

Proposal for
City of Cleveland:
American Rescue Plan Act Funds for

LEGAL AID AND HOUSING STABILITY
FOR CLEVELAND RESIDENTS POST-COVID

Request:
\$1 million

Term:
three years
2023, 2024, and 2025
(or until all funds are expended)

Proposal Table of Contents:

Executive Summary.....	Page 2
Problem Statement.....	Page 2
Activity Description.....	Page 4
Outreach Plan.....	Page 5
Total Cleveland Residents to be Helped.....	Page 6
Metrics and Anticipated Outcomes.....	Page 6
Impact.....	Page 7
Budget.....	Page 9
Appendix.....	Page 10
<i>Supporting Data</i>	
<i>Agency Description</i>	
<i>Cleveland Resident Engagement and Participation</i>	
<i>Community Partnerships, Collaborations</i>	

Submitted by:

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland
Colleen M. Cotter, Executive Director (216-861-5273)
Melanie Shakarian, Development and Communications Director (216-861-5217)

Submitted to:

Cleveland City Council
c/o Council President Blaine Griffin
Jessica Colombi, Research and Policy Director
Anne Tillie, Research and Policy Analyst

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) was created to change the course of the pandemic and deliver immediate and direct relief to families and workers impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The law – and subsequent ARPA funds to the City of Cleveland will bring transformational change and build a bridge to an equitable economic recovery. Funds for Legal Aid’s housing stability work are an important and key piece to the economic recovery for Cleveland residents.

Legal Aid requests \$1 million in ARPA funds from the City of Cleveland to support its housing stability efforts. Civil legal aid plays a critical role in connecting people with basic needs and services so they can thrive and contribute to the economic development of their communities. Investments in civil justice efforts like Legal Aid have proven great return on public investment over time. For instance, when someone’s home is saved from eviction, the ripple effect extends to school, employment, and family stability. That translates into thriving neighborhoods and cities.

A wide range of government programs work at maximum efficiency when people have access to legal services. Employment rates and wages go up and recidivism goes down following legal help to expunge or seal a criminal record. For low-income tenants facing eviction in one community who had full representation, approximately two-thirds remained in their homes compared to one-third of unrepresented tenants.

Support for Legal Aid is an allowable use for ARPA funds. See deeper legal analysis, background, and precedent at: www.lasclev.org/federalfundsforlegalaid

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Having a safe, stable place to call home is not only a fundamental need but a prerequisite for achieving success in all other areas of life. Unfortunately, far too many people and families experiencing poverty struggle to maintain stable housing. And in housing courts across the United States, only about two percent of tenants facing eviction have legal representation. Most of the time, this is because they simply cannot afford an attorney. At Legal Aid, we believe housing is a human right. We make it our mission to improve housing stability for our clients and communities through civil legal representation, outreach, and advocacy.

The vast majority of our housing cases are eviction cases for clients who live in the city of Cleveland, a reflection of the severity of the eviction crisis in our backyards. Before COVID-19, there were an average of 9,000 evictions filed every year in Cleveland. While eviction moratoria did cause filings to dip for several months, the trend did not last very long. Legal Aid has been handling a high volume of eviction cases in recent months, and the steady stream of intake keeps coming and increasing. In August 2022, the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority began to again file evictions for non-payment of rent (after a 2.5-year hiatus). It is clear the pandemic’s economic devastation continues to plague families with low incomes and those who lost jobs when they were already stretching a meager budget.

Evictions are associated with higher rates of depression, poor maternal health outcomes (such as low birthweight and infant mortality), childhood hospitalizations, school absenteeism, and emergency department visits. Another recent study showed workers were 11-22% more likely to lose their job if they were recently evicted or otherwise forced from their home. And counties with higher eviction rates also have higher rates of accidental deaths due to drugs and alcohol.

