

The Time is **NOW**





February 7, 2023, was a momentous day for Pennsylvania. Commonwealth Court declared that Pennsylvania's current public school funding system—a system that leaves the students who need the most support with the least—is unconstitutional, ruling for our clients in a lawsuit to change the system. The Court also declared that education is a fundamental right.

To see those words in black and white only deepened our resolve to keep fighting for students in low-wealth districts, who have been shortchanged by our leaders in Harrisburg for decades. We know there is much work yet to do, but what a moment to savor for the children of Pennsylvania, who should be valued more than they are, and who deserve a high quality public education.

This historic victory reminds me why I am proud to serve as chair of the Law Center's board of directors. With persistence and urgency, we help ordinary Pennsylvanians—parents, renters, voters, and workers—stand up to injustices that can seem intractable. And together with our partners and our clients, we win.

In our housing work, we continued to hold landlords accountable for violating laws that protect tenants who use Housing Choice Vouchers, commonly known as Section 8, from discrimination in their search for housing. The Law Center pursued litigation in state and federal court representing the Housing Equality Center, whose testing revealed that a large property owner refused to accept Section 8 vouchers in white neighborhoods, but accepted them in Black neighborhoods.

Their policy was illegal, and the Law Center demanded justice. The time is now to stop this blatant discrimination. All families should be able to thrive and live with dignity, in safe and healthy housing.

Gun violence is Philadelphia's most urgent crisis. In this report, you will read an interview with someone at the forefront of addressing this everyday tragedy: our client Stanley Crawford, who has dedicated his life to reducing gun violence since his son, William Aboaje Samir Crawford, was shot and killed in 2018. Mr. Crawford is one of our clients in our case challenging state firearm preemption, which blocks municipalities like Philadelphia from passing most local gun safety measures. Oral argument on our appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court is scheduled for September 13 at Philadelphia City Hall.

Our clients and the communities we work with have intersecting needs. They must navigate systems in every area of their lives laced with decades of institutional racism and marginalization of communities in poverty. Serving our clients requires a holistic approach, across practice areas and projects. In all our work, we focus on insuring that our clients can assert their fundamental social, civil, and economic rights, despite forces that seek to disenfranchise and exploit them.

The work highlighted in this report was performed under the leadership of Brenda Marrero, who became the Law Center's Executive Director in January 2021 and recently announced her departure for a new opportunity. In more than two years at the helm of the Law Center, Brenda helped greatly increase our capacity and ability to stand with the communities we serve, launched a strategic planning process focused on promoting racial justice, and more. We thank Brenda for her service and wish her well in her new position. We have every confidence that she will succeed.

We have had another impactful year. We continue to demand justice for our communities. With each issue we tackle, we know the time is now – we owe that urgency to our neighbors, our clients, our communities and our supporters. Thank you for being our partner and for believing in our work, now and always.

Molly Flynn
2023 Public Interest Law Center Board of Directors Chair
Barnes & Thornburg LLP

Cover: Stanley Crawford with a photo of his son, William Aboaje Samir Crawford. William was shot and killed on September 8, 2018. Mr. Crawford, who founded the Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia after the murder of his son, is a plaintiff in our lawsuit taking on state firearm preemption laws that block Philadelphia from passing many local gun safety measures.

15

volunteers
and interns

62

pro bono attorneys &
1 pro bono paralegal

413

individual donors



1,415

followers on our Instagram,
@publicinterestlawcenter

786

pages in a Commonwealth
Court opinion released on
February 7, 2023 that found
Pennsylvania's system for
funding public schools
unconstitutional, ruling
in favor of our clients in a
historic victory for students.

474

fatal shootings in
Philadelphia in 2022.
There were 1,788 non-
fatal shootings.

10

Philadelphia and
Pittsburgh residents
who have lost family
and friends to gun
violence sued the
Pennsylvania General
Assembly in our case
challenging state
firearm preemption
laws that block cities
from passing many
local gun safety
measures.

19.4%

more economically disadvantaged
students reach state standards
in English Language Arts in
Pennsylvania's wealthiest school
districts, compared to their
economically disadvantaged
peers in our poorest districts.

Reviewing these and other
statistics in its decision,
Commonwealth Court concluded
"that money does matter, and
economically-disadvantaged
students and historically
underperforming students can
overcome challenges if they have
access to the right resources that
wealthier districts are financially
able to provide."

60

tenant members
of Renters United
Philadelphia (RUP) with
60 tenant members,
which organizes and
educates renters to fight
for their right to quality
housing in the streets,
in the courts, and in City
Hall. The Law Center
launched RUP in 2019.

217

children under the
age of 18 were shot in
Philadelphia in 2022.

58

violations of city code since 2007
for a Southwest Philadelphia auto
body shop our clients sued for
public and private nuisance

The Public Interest Law Center uses high-impact legal strategies to advance the civil, social, and economic rights of communities in the Philadelphia region facing discrimination, inequality, and poverty. We use litigation, community education, advocacy, and organizing to secure access to fundamental resources and services.

A Historic Victory for Students!



✦ *Pennsylvania's School Funding System Declared Unconstitutional*

February 7, 2023, was a historic day for Pennsylvania's children, and a before-and-after moment for public schools. Commonwealth Court President Judge Renée Cohn Jubelirer, in a 786-page decision, ruled that Pennsylvania's school funding system is unconstitutional and must be reformed.

Our clients, from small towns and cities in every corner of the state, stood up for years to make it clear that Pennsylvania's two-tiered public school funding system, divided by wealth, cannot continue.

In Pennsylvania, a school district's local wealth has determined which fourth graders get the help they need in reading, which middle school students have safe buildings, and which teenagers can prepare for college. Students of color are concentrated in the lowest-wealth school districts, which are the most deeply underfunded. Pennsylvania has some of the nation's largest disparities in educational resources and opportunities between poor students and their peers, and between students of color and their white peers.

With our co-counsel from Education Law Center - PA and O'Melveny, we proved that the students who need the most have the least, because the state legislature shortchanges low-wealth communities. Now, it's time to change that.



◀ Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg and Michael Churchill celebrating in the office after receiving the decision.



ORDER

NOW, February 7, 2023, following trial in this matter, Petitioners' Petition for Review is **GRANTED**. The Court **DECLARES** as follows:

1. The Education Clause, article III, section 14 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, requires that every student receive a meaningful opportunity to succeed academically, socially, and civically, which requires that all students have access to a comprehensive, effective, and contemporary system of public education;
2. Respondents have not fulfilled their obligations to all children under the Education Clause in violation of the rights of Petitioners;
3. Education is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Pennsylvania Constitution to all school-age children residing in the Commonwealth;
4. Article III, section 32 of the Pennsylvania Constitution imposes upon Respondents an obligation to provide a system of public education that does not discriminate against students based on the level of income and value of taxable property in their school districts;
5. Students who reside in school districts with low property values and incomes are deprived of the same opportunities and resources as students who reside in school districts with high property values and incomes;
6. The disparity among school districts with high property values and incomes and school districts with low property values and incomes is not justified by any compelling government interest nor is it rationally related to any legitimate government objective; and
7. As a result of these disparities, Petitioners and students attending low-wealth districts are being deprived of equal protection of law.¹

Renee Cohn Jubelirer
RENÉE COHN JUBELIRER, President Judge

Fourth grade students
in the William Penn
School District in 2017



"All witnesses agree that every child can learn. It is now the obligation of the Legislature, Executive Branch, and educators, to make the constitutional promise a reality in this Commonwealth."

