

# **CONNECTICUT BAR FOUNDATION 2021 GRANT APPLICATION FORM**

## **INTEREST ON LAWYERS' TRUST ACCOUNTS / INTEREST ON TRUST ACCOUNTS / COURT FEES GRANTS-IN-AID / JUDICIAL BRANCH GRANTS-IN- AID**

*Date* September 18, 2020

*Name and  
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*Amount Requested:* \$7,439,077 (51.4815% of \$14,450,000- 85% of 2019  
actual total grant awards)

Connecticut Legal Services' (CLS) staff and board welcome 2021 as a year of recovery and renewal. In 2020, COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic created many challenges not only for our clients but also for CLS as an organization. We are proud of CLS' capacity to readjust the work that we do and the way in which we do it in order to balance successfully the health and safety of our staff and the needs of our clients. In addition to our individual client work, we also refocused our advocacy efforts to address our clients' emerging legal needs resulting from the pandemic.

The pandemic also affected our funding significantly. We received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds and took advantage of other COVID-19 related funding through local community and other foundations. These measures, however, do not resolve our projected budget deficit and we continue to explore and/or implement cost saving measures including salary reductions, over which we currently are negotiating with our staff union. In addition, we are temporarily attriting most of the staff positions left vacant at the end of 2019. We expect these positions to remain unfilled throughout 2020, along with additional vacancies expected in 2021 due to retirements.

We look forward to 2021 and persevering beyond the shadow left by the events of 2020. We will take steps to ensure financial sustainability, while at the same time providing the necessary legal services to our clients as courts reopen and we address the expected influx of cases. We are committed to moving forward with our mission and will continue the

implementation of the relevant portions of our strategic plan as we enter the second year of a four-year implementation plan (as described fully in our last application and report) which includes the continued use and expansion of racial equity and its role in deciding our advocacy strategies.

In support of our planned 2021 efforts, Connecticut Legal Services requests IICJ funding comparable to 51.4815% of available IICJ funds (CFGIA, JBGIA and IOLTA) which have been projected to be 15% less than the total funds awarded in 2019, as directed by the CBF in the August 2020 grantees conference call.

## **Funds**

**1. Describe the organization's expected use of IICJ funds during the next year. Include a one paragraph summary of the primary functions, goals and objectives of the organization and how, if at all, they have changed in the past year, the role of IICJ funds in achieving the goals and objectives, and the organization's geographic service area and client base.**

CLS' operations rely heavily on IICJ funds which comprise well over two-thirds of CLS' annual funding. IICJ funds allow us to provide life changing legal services to thousands of clients across the state each year. During 2021, CLS expects to use IICJ funds to continue this important and impactful work, responding to the continued COVID-19 related legal needs of our clients, and exploring the expansion of our racial justice initiatives. Although the available grant funds for 2021 are expected to be 15% less than the total funds awarded in 2019, we will work on increasing and measuring our impact to our clients, increasing our fundraising efforts, implementing cost saving measures, and finding ways to increase our reserves which are very important to ensuring our continued financial stability. While CLS' core goals and objectives remain consistent, we have adjusted our work to include COVID-19 related advocacy. We are preparing for the full re-opening of the courts which will create a wave of cases needing our attention, especially for low-income tenants when the eviction moratorium ends. We also intend to continue the implementation of our strategic plan, to the extent possible given the pandemic and our staffing. Please note that we do not use IICJ funds for litigation against the state or for any of CLS' lobbying efforts.

CLS, as the largest legal aid program in Connecticut, directly serves approximately 5,000 low-income households with civil legal needs each year. CLS is the only full service provider of legal services in 122 communities in Connecticut – the other 47 communities are served by Greater Hartford Legal Aid or New Haven Legal Assistance Association. We maintain seven offices across the state in order to be accessible to our clients, many of whom lack

transportation and rely on our presence within their communities. Hundreds of thousands of low-income individuals live in the communities within our service area – approximately 58% of the State’s low-income population. CLS serves all demographic groups – children, the elderly, veterans, people of all genders, people with mental health issues, people with physical disabilities, people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, citizens, and immigrants. In addition, CLS’ unique Consumer Law Project for Elders serves clients in all 169 Connecticut towns and cities.

