

# OUR RESPONSE TO COVID-19

*Centro Legal de la Raza's*  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
*FY 20-21*



**CENTRO LEGAL**  
DE LA RAZA

## Mission

Founded in 1969, Centro Legal de la Raza is a legal services agency protecting and advancing the rights of low-income, immigrant, Black, and Latinx communities through bilingual legal representation, education, and advocacy. By combining quality legal services with know-your-rights education and youth development, Centro Legal de la Raza ensures access to justice for thousands of individuals throughout Northern and Central California.

## Board of Directors

Maria Blanco	Christina Kothari	Daniel Purcell
Chip Conradi	Beatriz Mejia	Stephanie Tang
Raul Escatel	Albert Moreno	Sandra Sertel
Dorothy L. Fernandez	Rosanna M. Neagle	Erica Villanueva
Sergio Garcia	Claudia Perkins	

**FEATURED MURAL ARTISTS** *Brisa Del Mar Camacho-Lovell, Daniel Castaño Sanchez, Juliana Morgan-Trostle, and Luis Felipe Camacho-Lovell.*

## Dear Beloved Community,

It has been a transformational year! We experienced more than a year in a pandemic, and in response we have adapted to serve the needs of our community. Though Centro Legal has experienced changes, we remain committed to our mission of serving low-income, immigrant, Black, and Latinx communities.

We are grateful for your continued support during this critical time. For over fifty years, Centro has established itself as a bedrock organization serving the East Bay and beyond. Below are a few highlights of our collective success:

- Served 12,551 clients across our practice areas, and received more than 15,000 calls for assistance
- Co-authored one of the strongest eviction moratorium in California to protect vulnerable tenants affected by the ravages of the pandemic
- Secured \$2,185,000 in settlements and judgments in our Workers' Rights practice
- Distributed over \$3,000,000 of direct cash assistance to 7,432 undocumented workers
- Distributed \$30,000,000 in emergency rental assistance funds to prevent tenant evictions and employed twenty new staff and community members
- Three Youth Law Academy alumni were accepted to law schools

- Named the 2020 Nonprofit of the Year by CA Assemblymember Rob Bonta

Our clients lead the way, and bring expertise to our work. We center our clients' power and stories. We go beyond community lawyering to engage in movement lawyering by uplifting community voices to support advocacy efforts. For example, as COVID-19 spread through immigration detention centers across the state, Centro Legal supported successful campaigns led by immigrant organizers calling for health protections and safe release. We collaborate with community partners in organizing and policy to support long-term systems change.

This work is not done alone. **With your gift, we can continue to provide quality, legal services so that all have access to a just and bright future.** Thank you for your investment in this transformative work.

In solidarity,



*MBerlanga*  
**Monique Berlanga**  
Interim Co-Executive Director



*RJ*  
**Raymundo Jacquez**  
Interim Co-Executive Director



# Immigrants' Rights

**DURING THE PANDEMIC, CENTRO LEGAL STAFF ATTORNEYS PREPARED FOR ASYLUM HEARINGS THAT REQUIRED COUNTLESS HOURS WORKING WITH CLIENTS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, LEGAL EXPERTS, AS WELL AS TIME SPENT RESEARCHING, WRITING AND STRATEGIZING.**

However due to COVID-19, hearings were postponed, often at the last minute, and sometimes for up to four years.

Preparing for an asylum hearing can be very traumatizing for a client because they have to discuss in detail with Centro Legal attorneys — and prepare to testify before a judge and government attorney — some of the worst

things that happened to them in their life. The postponement means that the client will have to repeat this grueling preparation process again in the future. For many of our clients, this was the second or third time their hearing had been postponed. They can continue to live in the US, but without legal status they are vulnerable to uncertainties and stress.

Thankfully, one of our young clients, a 21-year-old college student named Andrea, who has been fighting her deportation case since 2015, won legal permanent residency this year! Andrea was overjoyed at the thought of finally being able to visit her grandmother in El Salvador. Her legal status also means she'll be eligible for federal financial aid, which may help her pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. Winning a case provides closure and stability in the lives of our clients, and a win gives them peace of mind knowing they can live and work legally in the US.

Centro Legal's Immigrants' Rights team envisions a world without borders, where we welcome those fleeing danger and instability without putting them through a grueling and retraumatizing process. Until then, we continue to work towards real change, engaging in advocacy and representing our clients in court for justice.