– PA COMMONWEALTH COURT'S DECISION, PAGE 778



Make the Constitutional Promise a Reality

✦ *Next Steps for Public School Funding*

In its landmark decision, the Commonwealth Court recognized what parents, teachers, and students have known for decades: Our system of funding public schools leaves hundreds of thousands of students in low-wealth communities without the comprehensive, contemporary and effective public education guaranteed by our state constitution. And this must change. Now, all eyes are on our elected leaders in Harrisburg as they work to meet their constitutional duty to Pennsylvania students.

THE TIME IS NOW

The court's ruling was unequivocal: we must come together to build the adequate and equitable system of public education to which all Pennsylvania children are constitutionally entitled. This will require determining how much funding each school district needs to give their students a meaningful opportunity to succeed civically, academically and socially – enough to provide resources like sufficient teachers and counselors, safe buildings, support for students with disabilities, quality pre-K, up-to-date curriculum, and much more. And it will require a commitment to fund these resources in short order, and a plan to ensure that this funding is provided year after year.

One thing is clear: there are no shortcuts. One estimate, based on targets written in state law, shows that our public schools need at least \$4.6 billion to reach adequate funding—without considering special education or facilities costs. Significant increases in state funding for low-wealth public schools over several years will be required to close these gaps, which have built for generations.

In his first budget address, Governor Josh Shapiro called the Commonwealth Court's decision “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to do right by our kids” and declared that “while theoretically there's still time left to file an appeal, all indications are that Judge Jubelirer's ruling will stand. And that means we are all acknowledging that the Court has ordered us to come to the table and come up with a better system, one that passes constitutional muster.”



Senior attorney Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg speaking at a Philadelphia rally on March 15, 2022, celebrating the conclusion of trial.

We look forward to working with the governor to find a comprehensive solution that ensures every child has access to a thorough and efficient public education, including pushing for a 2023-24 state budget that includes a significant down payment toward a constitutionally compliant system and additional support for the commonwealth's most deeply underfunded districts.

DAILY TIMES

Philly-area urban district school superintendents call for charter reform, decry unfunded mandates



On March 28, 2023, superintendents from 29 urban school districts held simultaneous press conferences in locations across the commonwealth calling for a school funding system that meets their students' needs.

At press time, budget negotiations in the Pennsylvania General Assembly were ongoing.

Meanwhile, on May 10, 2023, the Basic Education Funding Commission—a bipartisan panel of legislators and Pennsylvania Department of Education officials—reconvened for the first time since 2015. And as Commission Chair Rep. Mike Sturla made clear, this commission must craft a new funding system that addresses the court's decision. "This is the time to get it right, not just because it is our constitutional charge—something we're sworn to uphold—but because we cannot continue to fail future generations of Pennsylvanians," he said. "No doubt, if we fail again, the court will do our job for us."

We expect the commission to hold hearings throughout the summer, and to present its recommendation to the state legislature and the governor by November. We will be watching closely to ensure that the commission's recommendation, and our elected leaders' response, truly addresses the injustice of our current two-tiered school funding status quo.

At press time, Pennsylvania Senate President Pro Tempore Kim Ward and House Minority Leader Bryan Cutler have not yet announced whether they plan to appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

PENNSYLVANIANS STAND UP FOR FAIR SCHOOL FUNDING

Across the commonwealth, educators, parents, students and advocates have seized the moment, coming together following this historic decision to celebrate and demand real action to end an unjust status quo.

On April 26, 2023, we joined more than 100 parents, teachers, students and advocates in the State Capitol with PA Schools Work and Education Voters PA.



A Philadelphia Inquirer op-ed from three current students from William Penn School District and the School District of Philadelphia.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

- ✳ Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about the need for adequate state funding for public schools
- ✳ [Email and call your Pennsylvania legislators](#) and make sure they support building an adequate, equitable and constitutional public school funding system.
- ✳ Contact Dena Driscoll at ddriscoll@pubintl.org if you are interested in organizing an informative presentation on the case and its impact for your organization.

For more information, visit FundOurSchoolsPA.org

Clearing the Roadblocks

* *Challenging State Firearm Preemption at the Pennsylvania Supreme Court*

Gun violence is Philadelphia's most urgent crisis. In 2022, more than 2,200 people were shot in our city, including 217 children. There were 474 firearm homicides—a staggering rate that has remained steady for the past three years.

This violence is not felt equally. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for Black men and youth between ages 15 and 34 in Philadelphia, and shootings are concentrated in communities that have faced decades of disinvestment and segregation. Residents of Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods are more than 25 times more likely to be killed by gun violence than their neighbors in wealthier sections of the city.

Residents are demanding action from their local leaders—and every gun safety measure should be on the table to address this public health and civil rights crisis. Unfortunately, in Pennsylvania, that's not the case.

Pennsylvania's state firearm preemption laws block cities from enacting most local gun safety measures. At the same time, legislative leaders in Harrisburg have spent decades refusing to take statewide action. On May 22, 2023, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives narrowly passed two statewide gun safety bills for the

first time in years—but as of press time they appear to be stalled in the State Senate.

This status quo perpetuated by the General Assembly and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania violates the state constitutional right to life and liberty for Pennsylvanians who face the threat of gun violence every day. So we took the state to court, seeking to clear a path for Philadelphia to enforce local gun safety ordinances.

Together with the City of Philadelphia, we filed a lawsuit against the Commonwealth in October 2020. Our clients include residents of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh who have lost family members to gun violence and CeaseFirePA. We are joined by pro bono co-counsel from Hogan Lovells.

On May 26, 2022, the Commonwealth Court dismissed our case in a fractured decision, with three judges favoring dismissal and two dissenting. One of the three judges noted in a concurring opinion that

she felt constrained to uphold firearm preemption laws under precedent, but wrote that local conditions may justify stricter gun safety measures. The judge approvingly quoted a prior court dissent stating that it is not “consistent with simple humanity to deny basic safety regulations to citizens who desperately need them.”

We have appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, asking the Court to reverse the Commonwealth Court's decision and to send the case back to Commonwealth Court for trial. Oral argument is scheduled for September 13 at Philadelphia City Hall.

There are other cases going before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court that deal with local gun safety regulations. These cases include our lawsuit in support of Philadelphia's proposed ordinance that would require gun owners to report lost and stolen guns within 24 hours, a measure that research shows curbs handgun trafficking by closing a loophole often used by straw purchasers to avoid accountability.

