable, and permanent homes. Our goal is simple and urgent: to ensure every child we represent grows up in a safe, permanent, loving home.



129

children's best
interests represented



74%

of the children we've
represented in the past two
years witnessed domestic
violence and/or were abused



NAOMI'S STORY

For most of Naomi's life, she lived with her mother, who had sole custody of her. Naomi's father, previously incarcerated on drug-related charges, was largely absent. Naomi's mother struggled to provide a stable environment, and Naomi struggled academically and in relationships.

After years of untreated substance abuse and a DUI, Naomi's mother entered a rehabilitation center, and Naomi moved in with her father for the first time. As he became more involved in her life, he sought custody, and the judge appointed our attorneys as Naomi's Guardians *ad Litem* (GAL).

Through interviews with family members, educational records, and regular contact with Naomi and her parents, the GALs found Naomi independent, resourceful, and clearly able to articulate her wishes regarding custody.

Prioritizing Naomi, the GALs facilitated an agreement that reflected her wishes: Naomi now lives with her mother, with flexible visitation with her father, and both parents are committed to staying involved and supporting one another.

EXPANDING OUR REACH

Our team in Montgomery County, MD is helping close the justice gap.

Since opening our MD office in 2023, we have built a strong presence in Montgomery County, providing trauma-informed protective order and family law legal services for survivors in court, our walk-in legal clinic in Rockville, and our new family law forms clinic. This expansion reflects our vision of a world where every survivor has access to legal help, no matter their zip code.



361

survivors attended our walk-in clinics in Rockville



69%

increase in individual survivors supported since our launch in 2023

Maryland data is tracked from July 2025-June 2026.

EDEN'S STORY

Eden endured nearly two decades of abuse before her husband strangled her in their home; an attack her child witnessed and then called the police to stop. She left that night with a protective order, but returning to court was frightening.

Eden didn't speak English, and her husband had hired an attorney who treated her dismissively. She was alone in a system she didn't understand.

When she came to our Montgomery County clinic, though, our pro bono attorney helped prepare her case. Recognizing that Eden would benefit from full representation, we went to court with her, and she walked away with a Consent Protective Order. Today, Eden and her children are finally safe.



OPENING DOORS TO JUSTICE

Our legal clinics provide brief advice that empowers survivors of domestic violence to move toward safety and stability.

Our clinics in DC and MD reach survivors where they live and work so getting legal help is never an added burden. You'll find us in courthouses, libraries, at medical clinics, and online.

At each legal clinic, survivors can receive free trauma-informed legal consultations, learn about their rights, and connect with resources for housing, employment, and public benefits.

EXPANDING OUR CLINIC SERVICES

IN DC SUPERIOR COURT

Our **Domestic Violence Protection Order Clinic** (DVPOC) offers survivors appearing in court the opportunity to speak with our staff attorney in person or online in real time, helping cases move forward smoothly and swiftly. We are the only nonprofit providing this essential service. So when the judges at DC Superior Court requested that we run DVPOC more frequently, we sought funding to grow the service. Today, DVPOC is in court five days a week, ensuring that no survivor needs to face their abuser or a courtroom alone.

IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD

When we realized that our weekly clinic at the Rockville Public Library was always full, we knew the community needed more resources. Launching the **Maryland Family Law Forms Clinic** enabled us to support survivors who needed more straightforward assistance in preparing their legal documents for court.



 1,127

individuals served at our clinics in DC and MD

 14

recurring free legal clinics in DC & MD

ADVOCATING FOR SAFER FUTURES

Our Impact Litigation & Advocacy practice advances survivor-centered policies and laws to strengthen access to justice and protect vulnerable members of our community.

Through our frequent testimony before DC Council and state and local Maryland legislators and our active leadership in local policy coalitions and working groups, we help shape a more just and equitable legal system.

POLICY EFFORTS IN ACTION

IN WASHINGTON, DC

After chairing and convening a cross-sector Working Group to improve firearm relinquishment procedures in DC, we developed a set of recommendations to ensure effective enforcement, improve compliance, and enhance victim safety through legislative changes, court procedural reforms, and updates to Metropolitan Police Department protocols.

Now, we've launched a dedicated campaign encouraging local leaders to implement these essential steps.

IN MARYLAND

In a significant Maryland policy milestone, our Executive Director, Sara B. Tennen, and Managing Attorney, Robyn Swanson, testified before the Maryland State Judicial Proceedings Committee in support of extending the window between temporary and final protective order hearings. The subsequent passage of this legislation marked a survivor-centered reform to strengthen safety and stability.

Today, Sara also serves on the Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, bringing frontline survivor advocacy directly into county-level policy and coordination.

A FOUNDATION FOR SAFETY & INDEPENDENCE

Our Client Advocates support clients through every step, with safety planning, support during legal meetings, and guidance in navigating resources.

By integrating legal representation with holistic, trauma-informed support, we help survivors escape violence and build a foundation for the future.

