



**charlotte center
for legal advocacy**

justice lives here.



2021

annual report

Our mission is **to pursue justice**
for those in need.

Our vision is **to build a just community**,
where all people are treated fairly and
have access to legal representation to
meet their basic human needs of safety,
economic security and stability.

Friends,

As I approach 34 years at Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy, I reflect on how far our organization has grown since its formation. What began in 1967 as part of the War on Poverty has grown to an organization of over 60 staff members and attorneys, supported by 500 pro bono attorneys in the Charlotte legal community. We focus on one mission: to pursue justice for those in need. We remain true to our roots and continue to operate as an anti-poverty organization, dedicated to securing economic opportunity for our clients. We advocate for our clients as individuals when they face crises of safety, security, and stability, and we advocate for systemic change to address the issues that cause those crises on a broader scale.



The pursuit of justice has been our guiding force during the pandemic. Many in our community have been harmed by COVID-19 but our neighbors living on the economic margin have been in constant and deep crisis. These are the individuals we fight for. Our work focuses on protecting those most vulnerable, ensuring they have access to affordable healthcare, stable immigration status, or a safe home without fear of unlawful eviction.

These individuals also drive our mission for the future. I have long wanted to see a space that reflects the dignity and honor of our clients. Thanks to community support through the Building Justice Campaign, our new Advocacy Center on Albemarle Road opened in early 2022.

With a larger and more modern facility, we can consolidate our services in one place and greatly improve the service experience for our clients and community. I end my time with the Advocacy Center on this positive note, knowing I leave behind a staff and leadership team focused on pursuing justice for those in need.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Schorr'.

Kenneth Schorr
Executive Director
1988-2022

safety



housing

A survey conducted by the Census Bureau found 1 in 5 North Carolinians were worried about being evicted from their home last year. In Charlotte, our vulnerable community members found themselves struggling to pay rent or in danger of losing their homes due to loss of employment or economic instability. We were there to help. We prevented 61 illegal evictions and foreclosure, as well as educated the public about the limits of the federal eviction and foreclosure moratoria and connected neighbors at risk with federal and community-based rental assistance programs.

domestic violence

While many experienced higher levels of anxiety and stress due to the pandemic, nothing compared to the life-threatening existence in which domestic violence victims found themselves. The Advocacy Center was instrumental in shielding those already vulnerable to dangerous home environments by seeking protective orders and legal intervention for 81 women. We remained committed to fighting for the vulnerable women and families who could not afford a lawyer, but desperately needed safety and protection.

“If I didn’t know about the Advocacy Center, I don’t know what I would have done.”



*protecting
immigrants*

484

*unaccompanied
minors protected*

Unaccompanied migrant children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Through the Safe Release Support Program, the Advocacy Center aids the protection of unaccompanied minors by providing legal orientation and safe release services to their adult sponsors. The program is just one of the ways we provide safety and stability to immigrants as they navigate the complex immigration process. As the largest nonprofit provider of representation in the Charlotte Immigration Court, the Advocacy Center focuses on addressing the full scale of needs facing our immigrant community.

security

tax relief

When the American Rescue Plan was signed into law in early 2021, it became clear that our neighbors would have a difficult time navigating the complex unemployment insurance system and fluctuating stimulus benefits. Who was eligible? How would payments be distributed? What if payments didn't arrive? We developed a community hotline where staff members answered questions for over 400 individuals to ensure everyone eligible for payments could receive them. We initiated outreach efforts to educate low-income clients who do not traditionally file taxes how to access the Child Tax Credit, a critical component of economic relief. And when clients faced tax controversies because of these sweeping changes, our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic was prepared to help them.

helping seniors

Approximately 150,000 seniors aged 60 and up reside in Mecklenburg County. Nearly 27% of those seniors live with incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level. Last year our Legal Services for the Elderly Program helped nearly 100 clients make their own plans and decisions about end-of-life issues through drafting and executing simple wills, powers of attorney and health care power of attorneys.



\$8.6
million
accessed
via public
benefits

public benefits

The economic security and well-being of many families is contingent on their access to services and benefits that supplement health, food, and income. Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy fights to ensure families, seniors and people living with disabilities receive the benefits to which they are entitled to better position them to thrive in all areas of their lives.



moniek's story

Since the age of 15, Moniek had difficulty finding a job because employers were unwilling to overlook her juvenile criminal record. “I was a child, I was crazy, and I didn’t want to listen to anyone. But I’m not that person anymore.”