### ***CLS’ work in the coming year***

Throughout the coming year, CLS will use awarded IICJ funds:

- 1) to support our organizational core – a set of well-trained effective advocates providing a wide range of high quality direct civil legal services to large numbers of low-income households in substantive areas including:
  - a. Housing and homelessness matters;
  - b. Consumer issues for elders;
  - c. Domestic violence, child support, divorce and other family matters;
  - d. Immigration assistance for victims of domestic violence, childhood arrivals, and other groups affected as federal immigration reform takes shape;
  - e. Public benefits and employment;
  - f. Social security disability;
  - g. Health law;
  - h. Education and child protection law; and
  - i. Developmental/intellectual disabilities.
- 2) to use our core work as a foundation for specific focused projects designed to increase our impact for low-income individuals and communities;
- 3) to work with our sister legal services programs to maintain a statewide integrated system of legal services (including policy advocacy and other broad-impact efforts) for people living in poverty;
- 4) to provide COVID-19 related systemic advocacy and individual legal services whenever necessary;
- 5) to incorporate a racial justice lens to our work wherever possible;
- 6) to coordinate services and continue to increase efficiencies among our sister legal services programs and CLS; and
- 7) to expand and diversify collaborations to increase the range and impact of our services for clients.

In addition to CLS' continued direct legal services to thousands of low-income households facing crisis, CLS will implement and/or continue the following initiatives in 2021:

- **Victims of Crime:** CLS is the lead agency in a statewide collaboration with Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Connecticut Coalition against Domestic Violence, and the Connecticut Alliance to end Sexual Violence. We coordinate services for victims of crime and assist them in resolving legal issues that have resulted from their victimization or that are impeding their ability to overcome the abuse.
- **Health equity:** Connecticut Health Foundation has renewed funding for CLS' efforts to preserve healthcare access for low-income Connecticut residents and advance health equity advocacy. We continue to negotiate with DSS and the state's transportation broker to improve the efficacy of the nonemergency transportation system and resolve the ADA violations claims we brought in federal court that have resulted in people with disabilities not getting rides to their medical appointments.
- **Rental assistance:** We are working with the Connecticut Center for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI) to provide financial assistance to immigrant tenants who have been unable to pay their rents because of the pandemic and need help to stay in their homes. We will be providing trainings to CIRI's partner agencies on landlord/tenant issues, negotiating with landlords, and the eviction process. We also will be available for technical assistance as these agencies negotiate with landlords to resolve low-income tenant's housing issues and avoid homelessness.
- **Eviction Defense:** We have partnered with two major law firms—McCarter &English and Finn Dixon & Herling to provide *pro bono* eviction defense to low-income tenants. We are training approximately 12 associates (six from each firm) and four partners (two from each firm) this month on Summary Process, including all of the changes under the CARES Act. Once we have trained these attorneys, we will start referring cases to them at their firms and partnering them with a local CLS housing attorney, the Managing Attorney of the Housing Unit and/or the Director of Litigation and Advocacy for technical support.

**2. Describe the organization's use of IICJ funds during 2020. Include any variation from the 2020 application submitted. Provide caseload information using the attached Caseload Report Forms.**

As the attached caseload reports will demonstrate, CLS is using IICJ funds in 2020 to serve thousands of clients across the state in a broad set of crucial civil legal issues. Due to COVID-

19, these caseload numbers are lower than we have reported in previous years; however, we have engaged in broad systemic advocacy during the pandemic to address issues that have resulted. Below is a summary of a few of the efforts we engaged in during 2020.