**1,445**  
INDIVIDUALS SERVED

**9**  
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS

**846**  
CONSULTATIONS

**175**  
PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH  
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS  
PRESENTATIONS

**424**  
REPRESENTATIONS





# Tenants' Rights

**SINCE 2018, CENTRO LEGAL HAS SERVED AS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ALAMEDA COUNTY HOUSING SECURE (ACHS) PROGRAM, A COUNTY-WIDE ANTI-DISPLACEMENT COLLABORATIVE OF LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDERS PARTNERING TO PREVENT THE MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM BECOMING HOMELESS.**

The Tenants' Rights team leveraged the ACHS infrastructure and existing community partners to administer the County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), providing relief to individuals and families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. ERAP funds have paid off past due rent, utility payments, and future rent, serving almost 1,200 tenants and their families and distributing over twelve million dollars across the county.

Thousands of applicants are facing housing instability and homelessness due to lost employment, reduced hours from business closures, issues with child-care, other care-taking responsibilities, school closures, disabilities, and/or loss of income from a family member's death. Here are just a few of the thousands of

client stories: After losing his job, Benny, a rental assistance recipient, was forced to choose between paying his rent or buying food for his kids and family. The assistance he received ensured that Benny could stay in his home and pay for his other expenses, like food. Maria applied to the ACHS ERAP program after hearing about it from neighbors at her apartment complex. She was worried about paying for rent and the costs of clothes and snacks for her kids going back to school.

Without the ability to keep up with their rent or pay past due rent, thousands of people will be displaced and/or possibly homeless. COVID-19 and the inability to pay rent hit Black and Brown communities, the LGBTQ+ community, and marginalized communities the hardest.

Centro Legal's Tenants' Rights Practice has extensive experience providing effective legal services to low-income and marginalized tenants. The Tenants' Rights Team has developed and refined a model of service that efficiently provides a wide range of services along the continuum of homeless prevention, eviction prevention, and anti-displacement work, prioritizing accessibility, tenant empowerment, and response to emerging trends in landlord-tenant relations. The team has distinguished itself as a regional leader in providing free legal services to low-income tenants to ensure access to safe, healthy, stable, affordable housing.

<b>3,405</b>	<b>1,009</b>	<b>93</b>
INDIVIDUALS SERVED	CONSULTATIONS	REPRESENTATIONS
<b>1,183</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>1,120</b>
SERVED THROUGH EFA/ERAP TENANTS	KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS	PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS
<b>\$12,292,099</b>		
DISTRIBUTED THROUGH EFA/ERAP TENANTS		





## OUR Fund

As the COVID-19 crisis hit California, Centro Legal and community partners launched the Oakland Undocumented Relief (OUR) Fund. While many Oaklanders turned to existing safety net programs, undocumented workers were largely excluded from these programs. OUR Fund addressed this critical need in our social safety net, and supported those most impacted by this crisis. Each qualified recipient received \$500 (510 received second payments). Thank you to our donors, partners, and more than 50 volunteers for stepping up and taking care of our community during such an unprecedented time.

**7,432**

RECEIVED CASH ASSISTANCE

**\$3,500,000**

DISTRIBUTED\*

\*combined FY19-20 and FY20-21

# Workers' Rights

**CARMEN FINALLY FELT RELIEF. AFTER DEALING WITH A HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING WAGE THEFT, SEXUAL ASSAULT, AND HARRASSMENT - SHE CAME TO THE WORKERS' RIGHTS PRACTICE AT CENTRO LEGAL.**

Carmen had every right to be nervous given her hostile workplace. However, she was courageous. Carmen wanted justice, and didn't want any other woman to experience the same pain. Though she was fearful, she was empowered with knowledge of the process and her rights: **"Centro helped me so much, especially my attorneys. I felt empowered to speak up, and if I see an injustice from an employer, I know what to do,"** she said.

Carmen ended up moving away from the city where she endured the workplace assault. However, with the money she gained from her case, she was finally able to buy her own home, maintain a good job, and has left her exploitative former employers in the past.