“For legislative leaders in Harrisburg to step in and say that a whole category of local solutions — most regulations on guns — are absolutely off the table, thus hamstringing local leaders at the behest of gun industry lobbyists, is unconscionable. And to deny Pennsylvanians who experience gun violence both the power to enact overwhelmingly popular local solutions and a fair hearing in the state capitol is to deny their most basic rights as citizens in a democracy.”

– SENIOR ATTORNEY BEN GEFFEN AND LEGAL DIRECTOR MIMI MCKENZIE, IN AN OCTOBER 14, 2022 PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER OP-ED, “PHILLY NEEDS TO ENACT ITS OWN GUN LAWS. WE SUED HARRISBURG TO LET THAT HAPPEN.”



THE IMPACT OF LOCAL GUN SAFETY LAWS

The data from states and cities across the country is clear: Laws that help keep guns off the streets reduce gun violence and save lives. These are a few of the local measures that firearm preemption has blocked in Pennsylvania.

PERMIT-TO-PURCHASE REQUIREMENTS

These measures would require a license to purchase a handgun, following an application and background check with a law enforcement licensing agent.

↓ **11%** reduction in firearm homicide in large urban counties following permit-to-purchase laws.

Source: Cassandra K. Crifasi et al., *Association between Firearm Laws and Homicide in Urban Counties*, 95 J. Urb. Health 383, 385 (2018)

↑ **25%** increase in firearm homicide in Missouri following the repeal of the state's permit-to-purchase law.

Source: Daniel W. Webster et al., *Effects of the Repeal of Missouri's Handgun Purchaser Licensing Law on Homicides*, 91 J. Urb. Health 293–302 (2014)

✗ Philadelphia passed a permit-to-purchase law in 2007—and it was blocked by state firearm preemption.

EXTREME RISK PROTECTION ORDERS (ERPO)

These laws allow family members, household members, or law enforcement to petition courts to temporarily restrict a person's access to guns when they may be a threat to themselves or others.

↓ **13.7%** reduction in firearm suicide rates in Connecticut.

Source: Aaron J. Kivisto and Peter Lee Phalen, *Effects of Risk-based Firearm Seizure Laws in Connecticut and Indiana on Suicide Rates, 1981–2015*, 69 Psychiatric Services 855–862 (2018)

✗ A Pittsburgh ERPO law, passed following the 2018 Tree of Life Synagogue mass shooting, was blocked by courts interpreting state firearm preemption laws.

ONE-GUN-PER-MONTH LIMITS

Pennsylvania currently has no statewide limits on the number of firearms that can be purchased within a certain period, and municipalities are blocked from passing their own limits.

64% Handguns purchased in a bulk sale are 64% more likely to be used in crimes than handguns purchased individually.

Source: Christopher S. Koper, *Crime Gun Risk Factors: Buyer, Seller, Firearm, and Transaction Characteristics Associated with Gun Trafficking and Criminal Gun Use*, Report to the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice (2007)

This work is supported by the Richard Berkman & Toni Seidl Health Care Justice Project.

“When you take a life, it’s as if you killed humanity”

★ *An Interview with Our Client Stanley Crawford*

On September 8, 2018, Stanley Crawford’s son, William Aboaje Samir Crawford, was shot and killed. He had five children. Since then, Mr. Crawford has dedicated his life to preventing gun violence. In 2020, he joined our lawsuit with the City of Philadelphia that seeks to overturn Pennsylvania’s firearm preemption laws, which block Philadelphia and other cities from passing many local gun safety measures.



We sat down with Mr. Crawford in his office at the Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia to discuss the impact of gun violence on his family, his work to prevent future shootings, and why he joined the case. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Can you tell us about what kind of work your organization, the Black Male Community Council, does, and the kind of impact it has on preventing gun violence?

The Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia came into existence as a result of the murder of my son, William Aboaje Samir Crawford, who was murdered on September 8th, 2018. We formed four basic committees. One committee was the mediation committee, because we understood that some of these brothers had problems with each

other, and need adults to mediate their problems before it comes to a violent situation. We created what we call the cleanup committee, and the security committee, where we added security rounds at transportation corridors and schools. Then we have the education committee, where we create a structure where we can communicate and mentor. We have a plethora of collaborations going on with different entrepreneurs and social community programs, such as the victims’ impact program, the young women’s mentoring program, and the land care program.

We also have the family of unsolved murders project. In Philadelphia, the clearance rate for shootings and homicides is very low. You look at people who had their loved ones murdered, and there’s no closure, because no one has been charged or arrested for the murders.

Are there any particular examples of people you’ve helped in the last five years that stand out?

This is a classic story. Judge Sawyer sent us a brother by the name of Jeffery. He had an ankle bracelet, open cases, five children—two sets of twins—and a wife. He’s in a parallel situation [to my son]. We happen to have a person who was a certification trainer in medical sterilization. Jeffery came to us and he stuck to it. All the judicial problems went away. He’s an exemplary person in that in that program. His ankle bracelet is off, and he’s home to be a father with his five children, and a husband to his wife and a positive individual in the community. Thus far, he hasn’t been back in the judicial system, since he came in contact with us.

You started this organization after your son William was murdered. Could you tell me a little bit about your son?

He wasn't a church boy or a college student; he was street. But if he was your friend, you had a friend. If he didn't like you, you didn't have to worry about him bothering you. He was a loving and caring father to his children. And me and him, we had a father and son love relationship. I was a single parent with William. From three years old all the way up, it was just me and him. He loved me and I loved him. He'd call me, and when he got in trouble, he knew dad would be there.

William was the type of person who would do anything for you. He was very loyal. He was locked up a couple of times. But I tell people: no matter what, nobody had a right to kill my son.

This may be impossible to describe, but I feel like I should ask it just to convey what your experience was like. How did that day feel when you lost your son?

It was a twilight zone. It was a Saturday morning. My son was waiting for my daughter, his sister, to open up the door. They were waiting to ambush my son. Before she could get to the door they shot him once in the right jaw, once in the temple, and once in the chest. I saw this when I was at the hospital.

Me and my other son were driving in the vicinity when my daughter called. By the time we get there, they had already picked him up and took him to the hospital. When we get to the hospital, the word gets out, and family members from all over converged to the hospital emergency room. For some reason, in my spirit, I knew that the inevitable had occurred.

When the doctor came and said that he had passed, that's when the wailing went all over the place. His children, his mother, everybody—grandmother, uncles, aunts—wailing, as you can imagine. I didn't have a chance to wail, because I had to console some of my grandbabies. That day was a very twilight zone type day for me. And that's the best way I can explain it.

How does your son's death still impact your family?

This is another reason why I do what I do. Once a murder happens, once you put that murdered person in the ground, people seem to think that it's all over with. One murder might affect a minimum of 100 people. And that's something that you just can't make magically go away.