When tenants have full legal representation in an eviction case, they can participate meaningfully in the eviction proceedings and achieve better outcomes. Studies show that tenants who receive full legal representation in eviction cases are more likely to stay in their homes and save on rent or fees. They also have a better chance of getting approved for important COVID rent assistance (which makes landlords whole). Unfortunately, in housing courts across the United States, only about two percent of tenants facing eviction have legal representation. With a Legal Aid attorney by their side, however, tenants can have confidence that they will see justice realized.

The City of Cleveland is taking positive steps towards quelling the eviction crisis and helping families stay housed:

In October 2019, Cleveland became the first city in the Midwest and only the fourth in the United States to enact a right to counsel in eviction cases. Cleveland's law applies to families with children who meet federal poverty guidelines and took effect on July 1, 2020. Cleveland City Council designated United Way of Greater Cleveland to help implement the new law, and Legal Aid was designated as the lead provider of legal services. The resulting program is now known as "Right to Counsel Cleveland" (RTC).

In August 2022, Cleveland passed "pay to stay" legislation, which codifies existing Ohio law and allows residents to remain in their homes if they pay all past due rent with late fees and court costs to landlords before an eviction judgement is issued. If landlords refuse to accept such payments, then renters can use that as a defense against an eviction notice.

Upon passage of the pay-to-stay legislation, The City of Cleveland's Mayor's Office requested to collaborate with Legal Aid on publicity for pay-to-stay and RTC. Special coordinated outreach on both initiatives will begin in September 2022.

Legal Aid has been handling more eviction cases than ever before due to both the pandemic's devastating economic effect on people who were already struggling to afford rent and the institution of Cleveland's Right to Counsel law.

In 2021, Legal Aid represented an estimated 60% of all tenants who were eligible for RTC and turned none away. We increased the rate of tenant representation in housing court from 2% (pre-RTC) to 18%. Stout's full report and more key points can be found at www.FreeEvictionHelpResults.org

While we are proud of our RTC success, we know hundreds of families in need of our services are still facing eviction without representation. Therefore, Legal Aid is taking steps to broaden representation beyond the scope of Cleveland's RTC law. This ARPA grant will support Legal Aid's housing work – with a special focus on RTC work.

Legal Aid's total budget to help Clevelanders with housing issues now is \$4.4 million. This budget will grow if Right to Counsel in Cleveland Housing Court expands through City Council action and as more evictions are filed and the need increases. Right now, funding available to Legal Aid via the City supports only a fraction of the overall budget. ARPA funds will help support these housing stability efforts for the next 2-3 years, but collaborative planning between the City Administration

and City Council is needed for sustainable support for this legislated right, and Legal Aid looks forward to participating in those discussions.

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

With ARPA funds, Legal Aid will use attorneys and other staff to provide free housing help to Cleveland residents. This housing help will include: (1) free legal help: including extended representation, brief advice, and pro se help, and (2) community outreach and education.

Priority service will be given to residents who qualify for Cleveland's nationally recognized Right to Counsel program (households at or below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines with children in the home who have an eviction filing); as funding allows, other Cleveland residents will be provided Legal Aid's help with housing (i.e., those residents at 200% of the federal poverty guidelines and below, regardless of household composition).

Legal Aid's housing justice work ensures vulnerable neighbors have a reliable place to call home. Using our unique skills as legal professionals, we harness the power of the law to protect shelter. With this grant, our dedicated attorneys and paralegals will provide free housing help to Cleveland residents through the following activities:

1. Legal Aid will work with our community partners to field and facilitate referrals and help people secure rent assistance.

To reach as many people as possible, we partner with social service organizations that also serve our client community. For example, through our Medical Legal Partnerships with four local hospitals (we work with MetroHealth, Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, and St. Vincent Charity Medical Center), Legal Aid helps people resolve issues that can have a major impact on their health, housing, and well-being. Legal Aid attorneys regularly work on-site at clinic locations to meet people when and where they are experiencing times of crisis. Legal Aid is also the official legal services provider for Say Yes Cleveland, which provides scholarships and supportive services to students and their families in all Cleveland Metropolitan schools and some partner chart schools. The majority of cases that come through the Say Yes partnership are housing cases.