Now leading a busy life taking care of her 1-year-old daughter, her disabled mother, and working as a dental assistant, Moniek did not want the charges hanging over her head any longer. Moniek knew she would need a lawyer to have her record expunged, an expense she could not afford. She decided to contact the Advocacy Center.

For many North Carolinians, criminal records can spark collateral consequences by limiting a person’s housing, employment, and other opportunities. By removing those barriers, expunction has proven to have a significant impact on an individual’s economic opportunity. Moniek could confidently move forward with applying to dental hygienist school and be proud of the example she set for her daughter. “I want people to know that the person you are in the past does not have to define who you are in the moment, or the person you could become in the future.”

230
*clients' records
expunged or
driver's license
restored*

stability



268
*clients gained
stabilized
immigration
status*

mirian's story

When she emigrated from El Salvador at the age of 13, getting a green card was a dream for Mirian. She quickly learned it would take time, knowledge, and resources she did not have. Facing the immense barriers of a complicated immigration system, Mirian contacted Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy.

Research has found that the probability of a positive outcome in Charlotte Immigration Court increases dramatically, from 5% to 95%, when an individual has legal representation. Most cases take years to resolve and hiring a private attorney can be cost prohibitive for immigrants and their families. Mirian gratefully relied on the Advocacy Center to help her apply for Special Immigration Juvenile Status. 10 years after immigrating to the United States, Mirian was finally granted legal permanent residency.

Now married with two wonderful children, having a green card has created the stability and security Mirian dreamed of. "I don't have to live in fear. I can live in peace and see my kids grow up." Mirian is excited about the possibilities in front of her.

consumer protection

Low-income individuals often face barriers to access the resources that preserve income and protect them from financial exploitation. Protecting these community members from unlawful foreclosures, predatory real estate investment, abusive collection practices, and consumer scams resulted in \$305,794 in monetary relief for our clients. Our efforts focus on ending the cycle of poverty by helping individuals and families build wealth and prepare for the future, particularly in immigrant and communities of color disproportionately impacted by barriers to economic mobility.

healthcare access



It is crucial our neighbors have access to affordable health care. To ensure coverage for those who need it the most, our team of health insurance Navigators guide families and individuals through the confusing health care landscape. They help clients get covered through Healthcare.gov or Medicaid, in addition to pursuing tax credits and identifying ways to decrease healthcare costs. This assistance further reduces barriers to healthcare access for individuals and their families.

2,218

*clients assisted in
accessing affordable
health care*

helping veterans

Of the more than 55,000 veterans living in Mecklenburg County, 8,000 are estimated to live with a service-related disability. Complex, time-consuming benefit claims mean that veterans may struggle getting the aid that is needed to build security for themselves. We address this problem by serving veterans seeking help with disability benefits claims and appeals, discharge upgrades and over-payment issues, as well as other civil legal matters. This past year, we were able to access nearly \$900,000 in benefits for our clients, providing lasting economic stability for the veterans and their families.

advocacy



Through our representation of individuals and families, we identify issues that inform our advocacy for programmatic and systemic change.

We believe our community deserves:

- Access to the Legal System
- Financial Security and Family Stability
- Economic Opportunity
- Racial Equity
- Protection for Immigrants
- Affordable Housing
- Access to Health Care
- Food Security

[View our 2022 Advocacy Priorities](#)



medicaid transformation

In 2021, North Carolina transitioned most Medicaid beneficiaries to a managed care system. The massive undertaking introduced changes and complexities for beneficiaries. The Advocacy Center focused on educating the community about the impending changes, informing beneficiaries of their rights, and engaging those impacted through outreach and communications. In addition, we partnered with Legal Aid of North Carolina, Pisgah Legal Services, and the state of North Carolina to launch the NC Medicaid Ombudsman program. The program provides free, confidential service to beneficiaries facing problems with their coverage or care.

lake arbor

Last year a settlement was granted to Lake Arbor tenants who were illegally evicted after raising concerns about Housing Code violations in their apartment complex. The suit, filed against the former owners and property managers, exposed how dire Charlotte's affordable housing crisis has become, leaving tenants vulnerable to displacement and homelessness just for exercising their rights to a safe and habitable place to live. The settlement set a precedent for landlords in Charlotte who may allow dangerous conditions to persist at their properties.