My son's picture is in the vestibule when you come in. Sometimes I can look at it; sometimes I can't. I believe this work that I'm doing is my catharsis.

Why did you decide to join this lawsuit taking on firearm preemption laws? And why do you think it's important for the city to be able to make its own gun laws to curb gun violence?

Number one is my humanity. My humanity is connected with those individuals that have had a loved one murdered. My humanity is with those who are going to be a part of this club that nobody wants to be in. Anything that we can do as human beings to save another human being's life, it should be on the table. Philadelphia getting its own gun laws is just one piece of the puzzle. If you're serious about trying to come up with some method of stopping this murder and mayhem, you can't cherry pick, and not put something on the table that might work or add to the bigger purpose.

If you're in the middle of Pennsylvania, your condition, your environment is different than being in the city of Philadelphia, the city of Pittsburgh, the city of Harrisburg. If middle Pennsylvania is having a problem that's different than Philadelphia, and they want to implement something to help solve that problem, why should Philadelphia have the right to tell them not to try something, because their situation is different than the city? It works both ways.

For those of us who have some God consciousness, I can't go to the masjid and confess to believing in the creator and not be a positive participant in its creation. There's a saying in al-Islam that when you save a life, it's as if you save humanity, and when you take a life, it's as if you killed humanity. There's another saying: if you see a wrong, change it with your hands. If you can't change it with your hands, speak out against it. And if you can't do either one of them, dislike it in your heart, and that's the weakest of faith.

I don't care if you're in rural Pennsylvania, I don't care if you in urban Pennsylvania, where does your humanity touch the two and bring the two together?

"Anything that we can do as human beings to save another human being's life, it should be on the table."

The Road to Fairer Districts

✦ *Taking on Prison Gerrymandering*

For decades, prison gerrymandering warped representation in Harrisburg, giving an unfair population boost to state legislative districts where prisons are located by counting incarcerated individuals in their cells, rather than their hometowns. In Pennsylvania, districts that host state prisons are predominately rural and white, while prisoners are disproportionately Black, Latino, and from urban communities.

“It was always a distortion to treat them as if they were residents of places where they didn’t actually have any ties, wouldn’t remain once released, couldn’t vote, and where typically the local elected officials did not consider them constituents,” said our senior attorney Ben Geffen.

In 2022, Pennsylvania took a major step forward: for the first time, legislative district maps were drawn using population data that counted most prisoners in their hometowns, resulting in maps that more fairly represented communities across the state.

The Law Center fought for this change for years—advocating for better data, educating lawmakers, and standing up for the fair maps in court. Explore this timeline of our work taking on prison gerrymandering, with the two attorneys who persisted at every turn: legal director Mimi McKenzie and senior attorney Ben Geffen.



Mimi McKenzie



Ben Geffen

2016

We advocated that the United States Census Bureau should change its residency rules for people who are incarcerated and count people in prisons and jails as residents of their hometowns rather than their cells.

Though the Census Bureau did not change these rules for the 2020 Census, we advocated for Pennsylvania to collect the necessary residency data on the state level.

“Part of the challenge was that the state needed to collect home-address data for all state prisoners in advance of the 2020 Census in order to make this change happen. Even if we had buy-in from the map makers, we had to be sure we had all the data for the individuals who are incarcerated to make those adjustments in the maps.” – Mimi McKenzie

“Starting in 2018, we were advocating to anyone whose ear we could bend in Harrisburg that it was important to collect this type of information. We ultimately succeeded in pushing the Wolf Administration to direct the Department of Corrections to compile up-to-date home address information for everyone in the state prison system.” – Ben Geffen

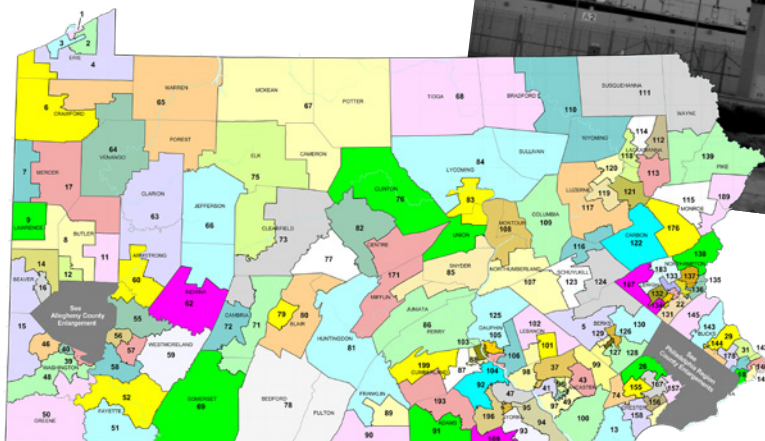
August 24, 2021

By a 3-2 vote, the Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC)—the state panel authorized under the Pennsylvania Constitution to draw state legislative district lines—voted to count state prisoners at their home addresses for the first time. For several years before the 2021 legislative reapportionment, we advocated to public officials and in the media that addressing prison gerrymandering should be a top priority.

“Today’s decision was not only the right thing to do, but is necessary to abide by the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ as laid out in the Pennsylvania Constitution,”

we wrote in a statement following the LRC’s decision.

The LRC used this reapportionment data to draw Pennsylvania’s state house and senate district maps ahead of the 2022 primary and general election. Then-State House Majority Leader Kerry Benninghoff promptly challenged these maps in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.



▲ Pennsylvania’s state house districts.

March 11, 2022

We file an amicus brief with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court defending the legislative maps, representing formerly incarcerated Pennsylvania voters and the NAACP Pennsylvania State Conference. We were joined by co-counsel from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Hogan Lovells.

“[Our clients] have seen firsthand how many formerly incarcerated people in Black and Latino communities, even after regaining the right to vote and returning home, are discouraged from participating in democracy because they do not believe their communities are fairly represented,” Ben Geffen said in a statement.

March 16, 2022

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court upholds the LRC’s state house and senate redistricting plans, preserving a significant step towards ending prison gerrymandering.

“Some people said it was not a practical possibility, some people said it was not a legal possibility, and now it’s a reality, and that’s really important and cause for celebration,” said Ben Geffen.



Pa. Supreme Court rejects legal challenges to state’s new legislative maps

Pennsylvania’s highest court has affirmed the state’s new legislative district maps and rejected final legal challenges to them.

By Kate Huangpu, Spotlight PA - March 16, 2022



The Legislative Reapportionment Commission public released the final state House and Senate maps in early February.

What’s next?

The new redistricting plan put in place by the LRC isn’t perfect. Incarcerated Pennsylvanians serving any sentence longer than 10 years are still counted as residents of their cells, not their hometowns. And our congressional district map still uses unadjusted prisoner data—though the shifts in population are less consequential in much larger federal districts.

“But, it was an incredible breakthrough to get this first hurdle lifted, which is counting most prisoners in their home communities,” said Mimi McKenzie.