**601**

INDIVIDUALS SERVED

**15**

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS

**226**

PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH KNOW YOUR RIGHTS PRESENTATIONS

**\$2,185,000**

SECURED IN SETTLEMENTS & JUDGMENTS FOR WORKERS

**442**

CONSULTATIONS





# Partnering in a Pandemic

**FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS, CENTRO LEGAL HAS RELIED ON THE SUPPORT OF PARTNERSHIPS. ONE OF OUR LONGSTANDING PARTNERSHIPS IS WITH HANSON BRIDGETT LLP, A LAW FIRM WHOSE MISSION IS DRIVEN BY A COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, CHARITABLE GIVING, PRO BONO LEGAL WORK, AND HANDS-ON SERVICE.**



In the last five years, Hanson Bridgett has worked with Centro Legal's Immigrants' Rights practice asylum

program. Thanks to Hanson Bridgett, 331 pro bono hours were contributed in fiscal year 20-21. Hanson Bridgett collaborated on and donated \$5,000 towards Asylee Adjustment of Status application fees, represented an asylum-seeking family in removal proceedings, and opened a new case on behalf of an LGBTQ+ asylum seeker. Additionally, the firm has taken on short term projects, assisting Centro Legal attorneys in finalizing legal arguments and country conditions evidence on behalf of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.

*"It's always great to see our attorneys responding to the call of service. Working with Centro Legal means taking on individual cases, supporting clinics and providing assistance with Tenants' Rights workshops. Legal clinics are popular among our attorneys, and we hope to continue this partnership and further assist with immigration, rental assistance, eviction crisis, impact litigation, and other opportunities."*

— SAMIR J. ABDELNOUR

Partner, Director of Pro Bono & Social Impact

The pandemic proved to be challenging and discouraging when closures and court hearings were postponed. The opportunity to support Centro Legal and assist with pro bono work during the pandemic proved to be uplifting and encouraging for attorneys at Hanson Bridgett.

*"It's been challenging, but we've tried to approach the pandemic situation with flexibility and patience. For instance, I've been working on an asylum case from Centro Legal since 2017. Due to the court closures, my client's hearing scheduled for May 2020 was pushed to 2022. While the pandemic is still ongoing for now, we know she and other clients will eventually get their day in court."*

— ANN MARY OLSON

Senior Counsel

Hanson Bridgett and Centro Legal's partnership have supported many clients with case success. If you or your law firm are interested in providing pro bono support, please contact Julie Hiatt at [jhiatt@centrolegal.org](mailto:jhiatt@centrolegal.org).

aquí  
respira  
se  
lucha



# Youth Law Academy

**SAY HELLO TO LILIAN LOPEZ-ZEPEDA! SHE IS A YOUTH LAW ACADEMY (YLA) ALUMNI, WHO RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM UC DAVIS SCHOOL OF LAW, CLASS OF 2021, AND IS PREPARING TO STUDY FOR THE CALIFORNIA BAR EXAM.**

Liliana graduated from the Youth Law Academy Program a few years ago. The YLA assures students that academic and professional goals are well within their reach. Systematic barriers to higher education, specifically pertaining to law school, are detrimental to creating an equitable, just, and diverse field. YLA alumni continue to flourish and prove that Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) can and will occupy spaces that have historically excluded them. We spoke to Lilian to learn about her experience in the program.

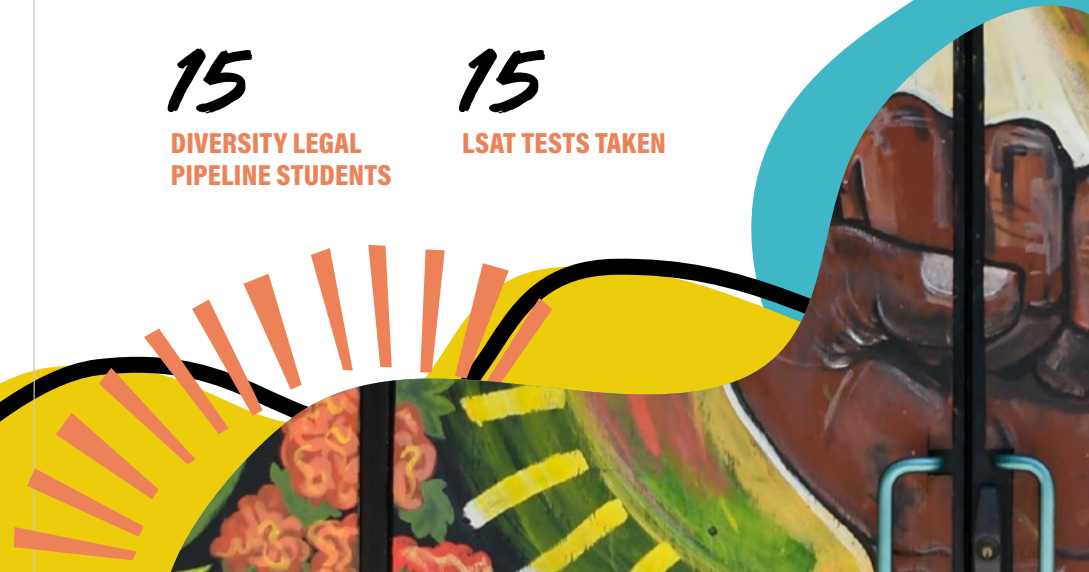
**What does your law degree mean to you?** *This degree means the world to me. Before coming to law school, I felt that my dream of becoming an attorney was such a distant goal and now that I graduated I feel a great sense of accomplishment and pride.*