outreach & education

Many in our community were impacted by the pandemic, but our neighbors already living on the margin were hit the hardest. Connecting with the community provided opportunities to address needs before they become critical. Our work included outreach on tax related changes and economic benefits, financial programs to alleviate housing insecurity, access to critical food security programs, and more. With a focus on individuals and neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by civil legal issues, we concentrated our efforts where they were needed the most.



systemic litigation

Our Family Support and Health Care Program continued to pursue litigation strategies to address systemic issues hindering Medicaid access in North Carolina. The cases seek to hold the Department of Health & Human Services culpable for illegal Medicaid terminations and improve the state run health system for those most vulnerable. Our program staff continues to work closely with county and state officials to address new issues impeding access, improving quality and equity of care in the process.

pro bono

The Mecklenburg Access to Justice Pro Bono Partners Program is the largest pro bono program in North Carolina, made up of over 400 pro bono attorneys and advocates. The volunteers who work with the Advocacy Center enable us to serve more people in need and to build a stronger, more just community for all.

“Providing civil legal assistance is a unique community service only lawyers can provide. We have a special obligation.”

Blaine Sanders, Director of Pro Bono Services, Robinson Bradshaw



6,293
*hours donated
by pro bono
volunteers*

For many volunteers, the civil legal needs issues facing our clients are well outside of their practice areas, providing a unique challenge and rewarding learning opportunity. Jay Suhr, partner at Nelson Mullins, shares what that experience has been like for him. “I had no idea how much a [criminal record] affected my client’s ability to be employed, to get housing, or to get a credit card or loan. Oftentimes the charges go back to when the client is 16 or 17 years old, and it’s been hanging over his/her head the entire time. It’s a tremendous feeling when you can help clients get an expunction and share in the excitement that they now have opportunities that had been previously blocked.”

look ahead



our new home

There are over 300,000 residents in Mecklenburg County who are eligible for our services and in need of legal assistance, but unable to afford private lawyers. With demand significantly increasing over the past several years, we increased our staff and resource to better assist our community. Our growth was met with its own challenges, and we quickly found our impact limited by physical space.

Thanks to the Charlotte community's commitment to our Building Justice Campaign, our new location, the Advocacy Center, opened in early 2022. The new facility at 5535 Albemarle Road provides a central location for clients, volunteers, and staff. It includes spaces for individual client services, client-focused clinic services, and community collaboration. It also allows for organizational growth to meet the increasing needs of our neighbors and expands our impact in the community. We look forward to welcoming you to our new home!

financial stewardship



Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy is *committed to being a good steward* of the donations and grants we receive. We invest the contributions effectively and efficiently in our *pursuit of justice for all*.

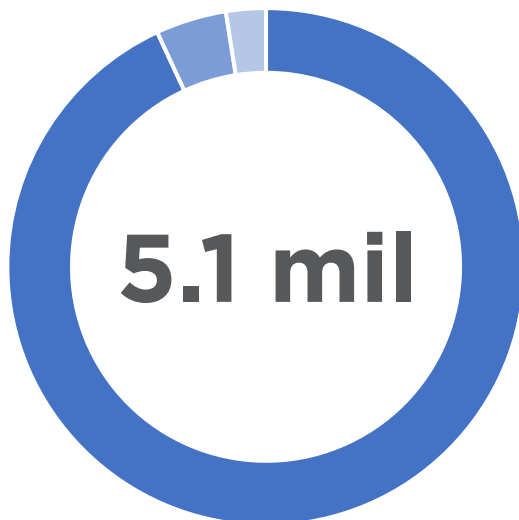
support and revenue*



private foundations	33%
federal, state, & local government	24%
other revenue*	14%
in-kind volunteer support	12%
donations	7%
United Way	5%
NC Interest on Lawyer Trust Accounts	4%