We will work to defend and strengthen last year’s significant progress towards ending prison gerrymandering.

“Not only do you have to fight for the next thing, but you also have to sometimes fight for what you already accomplished. It’s possible that the Legislative Reapportionment Commission 10 years from now might decide to do it differently and go back to counting individuals where they are incarcerated. Prison gerrymandering violates the Pennsylvania Constitution. We will be prepared to litigate,” said Mimi McKenzie.

This work is supported by the Jeffrey Golan & Frances Vilella-Vélez Voting Justice Project

PROTECTING PHILADELPHIA'S GREEN SPACES

✦ More than 40,000 plots of land are currently lying vacant across Philadelphia. In a city where one in five residents struggles with food insecurity and malnutrition, community gardens established on these vacant plots provide reliable sources of healthy food and income while revitalizing neighborhoods, reducing gun violence, improving physical and mental health, and cooling dangerously high summer temperatures. Over 65 percent of these gardens are located in low-income communities of color, offering food justice and greater autonomy to nearby residents.

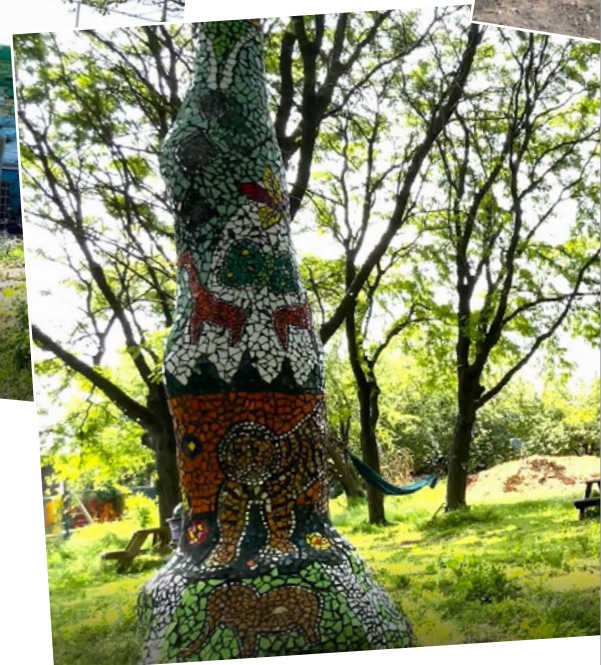
While many of these gardens have existed for decades, residents and organizations often do not have security over the land they care for. As many as one in three active gardens in the City are in areas with frequent new construction, compounding this instability. The Law Center's Garden Justice Legal Initiative provides education, advocacy, and legal support for Philadelphians seeking pathways to maintain community control of the city's green spaces and protect garden land from development.

CHALLENGING OLD BARRIERS TO LAND OWNERSHIP...

Hundreds of vacant properties in Philadelphia have burdensome third-party debt following a 1997 sale of property tax debt to U.S. Bank. The Land Bank is unable to acquire vacant properties with third party liens making it impossible to transfer the parcels to the gardeners who have maintained them for years (or decades) in the nominal owner's absence. In recent years, the Law Center has led a partnership of stakeholders to propose solutions that will help restore community land security for these lots.

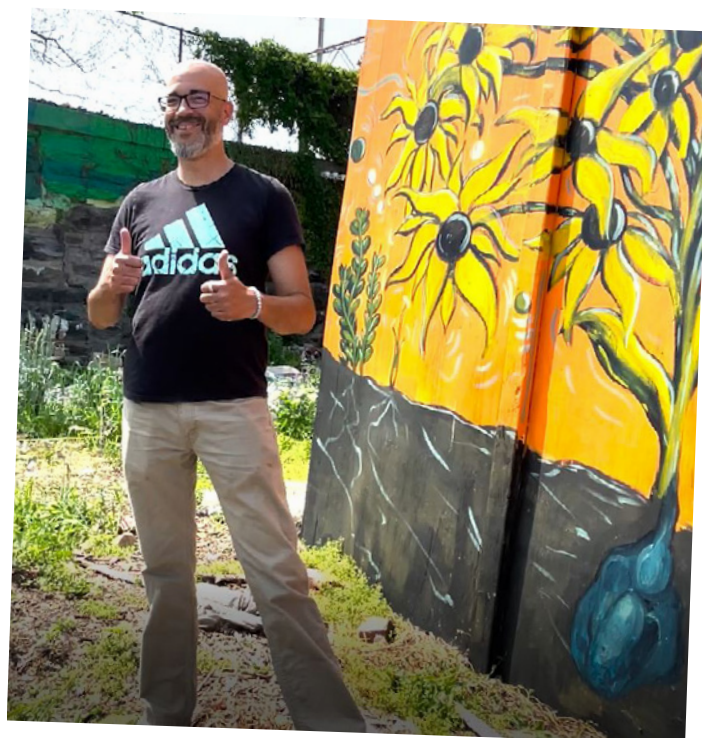


Life Do Grow urban farm and neighborhood creative commons in North Central Philadelphia, stewarded by Urban Creators



In June 2023, our work culminated in a major victory for the preservation of green space in Philadelphia. In an initiative led by Councilmember Kendra Brooks, the City will acquire back the U.S Bank liens on 88 community garden parcels across the City, protecting them from the threat of sheriff sale. With this major barrier finally removed, we look forward to working with the Land Bank, the Administration and City Council to finish the job by transferring title for these parcels to the longtime garden stewards who have cared for the land.

In addition to the barriers presented by U.S. Bank liens, Philadelphia's adverse possession laws present another obstacle for gardeners who care for privately owned vacant land abandoned by its original owners. Under the current law, a garden plot can be secured for those who care for the land through adverse possession after 21 years of continuous use – a time period that is often too burdensome for community members to establish in court. Working with state Senator Vincent Hughes, we drafted legislation currently before the General Assembly that would lower the time requirement to 10 years and broaden access to legally securing garden land in Philadelphia.



▲ Josh Warner of Urban Creators, helping lead the efforts to reform the Land Bank's 30-year mortgage policy.



◀ Staff attorney Sari Bernstein speaking at a June 20, 2023 press conference announcing the City's planned acquisition of U.S. Bank liens



...AND CONFRONTING NEW ONES

The Philadelphia Land Bank and other City agencies, which own much of the land that houses community gardens across the city, provides pathways for non-profit gardens and organizations to achieve ownership of their green spaces.

In response, the Law Center helped organize a campaign to advocate for better policy surrounding the acquisition of vacant lots. In March 2023, we led a coalition of 30 community gardens, nonprofits, and allies to co-author a letter and provide testimony urging the Land Bank to reconsider the mortgage requirement and adopt alternative practices to ensure that garden land is used productively while protecting Philadelphia's most vulnerable communities from predatory development and gentrification.