We will also continue to partner with the community agencies responsible for distributing government sponsored rent assistance funds (e.g. CHN Housing Partners and EDEN).

Legal Aid attorneys will also conduct educational presentations and brief advice clinics at trusted community locations in neighborhoods around Cleveland. At our brief advice clinics, Legal Aid attorneys and volunteers meet one-on-one with potential clients. We provide people with the tools they need to avoid a legal problem with housing or resolve it on their own and help them understand when it is appropriate to seek assistance from Legal Aid or another service provider.

2. Legal Aid will do direct outreach to people who had an eviction filed against them. Working with United Way, outreach will happen in collaboration with the Cleveland Housing Court. The Court will insert a flyer in each summons. And, United Way will separately mail to every person facing eviction a letter to highlight the services Legal Aid provides.

3. Legal Aid will participate daily in the Cleveland Housing Court docket to help Cleveland residents in the last movements before an eviction happens. The above-described outreach and referrals do not always reach every potential client. So, it is necessary for Legal Aid to be in the daily dockets of Cleveland Housing Court – doing initial intake outreach to people as they appear before the Court.
4. Legal Aid will run a “Tenant Information Line” – a phone line for people to call with quick questions about landlord tenant issues. Calls to this line that become a legal issue will have a direct line into Legal Aid’s intake department.
5. Legal Aid will conduct client intake and subsequently advise and represent clients in hearings, negotiations, and litigation for cases that affect housing stability.
6. Legal Aid will provide legal advice and representation. Priority will be given to residents who qualify for Cleveland’s Right to Counsel (households at or below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines with children in the home who have an eviction filing), and as funding allows other Cleveland residents will be provided Legal Aid’s help with housing (i.e., those residents at 200% of the federal poverty guidelines and below, regardless of household composition).

Through this work, we will secure positive outcomes for our clients, and achieve their goals related to housing stability. Avoiding eviction will prevent a host of devastating potential consequences that can result from such a disruption. For example, it can help them keep their job; one study found that working tenants who are evicted are as many as 22 percentage points more likely than similarly situated people to subsequently lose their job (see <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondgershenson.sp2016.pdf?m=1452638824>).

Consequences go farther than just homelessness, too; often, the temporary housing options available to people who are evicted are unstable, unsafe, or far from a child’s school/ in another school district altogether. Legal Aid’s representation helps families avoid these periods of instability and helps children maintain a healthy, supportive home environment. Legal Aid’s community education work on housing law issues will lead people to advocate for themselves and better understand their rights and processes of the civil justice system.

OUTREACH PLAN

Legal Aid partners with United Way to execute a robust community awareness campaign to spread the news about RTC and help tenants in Cleveland understand their rights related to eviction and housing. One important part of this work is the provision of an insert in every eviction court summons that explains RTC and how to contact Legal Aid. We are also sharing messages about the program through media partners, including local newspapers, TV stations, and radio stations. We print and distribute “Know Your Rights” brochures to community partners and identify key partners who can elevate our message and reach a wider audience.

Legal Aid clients who receive housing help benefit in a myriad of ways – and the community in the City of Cleveland benefits from Legal Aid’s education and outreach work related to housing rights. These efforts increase knowledge about the civil justice system (e.g., through our “Know Your

Rights” presentations/ Facebook Lives) and increase access to justice (e.g., through systemic advocacy efforts – including our successful campaign to promote a right to counsel in eviction cases in Cleveland).

Clients we represent see significant improvements in their quality of life, as Legal Aid secures access to the basic need of shelter. Clients and their families are able to avoid periods of homelessness, and either stay in their current home or gain extra time to find a new, suitable place to live – without an eviction on their record. Our clients also often see improvements to their homes’ conditions, as Legal Aid attorneys compel landlords to comply with building codes and make needed repairs (including remediating lead hazards). Finally, during the coronavirus pandemic, Legal Aid has helped clients secure rent assistance funds that make landlords whole and help provide a financial cushion for tenants to get back on their feet. The rent assistance application process in Cleveland is quite complicated; the guidance and diligent attention of our skilled attorneys has often meant the difference between approval and denial. This fall, one of our RTC attorneys helped his client secure \$11,000 in rent assistance that he was originally denied due to a miscommunication about a form.