OUR CLIENT ADVOCATES ASSIST WITH:



Safety planning and referrals to crisis response resources



Referrals to the Crime Victims Compensation Program



Referrals to mental health and other healthcare resources



Financial referrals for expenses related to domestic violence



Relocation and housing advocacy

"Too often, our clients are entitled to services they don't even know exist. I find real purpose in connecting them with the support they need to reclaim their autonomy and rebuild their lives." - Client Advocate

A LOOK AHEAD: OUR EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS FELLOWS

Each year, talented Equal Justice Works Fellows take on meaningful projects to expand justice in their communities. We are honored to serve as an EJW host organization.

Paige Osgood and Cherissa Lindsay will join Volunteer Legal Advocates in fall 2026. We know their work will expand access to justice for survivors and children for years to come.

Paige Osgood, Esq.

Law School: Cornell Law, Class of 2026

Fellowship Sponsors: DLA Piper & Verizon

Project Focus: Representing survivors of domestic violence in cases involving cyber abuse and stalking.

"I'm looking forward to working with survivors of domestic violence. Building relationships with clients drew me to this work. I'm eager to support survivors and expand efforts to address stalking and technology-facilitated abuse."



Cherissa Lindsay, Esq.

Law School: GW Law, Class of 2026

Fellowship Sponsor: King & Spalding LLP

Project Focus: Child advocacy, identifying unmet academic needs, and collaborating with attorneys, courts, and schools to support children through guardian *ad litem* work.

"I am so excited to pursue my passion for advocating for students with unmet educational needs and helping ensure they have access to the resources and support necessary to succeed."

VOLUNTEER VOICES

Our volunteer attorneys bring expertise, compassion, and commitment to every case and clinic.



42,000

hours of pro bono legal services



611

pro bono volunteers



MONICA HERNANDEZ

Senior Corporate Counsel, Amazon

"I make time for pro bono work because it reminds me why I became a lawyer in the first place. It's a great reminder that legal representation is more than paperwork and going to court. It's about dignity and showing someone that you care."



GIDEON LEVY

Associate, Greenberg Traurig LLP

"Junior first-generation lawyers are often close in age and life experience to many of the people we represent. We're able to tap into the passion and hope for justice that drove many of us into law in the first place."



ALEX REILLY

Associate, Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young LLP

"When you see how much is at stake for a survivor, you learn to prioritize the most impactful arguments and act decisively. My work with Volunteer Legal Advocates has sharpened my ability to work through tense situations."



JAMES DARLSON

Air Force Reserve officer, airline pilot, and pro bono attorney

"We can impact the lives of people in our city by volunteering to take on sensitive cases that, to the client, may be the most stressful series of events they've ever experienced. Having a lawyer creates an almost immediate effect on their lives."

BY THE NUMBERS

Our Impact in 2025

Together with our supporters, Volunteer Legal Advocates is **ending the cycle of violence through pro bono legal aid.**



POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS



ESSENTIAL LEGAL REPRESENTATION



OUTCOMES THAT MATTER

Our success is in the safety, stability, and empowerment of our clients.



 **EVERY \$1 DONATED BECOMES \$5 IN LEGAL SERVICES**

Your investment multiplies hope, safety, and justice.

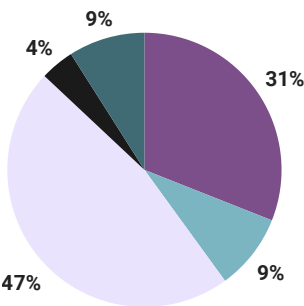
EXPANDING ACCESS TO JUSTICE



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

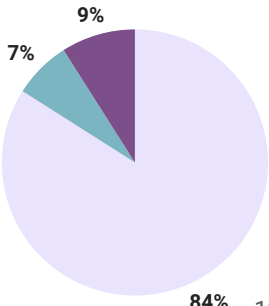
REVENUE: \$5.3 MILLION

- Government
- Foundations
- Individuals
- Corporations & Law Firms
- Other



EXPENSES: \$4.9 MILLION

- Programs & Services
- Fundraising
- Administrative



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We are deeply grateful for the partnership of volunteer attorneys from the 80+ law firms and corporations below.

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Each year, Amplifying Voices Society members help Volunteer Legal Advocates serve more than 3,000 survivors of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and vulnerable children through annual leadership gifts of \$1,000 or more.

Learn more and join at volunteerlegaladvocates.org/AVS.

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Our generous Legacy Circle donors have made our work a philanthropic priority for the past decade, fueling the growth of our programs and ensuring that thousands of survivors have access to free legal representation.

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We celebrate the law firms and corporate partners who make up our Sustaining Circle. Each has been recognized as a past Partner of the Year, and continues enhancing their commitment to Volunteer Legal Advocates and our community.

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We are grateful for the guidance of our Emeritus Board, a council of former board members who continue to support Volunteer Legal Advocates through their experience, insight, and ongoing engagement.

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Our Junior Board brings together emerging leaders from across the legal field who support our work through their advocacy, energy, and commitment.

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as of July 2026

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To our generous individual and foundation donors, dedicated law firm and corporate partners, and tireless volunteers, board, and staff: your support, investment, and compassion fuel everything we do.

Together, we are building a more just and equitable future; one where safety, dignity, and stability are within reach for every survivor and child.

We couldn't do this vital work without you.





Ending the cycle of violence for survivors and children through pro bono legal aid

info@volunteerlegaladvocates.org | www.volunteerlegaladvocates.org

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