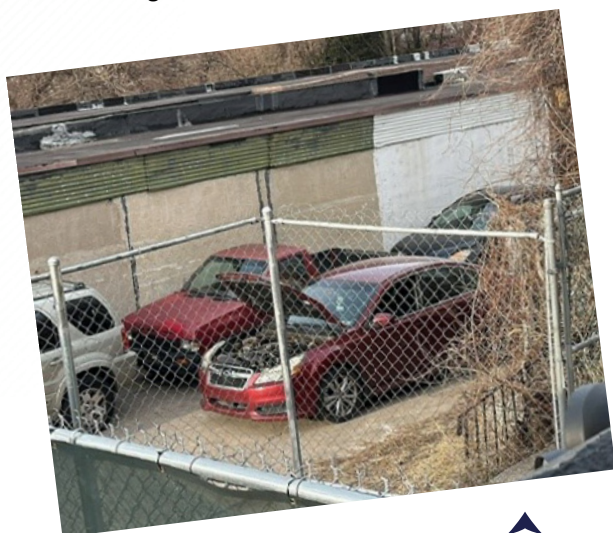
Our organizing work is supported by the Lea & Claude Knight Community Organizing Initiative

STANDING UP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

✦ *Our clients sue a nuisance auto body shop and property owners operating behind their homes and demand action*

In Southwest Philadelphia, working class Black neighborhoods have spent decades living with the fallout of the unchecked proliferation of auto body shops and scrapyards. A 2019 WHYY investigation found that the City granted zoning variances to more than 100 auto related businesses in this community to operate on lots that are not intended for industrial use. Dozens of them share blocks with homes and schools.

The rear of Ramona and Rodney Bell's and Marceline Dix's homes share an alley with a sprawling auto body business in the middle of their dense Southwest Philadelphia residential neighborhood. For years, operations at the property have disrupted their daily lives and the lives of their neighbors.



White's Autobody unlawfully deposits disabled cars, double-parks cars, performs auto bodywork and block the shared alleyway



Trash and debris in the shared alleyway

The shop litters their neighborhood, their shared alley, and even their backyards with junked cars, trash, tires, oilcans and debris. Noxious fumes and noise routinely intrude into their homes. Illegally dumped parked cars line the surrounding streets and block shared access in the alley.

Occasionally, city inspections have brought temporary relief—these particular property owners have been cited for 58 code violations since 2007—but disruptive, unsafe, and illegal practices inevitably resume.

For too long, ineffective City enforcement has left residents of Southwest Philadelphia with little recourse to address pervasive, serious disruptions to their quality of life caused by nuisance auto body shops that violate city code and their business licenses. Our clients are going to court because this must change.



On April 26, 2023, the Bells and Ms. Dix, represented by the Law Center, sued the property owners and White's Autobody in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, alleging that the shop has created a private and public nuisance and trespassed on their property. They are seeking an injunction demanding that the defendants cease their nuisance behavior and abide by all local laws and regulations under their business license. We are joined by pro bono co-counsel from Hausfeld LLP.

The Defendants' conduct is a pervasive interference in our clients' lives. For example, even with the windows closed, Ms. Dix can smell the fumes from spray painting—which is unlawful under White's business license—in her home. The smell exacerbates her son's asthma. She does not spend much time in her own backyard, and does not garden, though she would like to, because she worries that the exposure to toxic chemicals will harm her and her children's health. She takes her kids outside the neighborhood to play.

"This lawsuit is a last resort: we've spoken with the auto body shop employees and property owners, and with the City, countless times," Ms. Dix said. **"I brought this case because it is unacceptable for businesses to endanger my children's health by flouting the law."**

As we have since 2021, we continue to learn more about this persistent issue from residents of Southwest Philadelphia, distributing surveys and holding community meetings.

The Bells and Ms. Dix live near the historic Mt. Moriah Cemetery and Arboretum.



DO YOU NEIGHBOR AN AUTO BODY SHOP OR SCRAPYARD, OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?

Scan the QR code to take our online survey and learn more, or visit pubintlaw.org/auto-body-shops/



A Google Maps "Street View" image showing White's Autobody illegally storing inoperable cars in their shared alley and on the street.

"Fundamentally, this case is about a kind of neighboring property—in this case, an auto body business or businesses—that takes [away] our clients' ability to be in their backyard, to open their windows, to live in an area that is clean of debris and trash."

— STAFF ATTORNEY SARI BERNSTEIN, AS REPORTED BY THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER ON APRIL 28, 2023



TAKING ON SOURCE OF INCOME DISCRIMINATION

✦ In Philadelphia, renters who use Housing Choice Vouchers (a.k.a “Section 8”), the vast majority of whom are Black, face pervasive discrimination in their search for rental housing. The widespread refusal to accept vouchers deepens racial segregation and the concentration of poverty in Philadelphia.

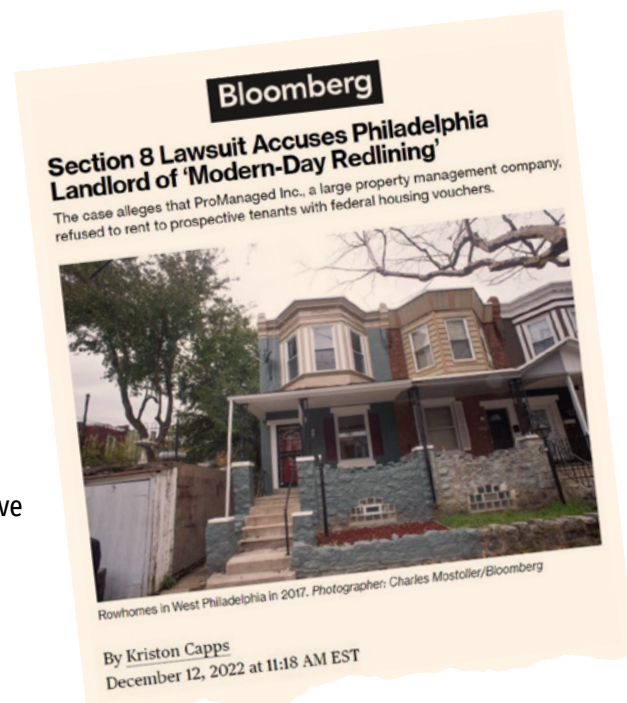
A blanket policy of refusing to rent to tenants with housing subsidies is illegal in Philadelphia under the Fair Practices Ordinance. Since 2019, we have represented tenants who face steep barriers to obtaining safe and healthy housing simply because of how they pay rent. We are advocating for more effective enforcement of federal, state and local fair housing laws.

WE SUED A LARGE PHILADELPHIA LANDLORD FOR RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST HOUSING VOUCHER HOLDERS, REACHING AN AMICABLE SETTLEMENT

In Philadelphia, 84 percent of voucher holders are Black, compared to 44 percent of renters in the city as a whole. Meanwhile, only 9 percent of voucher holders are white, compared to 39 percent of renters in the city as a whole.