- Lead poisoning: CLS continued its unique school based legal clinic in Windham County and expanded our advocacy to include children exposed to lead or suffering from lead poisoning. This work was funded by the Ossen Family Foundation.
- Health advocacy: We continued our work on a federal class action lawsuit we filed to improve the response of the state's non-emergency medical transportation system. We have been in negotiations with the state and the transportation provider, under a non-disclosure agreement, and cannot provide any specific information about the nature of those negotiations at this time. The Connecticut Health Foundation is funding and supporting this work.
- Juvenile Justice: CLS continued its juvenile justice advocacy work throughout the state and particularly focused on reducing the occurrence and effects of school pushout, including exclusionary school discipline measures such as suspension and expulsion, and school-based arrest in Waterbury. We also worked to ensure that effective and appropriate laws and policies around special education, placements, and the availability and provision of mental and behavioral health services exist and are being used appropriately to support students who need them. The Tow Foundation extended our funding for these efforts through 2021.
- Victims of Crime: CLS, as lead agency, continued its collaboration with Greater Hartford Legal Aid, New Haven Legal Assistance Association, Connecticut Coalition against Domestic Violence, and the Connecticut Alliance to end Sexual Violence. We coordinate services for victims of crime and assist them resolve legal issues that have resulted from their victimization or that are impeding their ability to overcome the abuse.
- Immigration: CLS continued its partnership with the Vera Institute to coordinate and provide legal services to unaccompanied minors who need our assistance to enforce their immigration rights and reunify with family. We provide Know Your Rights presentations, legal assessments, and direct legal representation to minors sent from their point of entry into the United States to Connecticut's shelter. As a Vera Institute partner, we are part of a nationwide collaboration and network of shelters and legal service providers working together to provide these immigration and resettlement services. Our funding has been extended through 2020 and we currently are working

with Vera as they prepare a response to an expected federal RFP to extend this work beyond 2021.

- **Harvard Study:** We finished our work on CLS' financial distress project in 2020. The project was developed in conjunction with academic researchers from UConn, Harvard and Maine. CLS had three dedicated attorneys (and one legal assistant) who represented low-income defendants of collection actions in small claims court and provided bankruptcy-related legal counsel and representation. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial to explore the impact of legal representation in these matters (other litigants were provided *pro se* materials related to their collection action, rather than legal representation). We represented more than four hundred and fifty clients throughout the project and Harvard is analyzing the findings.
- **COVID-19 related efforts:** At the onset of the pandemic, we joined Greater Hartford Legal Aid and New Haven Legal Assistance to enforce our clients' rights and address our clients' needs through systemic and broad based advocacy.
  - **Housing:** We asked the courts to implement a full moratorium on evictions and asked the Department of Housing and Urban Development to suspend eviction related actions. The courts enacted an immediate stay of all COVID-19 related evictions and extended that moratorium through October 1, 2020.
  - **Benefits:** We asked the DSS commissioner to suspend any actions meant to terminate benefits or enforce benefit time limits. DSS enacted these changes.
  - **Elder:** We asked DSS and DPH to suspend involuntary residential care home and nursing home discharges. These efforts were successful and the governor included discharge suspensions in an executive order, extending them through the pendency of the pandemic.
  - **Unemployment:** We meet virtually with the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Labor regularly to discuss issues that arise from their implementation of rules and regulations. Our advocacy ensured that public notices about the new programs implemented as a result of the pandemic were translated into Spanish and disseminated broadly.
  - **Education:** We met bi-weekly with the State Department of Education (SDE) to provide input into its COVID-19 guidance, relay client experiences, inform them of local school district policy issues, and identify inequities. As a result, the SDE included access to devices and internet in its guidance, addressed school discipline and attendance issues, and ensured a Free and Appropriate Public Education to high needs disabled students, all of which

disproportionately affected our clients. We created a Q&A about COVID-19 related education issues, a virtual training for the CBA on special education, and a CLS specific hotline to help parents address their individual issues when implementing remote learning for their children with disabilities who might not be able to transition between learning models.

- **Briefings:** We created 30-minute briefings to help community agencies understand the issues arising from COVID-19, how to help their consumers address those issues, and how to contact us for help. We created briefings on benefits, housing, education, and employment.

Each of the briefings created, the Q&A, and letters written to advocate on behalf of our clients during the pandemic, to date, can be found on [ctlawhelp.org](http://ctlawhelp.org).

**3. List your organization's sources of funds other than IICJ for 2020, including grants, donations, matching funds, and in-kind contributions, and include an explanation of any projected significant changes in funding (positive or negative) expected in the 2021 grant year.**

A list of CLS' funding sources for 2020 is attached to this application.