Our clients’ stories most powerfully demonstrate our impact. One client we helped in 2021 was “Sasha” (name changed for privacy), a fiercely independent single mother raising two young children on her own: a 10-year-old son and a 2-year-old daughter. Her daughter is mostly deaf.

Before COVID hit, Sasha was working for Spectrum in customer service. She lost her job in February and was unable to get right back to work because of the pandemic. She kept looking for jobs, but her unemployment benefits ended before she found anything stable. Making rent and bill payments became tougher and tougher. Eventually, Sasha received an eviction notice. She saw a brochure in the mail about Legal Aid and decided to give us a call.

With help from her Legal Aid attorney, Sasha obtained rent assistance which paid her back rent plus three months of future rent. The attorney then engaged in skilled negotiations with Sasha’s landlord and got the eviction case dismissed. Today, Sasha has a work-from-home job with Apple as a support specialist. Her daughter is scheduled to receive a cochlear implant soon as well. Things are looking up for the family – and they have stability, thanks to critical support from Legal Aid.

TOTAL CLEVELAND RESIDENTS TO BE HELPED

Legal Aid will help at least 5,700 household members through 1900 housing cases annually.

METRICS AND ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Legal Aid collects, records, and analyzes a wealth of quantitative data that further prove the effectiveness of our problem-solving strategies. Our attorneys and staff input details of all case work, including client data and case outcomes, into an electronic case management system. We also collect client story narratives as qualitative data which powerfully demonstrate the impact of our work.

Outcomes data to which we pay specific attention for housing cases include:

- Prevented eviction
- Secured extra time to move
- Obtained rent assistance
- Secured utilities
- Remedied defective conditions
- Secured monetary relief

- Secured participation in subsidized housing program

These data points and other outcomes are tracked in our comprehensive case management system, LegalServer.

Legal Aid has incredible success when we assist low-income community members with a housing problem. The global consulting firm Stout Risius Ross, which was contracted to conduct an annual evaluation of RTC, recently released its report on 2021. Highlights include:

- 93% of Legal Aid clients who were seeking to prevent an eviction or involuntary move achieved that outcome
- 83% of Legal Aid clients seeking rental assistance secured it
- 92% of Legal Aid clients seeking more time to move secured it
- 94% of Legal Aid clients seeking to mitigate damages did so
- 97% of Legal Aid clients seeking to secure monetary relief did so
- Cleveland/Cuyahoga County saved millions because of RTC

The entire report and more key points can be found at www.FreeEvictionHelpResults.org

Finally, Stout's evaluation includes detailed comparison of each Cleveland City Council ward, showing the number of evictions and number of evictions where the tenant was represented by Legal Aid. We use this information to inform our outreach plan to ensure that all tenants in need are served.

IMPACT:

Short-Term Impact

First year impact:

- Prevent Evictions and Achieve Client Goals: Decrease housing displacement and disruption arising from eviction.
 - Helping families avoid housing displacement or other disruptions arising from eviction will lead to a reduction in shelter costs, school absenteeism and overall and improvement in our community.
 - This outcome will be measured by data pertaining to families that avoided eviction; families that were able to stay stably housed; and instances when an attorney was able to negotiate a smooth transition to other housing.
- Leverage Rental Assistance
 - Refer clients to CHN and other partners for rent assistance
 - Facilitate access to rental assistance by providing necessary information and documentation
 - Negotiate with landlord the acceptance of rent assistance

Intermediate Impact

2-3 year impact:

- Decrease evictions filings.
 - Other jurisdictions that have implemented right to counsel legislation have noted a decrease in eviction filings. For example, in 2019, New York City experienced a decrease in eviction by 6%, and over five years, evictions have declined by 31%.

- The scales of justice in Cleveland will come into balance with changed landlord behavior. Landlords will do a deeper cost-benefit analysis ahead of filing, and specious claims will not be filed.
- This outcome will be measured by the number of eviction filings and a decrease in filings over time.