**How did YLA support you in this journey?** *I joined YLA when I was 14, and the staff has supported me from my college application process all the way through my time in law school. YLA is not just a 3-year high school program, YLA is truly invested in helping students succeed by guiding first-generation students through unfamiliar territory.*

**What's something you want to tell your community about accomplishing this huge achievement?** *I want to say thank you to all of my community in Oakland. Many friends, colleagues, and mentors played a huge role in encouraging me and helping me navigate the difficulties that law school presents. Thank you to everyone who played a role in helping me reach this milestone.*

Liliana is just one example of the power of the Youth Law Academy. "Going to law school is an act of resistance if you're a person of color," says Raymundo Jacquez, Interim Co-Executive Director and Director of YLA. Systems change is long and arduous work, but with the strength of YLA we are closer to a truly just system.

<b>36</b> HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS	<b>3</b> STUDENTS ENROLLED IN LAW SCHOOL	<b>8</b> STUDENTS PLACED IN INTERNSHIPS
<b>40</b> COLLEGE STUDENTS	<b>1</b> COMPLETED LAW SCHOOL	<b>24</b> MENTORS
<b>15</b> DIVERSITY LEGAL PIPELINE STUDENTS	<b>15</b> LSAT TESTS TAKEN	





## Did You Know?

Our client services depend on class action cy pres awards to Centro Legal. This year, we sincerely thank Feinberg, Jackson, Worthman & Wasow, Hunter Pyle Law, and the Spivak Law Firm for the cy pres designations and their critical work for low-wage immigrant workers.

we reached a \$1,600,000 settlement this year that provided relief for Olivia and the other workers. The employer not only paid these wages owed, but also fixed their unjust policies that led to the class action.

**"I'm very proud of the settlement in this case... Defendants have fixed the practices I was concerned about, and have agreed to pay fair compensation to their workers,"** said Olivia.

**147**  
INDIVIDUALS SERVED

**18**  
TOTAL CASES

**54,626**  
CLASS MEMBERS REPRESENTED

**\$6,215,000**  
AWARDED IN TOTAL

# Litigation

**AFFIRMATIVE LITIGATION CASES ARE OFTEN YEARS IN THE MAKING. FOR EXAMPLE, OLIVIA CAME TO CENTRO LEGAL'S OFFICES FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2015. SHE CAME TO US TO FILE AN INDIVIDUAL WAGE CLAIM THROUGH OUR WORKERS' RIGHTS PRACTICE.**