CLS expects funding changes in 2021. In addition to the projected decreases in IICJ funds, we believe there is an elevated risk on state and federal funding as governments begin to sort out the fiscal impact of the massive economic relief provided in 2020. We will, of course, continue to seek out new and diverse funding opportunities and currently have outstanding funding requests that have been submitted to various funding sources.

**4. Give details of the organization's system for the safekeeping and investment of grant funds, including IICJ funds.**

CLS incorporates a number of controls for the safekeeping of grant funds, and in particular, IICJ funds:

1. IICJ grant funds are deposited directly into CLS' bank account via automated clearing house (ACH), eliminating risks that might arise from handling hard copy checks;
2. Finance department staff regularly reviews bank activity for incoming wires and ACH deposits, and records the activity into a cash receipts control spreadsheet as well as the organization's accounting system. Finance department staff verifies amounts received;
3. Cash disbursements follow a disciplined approval process beginning with a staff member's initiation of a disbursement request, a manager's approval of the request, a

third person's review and signature on the check, and for amounts over \$2,000, a fourth person's review and second check;

4. Finance department staff monitors the organization's funds in order to detect and correct errors via regular review of bank accounts and monthly bank reconciliations;
5. The organization maintains electronic safeguards to mitigate the risk of system failures, cyberattacks and other business interruptions, and monitors vendor banks to ensure they maintain appropriate internal controls and business interruption plans including cyber security protocols.

IICJ funds not immediately needed for disbursement are invested in short-term certificates of deposit, US Treasury Bills, or demand deposit accounts at a federally regulated bank. No other investments are made with grant funds.

**5. Provide financial information as requested on the attached Budget Forms.**

All relevant Budget Forms and requested financial information are attached to this application.

**6. If you use, or if within the past three years you have used, IICJ funds in connection with representation of other organizations (as distinct from the representation of individuals):**

**a. List any organizations that have received such representation during the previous twelve months.**

Connecticut Legal Services has represented several organizations over the past year:

- Harborview Tenants' Association: we were available to represent and advise on organizational issues, as needed, and are assisting in issues involving the conversion of these apartments to project based Section 8;
- P.T. Barnum Tenants' Association: we were available to represent and advise on organizational issues, as needed;
- Marina Village Residents' Council: we provided general legal advice and representation on state and federal housing issues (not supported by IOLTA funds) as well as spending significant time advocating and problem solving the issues arising from relocation, demolition, and replacement of public housing dwelling units. We continue to monitor the availability of replacement housing;
- Charles F. Greene Homes: we provided representation on issues arising from the expected relocation, demolition, and replacement of public housing dwelling units;
- Pequonnock Apartments Residents Council: we provided representation regarding an out of court settlement of potential class claims stemming from the demolition of the



complex; and we provided assistance with organizational and settlement enforcement issues;

- Father Panik: we monitored the rights of low-income wait-list tenants who have legal rights to replacement units; and
- Bridgeport Resident Advisory Board: we have advocated on behalf of this group with regards to the policies and procedures that Park City Communities has implemented that don't comply with the federal regulations or have not been properly introduced for implementation; we also drafted their bylaws.

**b. Describe any guidelines established for the use of IICJ funds in such representations.**

Connecticut Legal Services represents other organizations with IICJ funds, but only when this work falls within our priorities for client service, does not involve lobbying or suits against the state or state officials, and meets CLS' guidelines for such representation. CLS' internal policy allows legal assistance to a group, corporation, or association if the Executive Director determines that:

- a. The group, corporation or association is primarily composed of persons eligible for legal assistance, and it provides information showing that it lacks, and has no practical means of obtaining, funds to retain private counsel.

Or

- b. (1) The legal assistance relates to an activity of the group, corporation, or association that would significantly or primarily benefit low-income people,  
  
(2) The legal assistance would contribute to CLS' efforts to achieve important goals in our then-current representation of another client or clients, and  
  
(3) The group, corporation, or association provides information showing that it lacks, and has no practical means of obtaining, funds to retain private counsel.

Or

- c. The group, corporation, or association meets eligibility criteria of a CLS funding source with less restrictive group representation rules than those described in this policy, and representation can be provided by CLS staff supported by that funding source.