*excludes \$1.69mil in capital campaign contributions

expenses



program services	93%
management and general	4%
fundraising	2%

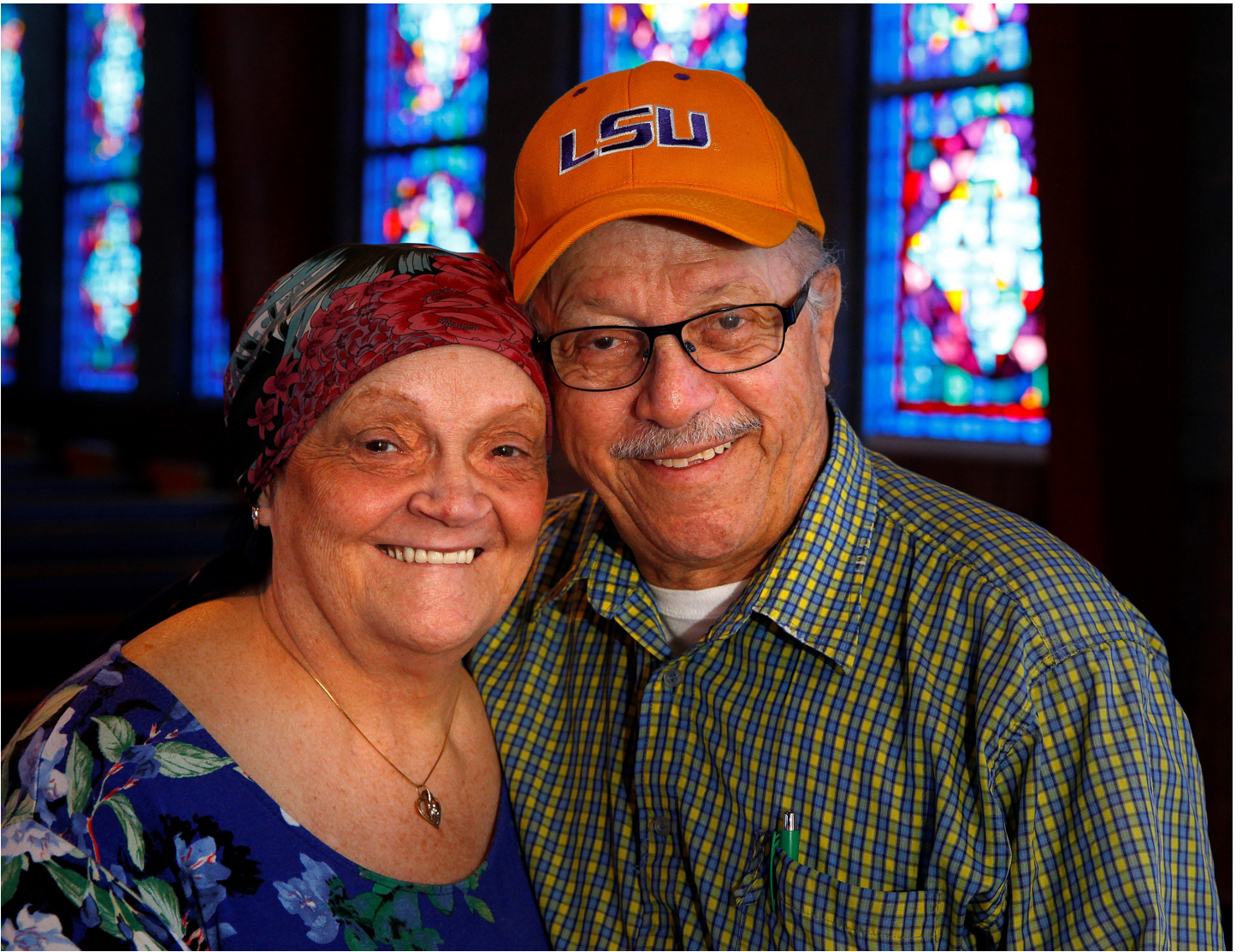
[Visit our website for our full financial statements and audit](#)

We are grateful for those who are leading the way to fund our effort to ensure justice for all.

Your commitment ensures legal staff will be ready when one of our neighbors faces civil legal issues threatening their safety, security, and stability.

Visit our website for a full list of supporters who have graciously contributed to Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy.

get involved



Our work is not possible without the support of our community. Here's is how you can help:

- [Become a pro bono partner.](#) Our volunteers enable us to serve more people in need and to build a stronger, more just community for all.
- [Stay informed and help us advocate for change.](#) Join our mailing list to stay up to date on our work and critical advocacy issues.
- [Donate.](#) Your contribution ensures our clients have a place to turn when they face crises affecting their safety, security, and stability.



charlotte center
for **legal advocacy**

get help

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