Long-Term Impact – beyond ARPA funds

Long-term impact:

- Identify and Respond to Poor Housing Conditions
 - The CWRU study has shown that 30% of people being evicted in Cleveland live in rental units with substandard housing conditions. Tenants who cannot afford to hire an attorney rarely file a legal claim when they are living in substandard housing conditions that violate state and local law; this is often because they perceive that the legal system will not serve them, or they simply fail to recognize they have a right to legal action. Addressing these issues in court with a skilled attorney will help to remediate substandard housing conditions and create safer, more stable neighborhoods.
 - This outcome will be measured in the short term by collecting data pertaining to the following types of cases: 1) cases where substandard housing conditions were remedied as part of the right to counsel representation; 2) cases where the tenant's rent or debt decreased because of substandard housing conditions; and 3) cases where a landlord was prohibited from re-renting a substandard rental unit.
- Respond to an Eviction Crisis that Disproportionately Impacts Black and Female Households
 - Last year, Legal Aid clients who had their cases closed in calendar year 2021 were disproportionately female and Black compared to Cleveland's overall demographics.
 - Approximately 77% of clients who had their cases closed in calendar year 2021 were female, and approximately 72% were Black. This compares to Cleveland's population being 52% female and 49% Black.
 - Furthermore, Cleveland eviction filings overall in 2021 were concentrated in census tracts with non-white majority populations. Approximately 42% of all eviction filings in Cleveland in 2021 were in majority Black or African American census tracts compared to approximately 19% in majority white census tracts.
- Create costs savings for the community
 - The total preliminary fiscal impact of Cleveland's Right to Counsel in Cleveland / Cuyahoga County for 2021 was approximately \$4.3 million to \$4.7 million.

(Right to Counsel represents \$2.7 million of the overall \$4.4 million budget for this project. Thus \$4.7 million of benefit for the \$2.7 million investment is impressive.)

- Stout estimates that Cleveland / Cuyahoga County likely avoided social safety net costs of at least \$1.8 million to \$1.9 million (housing social safety net responses, Medicaid spending on in-patient and emergency room health care, and out-of-home foster care) and retained approximately \$2.5 million to \$2.8 million in federal funding and economic value (federal and state funding for Cleveland Metropolitan School District and economic value of avoiding out-migration / population loss) through Cleveland's Right to Counsel.

- Increase public trust in the civil justice system and provide access to justice:
 - Currently, 60% of tenants facing eviction do not show up in court. Legal Aid's awareness campaign around Right to Counsel Cleveland and tenant rights will aim to increase the number of tenants who show up to court for their eviction hearings, thus decreasing the default rate and increasing trust in the civil system and civic engagement.
 - Tenants will engage with their democracy and the judicial branch of government. They will only do this if they trust the system more and have an advocate by their side.
 - This outcome will be measured by related court data and an increase in the number of tenants who appear in court for their eviction hearing.

TOTAL BUDGET

\$4,428,708: This is the estimated annual budget as of August 2022. This is for all anticipated Cleveland housing cases, and approximately \$2.7 million of this budget is for Right to Counsel cases.

As of today, the total estimated cost for three years of this program is \$14 million. Legal Aid requests \$1 million of ARPA funds over three years, or until all funds expended. *This request represents only 7% of the total estimated budget.*

The budget is anticipated to grow in years to come as Legal Aid leverages these ARPA dollars with other investments to serve more Cleveland residents in need.

Currently, revenue for this work to provide housing help to Cleveland residents includes:

- \$100,000 Cleveland CDBG,
- \$500,000 city appropriation for RTC,
- \$300,000 funding from United Way,
- \$400,000 from Cuyahoga County ERA2,
- approximately \$1,000,000 philanthropic funds from the Cleveland Foundation and other funders, along with Legal Aid general operating funds.

With this revenue, we have a funding gap of \$2,128,708 due to the increased need in the community due to COVID-19. A \$1 million ARPA grant can help close this \$2,128,708 funding gap.