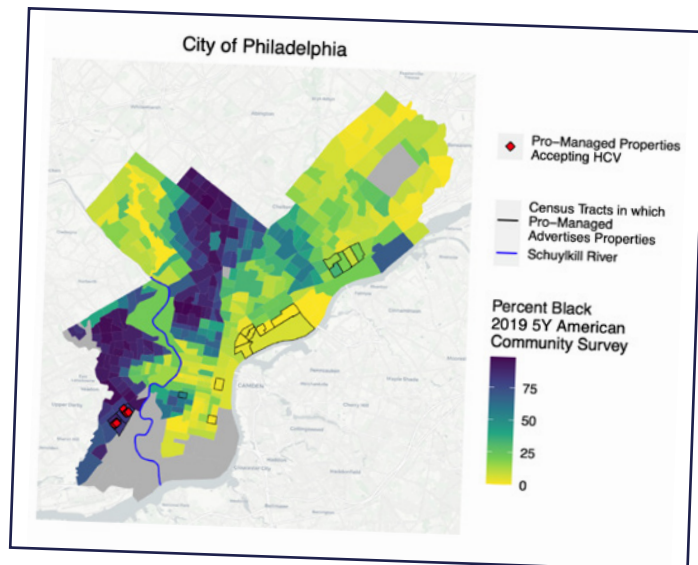
Over six months in 2021, fair housing testers from the Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania (HEC) posed as prospective renters, asking about available properties in white and integrated neighborhoods in Northeast Philadelphia. The properties were listed by Pro-Managed Inc.—a Philadelphia landlord and property management company with at least 77 properties—and each listing advertised they would not accept vouchers, in violation of Philadelphia law. Each time, testers who said they used rental assistance were either denied or ignored. All of the units were affordable using the tester’s housing choice voucher.

At the same time, Pro-Managed advertised that Section 8 vouchers would be accepted in a small number of available units—all located in vast-majority Black neighborhoods.



**SCAN THIS QR CODE TO
READ OUR FULL JOINT
STATEMENT FOLLOWING
THE SETTLEMENT OF
OUR CASE.**

On December 8, 2022, we represented HEC in a federal lawsuit against Pro-Managed and related individuals and entities, claiming that its treatment of Housing Choice Voucher holders violates the Fair Housing Act's ban on disparate treatment based on race and has a disproportionate discriminatory impact on Black renters. We were joined by pro bono co-counsel from Dechert LLP.



This map shows Philadelphia's non-Hispanic Black population by census tract. Each outlined census tract contains Pro-Managed properties. The red diamonds represent properties in which Pro-Managed advertised that it accepts Housing Choice Vouchers.

In Philadelphia, housing choice voucher renters are predominantly located in low-income, racially concentrated neighborhoods. 43 percent of voucher holders live in neighborhoods that are over 80 percent Black, while only 1 percent live in neighborhoods that are 80 percent white.

Most Philadelphia voucher holders—70 percent—earn less than \$20,000 per year and have a deeply limited ability to afford housing without a subsidy, facing a substantial risk of homelessness.

Almost immediately after HEC filed its charge and complaint, the parties reached a settlement agreement to address the concerns raised by HEC. Pro-Managed LLC, its owners, and related entities agreed to advertise that they accept and encourage the use of Housing Choice Vouchers at all of their rental portfolio properties. Pro-Managed also agreed to adopt written policies regarding compliance with applicable federal and local fair housing laws and to receive training from HEC.

“The widespread barriers and bias faced by Housing Choice Voucher holders deepens Philadelphia’s affordable housing crisis,” said staff attorney Sari Bernstein. **“Pro-Managed should be commended for taking meaningful and prompt action to comply with the letter and spirit of local and federal fair housing laws, and for providing greater opportunities for Philadelphia renters who receive housing assistance.”**

OUR CLIENTS SHARE CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY

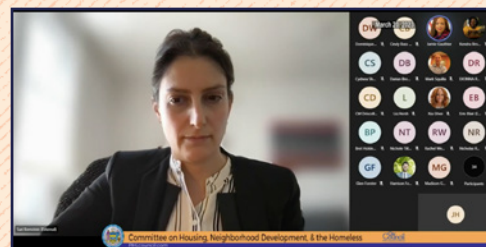
In a March 20, 2023 hearing before the Philadelphia City Council Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless called by Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, our clients shared testimony on the impact of widespread source of income discrimination.



From left to right: Councilmember Jamie Gauthier, our client David Smith, and Law Center Independence Foundation attorney fellow Madison Gray.

“Being told ‘no’ again and again was devastating for me and my family. It felt like landlords assumed I was a lazy, no-good person just because I had a housing voucher.”

– OUR CLIENT DAVID SMITH



“Voucher holders are turned away from rental opportunities solely because of their voucher status so often, and so flagrantly, that they are reasonably shocked to learn that this behavior is a violation of the law.”

– LAW CENTER STAFF ATTORNEY SARI BERNSTEIN

When Renters Unite, Renters Win!

★ For nearly four years, Renters United / Inquilinxs en la Lucha Philadelphia (RUP), launched by the Law Center in 2019, has brought together renters citywide who share a large landlord, building or neighborhood to stand up for quality, healthy, and affordable housing. Through organizing, education and community lawyering, RUP members have become a force to be reckoned with, addressing their own housing challenges head-on and advocating for positive changes for renters across the city.

RENTERS UNITED PHILADELPHIA FIGHTS FOR QUALITY HOUSING...



➤ RUP's organizing committee. Members of the organizing committee plan campaigns, lead actions like call-in campaigns, and make organizational decisions.

IN THE STREETS...

The holiday season reminds us of the vital importance of having a home with safety and dignity, one where we can gather together with friends and family. But too many renters in Philadelphia are denied the homes they deserve, faced with intolerable disrepair and neglect, landlords who refuse to maintain their properties, and City officials that are too often unable to enforce laws that promise safe and healthy housing.



Members and supporters of RUP at the December 17 "Fix our Homes for the Holidays" action.



On December 17, 2022, RUP members stood up to landlords and City of Philadelphia officials at a rally at the Frankford home of a RUP member. Tenants demanded repairs for longstanding issues from their landlords, City investment in programs to protect tenants and prevent displacement, and proactive enforcement of housing code laws from the City of Philadelphia to stop letting landlords off the hook. 6ABC reported on the action.

Living in communities that have borne the brunt of disinvestment and exploitation for decades, RUP members stand together not just to demand better for their families, but to fight for changes to policy and practices that will benefit renters across Philadelphia.



A RUP Renters' Rights Clinic

Todd Abney and Ariel Morales in April, after delivering a request for a meeting to the Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections.



...IN THE COURTS,

RUP holds Renters' Rights Clinics monthly in Frankford, where renters can learn more about their legal rights, share their knowledge and experiences with other renters, and participate in a political education presentation. Renters can also meet with a Law Center attorney or law student for a pro bono consultation.