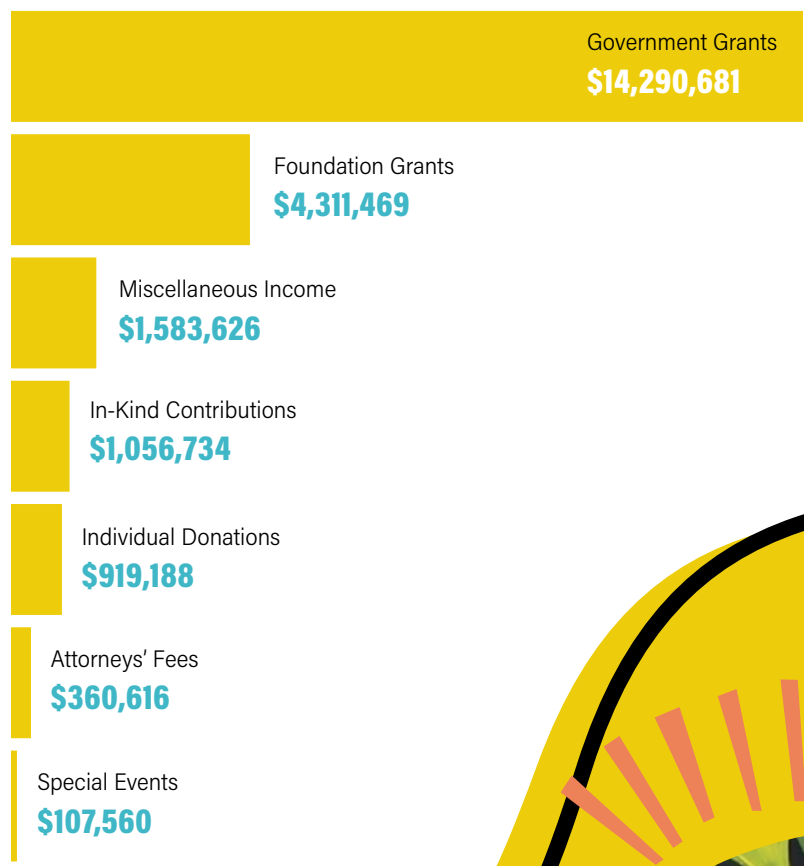
However, Olivia was not the only person at her work who was not paid all of her wages. Instead of continuing with her individual wage case, which would have likely yielded quicker results and more individual compensation, Olivia decided to also seek relief for the 1,400 other impacted workers. Olivia was the only representative for the entire class. Because of her courage and sacrifice,





# Financial Overview\*

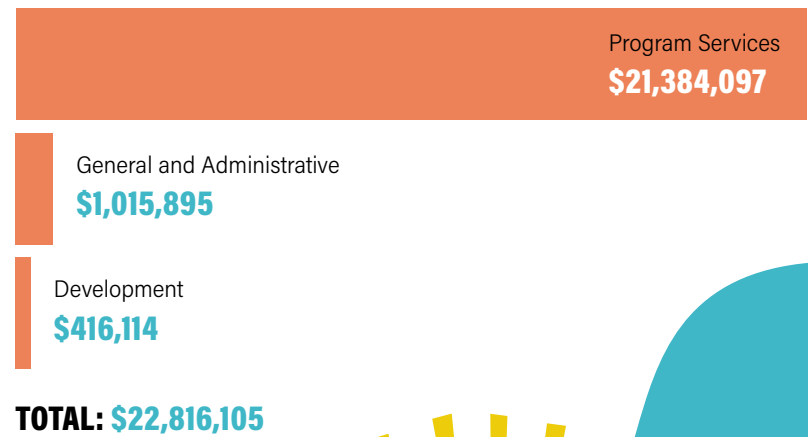
## Source of Funds



**TOTAL: \$22,620,824**

\* Unaudited

## Use of Funds



**TOTAL: \$22,816,105**



# Thank You!

Centro Legal de la Raza is grateful to our supporters and community partners for helping execute our goal of protecting and advancing the rights of low-income, immigrant, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities through bilingual representation, education, and advocacy. Thanks in part to your support, we provide culturally humble, quality services for some of the most impacted members of our community. Your generosity helps meet critical needs and challenges, while assisting our clients in accessing the justice they deserve.

**IN FISCAL YEAR 2020-2021, WE RECEIVED OVER 2,100 GIFTS FROM SUPPORTERS LIKE YOU. IN A YEAR WITH SO MUCH TURMOIL, WE CANNOT THANK EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU ENOUGH FOR YOUR SUPPORT. OUR WORK IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOUR HELP.**

## To Our Funders & Partners

**CENTRO LEGAL IS PROUD TO BE IN COMMUNITY WITH OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS.**

This difficult work requires collaboration with local partners and support from committed funders. We thank every partner organization and funder for their genuine partnership. The movement for liberation for all is not done alone — it requires all of us working together. We are humbled and grateful for your support.



**SCAN THE QR CODE AND  
SUPPORT OUR WORK TODAY!**





**CENTRO**LEGAL  
DE LA RAZA

[www.centrolegal.org](http://www.centrolegal.org)

3400 E 12th St., Oakland, CA 94601  
3022 International Blvd., 4th Floor, Oakland, CA 94601

(510) 437-1554  
[info@centrolegal.org](mailto:info@centrolegal.org)

 [@centrolegaldelaraza](https://www.facebook.com/centrolegaldelaraza)

 [@centro\\_legaldelaraza](https://www.instagram.com/centro_legaldelaraza)

 [@centrolegal](https://www.twitter.com/centrolegal)