APPENDIX

SUPPORTING DATA

Cleveland recently became the poorest major city in the United States – a title that came as no surprise to Legal Aid’s Housing Group attorneys, who have seen first-hand the impact of the city’s affordable housing crisis. In 2019, over 8,000 eviction cases were heard in Cleveland Housing Court, resulting in over 3,500 evictions (see https://www.clevelandhousingplan.com/uploads/1/3/2/9/132946414/cleveland_2030_a_housing_equity_plan.pdf).

Evictions are associated with higher rates of depression, poor maternal health outcomes (such as low birthweight and infant mortality), childhood hospitalizations, school absenteeism, and emergency department visits. And counties with higher eviction rates also have higher rates of accidental deaths due to drugs and alcohol (see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6980955/>).

A 2019 study by researchers at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) delved deeper into the landscape of evictions in Cleveland. The study found that 58 percent of households in Cleveland rent, and just over half (51 percent) of these households are “rent-burdened,” meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent. A third of Cleveland renters spend 50 percent or more of their income towards rental housing. Most tenants in Cleveland eviction court are low-income, Black, female head of households with children (see <https://case.edu/socialwork/povertycenter/sites/case.edu.povertycenter/files/2019-11/The%20Cleveland%20Eviction%20Study-10242019-fully%20accessible%28r%29.pdf>).

Multiple studies from recent years have demonstrated that tenants facing eviction who have an attorney by their side achieve more positive outcomes in housing court. Tenants with representation are much more likely to avoid an eviction judgment, to be able to stay in their homes, and to save money on rent/ fees than unrepresented tenants. In addition, attorneys can secure added benefits for tenants; for example, they may be able to help tenants seal their eviction record, arrange for alternative housing, negotiate reasonable amounts of time for tenants to move out, reduce or eliminate money owed to the landlord, or help tenants apply for rent assistance.

AGENCY DESCRIPTION

Founded in 1905, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland (Legal Aid) is the 5th oldest civil legal aid organization in the United States and the only one in Northeast Ohio. Our mission is to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who have low incomes and are vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions. Values of fairness and equity guide Legal Aid’s work to ensure justice is for all.

Legal Aid operates multiple offices and serves residents of Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, Lorain, and Geauga counties. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit led by Executive Director Colleen Cotter, Esq., who has 17 years’ experience at the helm of the organization. Other leadership staff include: Deputy Director for Advocacy Tom Mlakar, Esq., who has been with the organization for 30 years; Director of Development & Communications Melanie Shakarian, Esq., who has been in her role for 18 years; and Director of Finance and Administrative Operations Jason Nedley, who joined Legal Aid in 2022 and has more than 20 years of experience as an auditor, accountant, analyst, and finance manager.

With a staff of 130 full-time employees (75 attorneys and 55 administrative/support staff, including paralegals, intake staff, human resources staff, development staff, finance staff, and other positions), Legal Aid also boasts a volunteer roster of more than 3,000 attorneys – 600 of whom are engaged in a case or clinic each year. In addition to executing their roles per their job descriptions, all staff also serve as positive representatives of the organization in the community at large. Volunteers include law students, paralegals, attorneys, and retired attorneys who help with brief advice clinics and events (in a variety of virtual, hybrid and in-person formats). Local volunteer attorneys also take on cases through our Volunteer Lawyers Program.

Legal Aid's Board of Directors is currently comprised of 22 members. Our Code of Regulations dictate that one third of our Board members meet the financial eligibility requirements for Legal Aid services; currently, eight Board members fit this criterion, and all were recommended by a partner organization. Board responsibilities include: 1) adopt regulations, bylaws, policies and procedures consistent with applicable law, 2) assure Legal Aid remains fiscally sound through strong financial management and fundraising; and 3) develop and oversee the implementation of a strategic plan. Legal Aid's Board of Directors meets quarterly.