Through these clinics, Facebook advertisements, and regular door-to-door canvassing, RUP is always working to engage new renters. RUP has continued to grow, and now counts 60 renters as members.

...AND IN CITY HALL.

The average home in Philadelphia is more than 90 years old, and a Federal Reserve study found that 40 percent of rental properties need repairs—a rate that rises for households in poverty. Thousands of tenants in Philadelphia live in rental properties with serious and unaddressed housing code violations, putting their health, safety, and housing stability at risk.

And yet, Philadelphia, unlike some other cities, has no program for regular, proactive inspections of rental properties. Reactive inspections in response to formal complaints result in less than 1 in 10 units receiving an inspection from the Philadelphia Department of Licenses & Inspections each year. **Throughout 2022, RUP members advocated for a housing safety system that better serves the city's renters.** They are demanding funding for proactive inspections to address housing quality, support for repair programs and emergency housing, and solutions that do not lead to tenant displacement.

At a May 24, 2022, Philadelphia City Council budget hearing for the Department of Licenses & Inspections, RUP organizing committee member Todd Abney and tenant organizer Ariel Morales testified about the urgent need for the city to proactively address housing quality.



From left to right: Tenant organizer Ariel Morales, organizing committee member Todd Abney, and community organizer Cara Tratner prepare to canvass.

A September 2022 canvass.



“As a PGW employee, I get to see that it’s not only me that has problems. I have been in houses that are ready to collapse. It brings tears to my eyes because people are paying rent and landlords are doing absolutely nothing. It’s time for the city to step in to increase inspectors for proactive inspections, but without displacing renters.”

– RUP MEMBER TODD ABNEY IN CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY

From left to right: Law Center and RUP community lawyer Mary Beth Schluckebier, Ariel Morales, and former Law Center staff attorney George Donnelly.



Ariel Morales, who led Renters United Philadelphia as the organization's founding tenant organizer, recently left the Law Center to become Organizing Director at One Pennsylvania. All of us wish him the best of luck and success in his new role!

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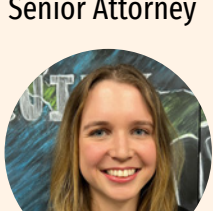
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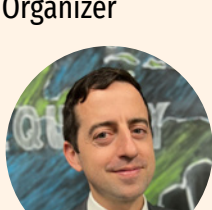
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Law Center staff, summer interns,
and family members at a 2022
Phillies game. 



Persevering for Justice:

OUR 2022 ANNUAL CELEBRATION

On October 27, 2022, we welcomed more than 275 of our supporters and friends to our 2022 Annual Celebration, Persevering for Justice, at Vie on Broad Street in Philadelphia.

We honored our of counsel Michael Churchill, who joined the Law Center in 1976 and served as co-director until 2006, with the Thaddeus Stevens Award in recognition of more than 50 years of dedication to advancing civil rights in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. His service and leadership has been foundational to the Law Center, and Churchill has won major victories against housing segregation, police misconduct, employment discrimination, and more. In 2022, he helped lead our litigation team that successfully challenged Pennsylvania's unconstitutional system for funding public schools, culminating several decades of standing up for quality public education for all children in Pennsylvania.

We also honored our pro-bono partner in our public school funding case, O'Melveny, and our clients, six superintendents from school districts across Pennsylvania. Our clients, serving small towns, suburbs, and cities across Pennsylvania, stood up to a funding system that deeply shortchanged hundreds of thousands of students in low-wealth communities like theirs. The historic trial would not have been possible without the tireless and brilliant support of O'Melveny.



Michael Churchill accepting the 2022 Thaddeus Stevens Award

"All of us know that today there are severe challenges to maintaining, much less increasing equality in our civic life. Looking around this room, seeing how many are persevering in this struggle, I have faith we will prevail."

– MICHAEL CHURCHILL



The West Powelton Drummers performed to open the celebration



Katrina Robson accepting the 2022 Thaddeus Stevens Award on behalf of O'Melveny



Our client David McAndrew, superintendent of Panther Valley School District, accepting the 2022 Thaddeus Stevens Award



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Dan Beaty	Jane Century	James Faunes	Ellen Good <i>In Memory of Barbara Macholz Grimaldi</i>	Nicolas Johnson
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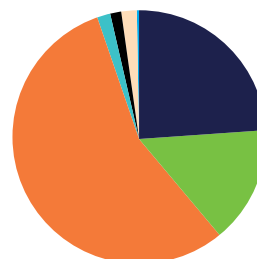
Financials

January 1, 2022–December 31, 2022. Figures from audited financial statement

SUMMARY OF REVENUE & EXPENSES*

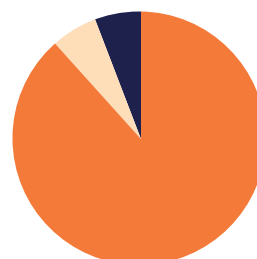
REVENUE

Grants & Contributions	\$1,115,553	
Legal Community & Other Support	\$699,971	
In-Kind Legal Services	\$2,586,665	
Fee Awards	\$75,750	
Contracts & Honorarium	\$62,895	
Investment Income	\$89,079	
Other Revenue	\$7,857	
Total Revenue	\$4,637,770	



EXPENSES

Program Services	\$4,357,991	
General & Administrative	\$290,044	
Fundraising	\$273,734	
Total Expenses	\$4,921,769	



Net realized and unrealized losses on investments \$470,390

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

Current Assets	\$1,004,023
Other Assets	\$3,704,385
Property & equipment (net of depreciation)	\$17,113
Total Assets	\$4,708,408
Current Liabilities	\$181,965
Prior Year Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$5,109,239
Change in Net Assets	(\$754,389)
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$4,708,408
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$2,599,649

*Audited financial reports are available on our website at pubintlaw.org/corporate-documents/

Strategic Planning

CHARTING OUR COURSE

Starting in May 2022, the Law Center began to look towards the future by embarking on a strategic planning process. With the arrival of a new Executive Director in 2021 and the conclusion of our prior strategic plan, the time was right to draw a roadmap to guide our work through the next three to five years—a pivotal moment for Philadelphia and Pennsylvania.



THE CURRENT PROCESS IS IN FULL SWING, SETTING GOALS AND EVALUATING OUR WORK IN THREE PHASES:

✦ PHASE 1 (COMPLETED)

Through stakeholder surveys and an analysis of the political, economic, demographic, philanthropic and legal trends, we sought to discover challenges and opportunities.

✦ PHASE 2 (ONGOING)

Through a series of planning retreats, we will find ways to strengthen our four core strategies for taking on discrimination and poverty (litigation, community education, advocacy and organizing), and determine how best to make positive change in our six practice areas (employment, environmental justice, healthcare, housing, public education and voting). We will also discuss all aspects of our operations: board governance, fundraising and development, and more. Throughout this process, we will apply an intentional racial justice and DEI lens.

✦ PHASE 3 (UPCOMING)

Draft and implement the strategic plan.





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