CLEVELAND RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Legal Aid's Strategic Plan, including mission, vision, values, and goals, is developed by Legal Aid's Board, in partnership with staff. One-third of our Board members are people with low incomes who represent our client community; these individuals have served in leadership positions, including Board President. They also serve as chairs of committees and on Legal Aid's Strategic Planning Committee. They help lead in the development of Legal Aid's goals and strategies.

In addition, Legal Aid surveys clients quarterly and takes care to listen to and engage with our community through various outreach events, texting initiatives, focus groups, and other efforts. We use this information to create and modify programs. Legal Aid is committed to accountability, cultural humility, and applying the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to all aspects of our work – both internally and externally. In December 2019, we engaged a DEI consultant with whom we continue to work to create a more diverse, collaborative work environment.

Also in 2020, we partnered with the Center for Community Solutions to begin a comprehensive "Legal Needs Assessment" of our five-county area to inform the next strategic plan. That Assessment was completed in 2021. We will further focus Legal Aid's work through a racial justice lens. Finally, the evaluation of Legal Aid's implementation of Cleveland's Right to Counsel includes gathering feedback from landlords and landlord attorneys as well as tenants. That information is used to inform program refinement.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATIONS

It's no secret that partnerships are critical to making real and lasting change. As Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Legal Aid is inspired by this call to action.

Our partnerships with local hospitals, libraries, social service providers, public agencies, community leaders, and neighborhood groups elevate the impact of our services and also ensure sustainability of our outcomes. For example: our medical-legal partnerships (MLP) with four area hospitals bring civil legal assistance to the places where people seek medical care. By integrating legal problem-

solving into health care, attorneys and medical providers can target the social determinants of health, which are factors such as home environment and economic stability that affect up to 80% of a person's health outcomes.

Last year, our MLP with MetroHealth helped Salma, a refugee from Iraq whose teenage son Abdul has multiple physical and intellectual disabilities (*names changed to protect client privacy*). Salma speaks limited English and wanted help getting Abdul the supports he needs at school. A Legal Aid attorney advocated on Salma's behalf at multiple meetings with school administration, until the district agreed to place Abdul in a specialized school that better met his needs, at no cost to the family. The attorney also helped Salma maintain guardianship over Abdul past age 18 so she can continue making educational and medical decisions in his best interest.

A second major partnership particularly relevant to this proposal is our partnership with United Way. On October 1st, 2019, Cleveland became only the fourth in the United States to enact a right to counsel (RTC) in eviction cases. Cleveland City Council designated United Way to help implement the new law, and Legal Aid was designated as the lead provider of legal services.

In 2019, Legal Aid began working closely with United Way to plan program implementation, outreach, and evaluation strategies; these were implemented in 2020 and continue today. Legal Aid has provided legal representation to eligible tenants since the program launched on July 1, 2020. City funding is needed to grow Legal Aid's capacity to help community members with housing issues (which includes work for this right that was legislated by City Council, as Legal Aid is the sole entity positioned to provide the legal services).

Legal Aid's total budget to help Clevelanders with housing issues now is \$4.4 million. (And, if Right to Counsel in Cleveland Housing Court expands through City Council action this budget will necessarily grow). While ARPA funds will help support housing stability efforts post-COVID-19, collaborative planning between the City Administration and City Council is needed for sustainable support for this legislated right, and Legal Aid looks forward to participating in those discussions.

Right to Counsel Support

Housing

\$1M

Targeted

Provide funding for increased coordination and support to women and children experiencing the threat of eviction

What will this program do?

- Increase capacity and support for the Right to Counsel law
- Provide legal resources and representation to prevent residents from being evicted from their homes

Who will this affect?

- Approximately 5,700 household members facing evictions, the majority of whom are women or Black

How is it going to happen?

- The City will administer funds to Legal Aid Society of Cleveland

When will we see success?

- Increased number of evictions prevented
- Decreased number of eviction filings
- Improved housing conditions
- Levered rental and utilities assistance

Where do we see alignment for this? Greater Cleveland American Rescue Plan Coalition; City of Cleveland; Say Yes Cleveland; United Way; Cleveland Housing Court