**7. Describe any contingency or other plans to continue the operations and programs of the organization in the event that IICJ funds decrease or cease, including the agency's reserve funding available for operating expenses at the start of 2021, expressed as a percentage of the proposed annual operating budget.**

IICJ funds are CLS' primary source of support for the services we provide throughout our service area. Because of the importance of IICJ funding, CLS (and UAW, our staff's union) puts significant resources annually into the development and sustaining of IICJ funding. Decreases in IICJ funding would result in directly proportional decreases in our client services. One example of the results of prior IICJ funding decreases for CLS was the significant and drastic decrease in IOLTA funding in 2009. Pressures on funding combined with gradual increases in program expenses resulted in a drop of over 20% in CLS' staffing.

The most relevant example of a contingency plan for dealing with IICJ fund decreases is the strategy that CLS, the CBF, and others collectively deployed as a result of the IOLTA funding crash. One cannot imagine a more successful contingency plan: working together to create a new funding source which now comprises the majority of funds available for disbursement by the CBF. With the projected decrease in available IICJ funding for 2021, CLS is taking steps to decrease spending and is negotiating with our staff union to implement furloughs and/or layoffs. Of course, CLS continues its efforts to increase its grant-writing and individual donor fundraising strategies.

CLS currently forecasts the equivalent of 4.3 months operating expenses in reserve at the beginning of 2021. This equates to 36% of our proposed annual expenses. Two factors contribute to this forecast:

- CLS received a Paycheck Protection Program loan in May 2020 in the amount of \$1,674,195. CLS expects most or all of this loan to be forgiven under guidelines established under the CARES Act.
- CLS has taken cost reduction measures through attrition of six positions since the beginning of the pandemic and expects a few more over the next one to two years.

Because of further losses expected through 2021, CLS forecasts its reserves to fall to 2.9 months operating expenses (25% of annual expenses) by December 31, 2021. CLS plans further cost reduction measures through attrition and from on-going negotiations with our labor union as necessary to maintain liquidity at or above its minimum threshold of 2.0 months operating expenses.

## **Client Services, Community Involvement and Collaborative Efforts**

### **8. Describe the goals, activities, and accomplishments of any collaborations between your agency and other service providers or organizations (including government agencies) that serve your client community.**

Virtually all of CLS' work relies on collaborations with others in the legal services network, other service providers, government agencies, and local community groups. Some particular examples of these collaborations over the last year are:

- Our collaboration with GHLA and LAA and other agencies in the legal services network to prepare 30-minute briefings on education, employment, and benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Our collaboration with legal services agencies to create and deliver a virtual briefing on housing which provided information to the social services agencies that were dealing with tenants who had questions about paying rent, evictions, and landlord harassment during the pandemic. We answered those and many other questions for the over 200 participants who called in to the briefing;
- Our work with CIRI (as noted above) to provide training and technical support to agencies in a statewide collaborative effort to help immigrants who need financial assistance to stay in their homes after a loss of income due to COVID-19;
- Our participation with the PT Partners collaborative in Bridgeport and onsite services to tenants in that project and the surrounding area. This collaborative was disbanded in its current form in 2020, however, we continue to provide support to tenants;
- Our collaboration with the Vera Institute and a nationwide network to enforce the immigration rights of unaccompanied minors;
- Our collaboration with Connecticut's Department on Aging and statewide network to protect seniors who have been financially exploited or abused. This formal collaboration ended, however, we have sought federal funding to expand the work started under this collaboration;
- Our collaboration in Waterbury which reviews and implements policies affecting youth in Waterbury schools (the Waterbury Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Collaborative). CLS brought together a broad group of local stakeholders, including representatives of the Board of Education, school administrators, the Chief of Police, the Mayor's office, advocates and attorneys, and community agencies and providers working with children, to create the DMC. CLS agreed to lead the coalition until others in the DMC were ready to assume the lead. CLS continues to be an active participant in the DMC; and,

- Our collaboration on the [CTLawHelp.org](http://CTLawHelp.org) website with the CBF, NHLAA, GHLA, and SLS results in crucial legal information for hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. CLS' technology collaboration with SLS, GHLA and NHLAA (funded initially by the CBF some years ago) has produced a powerful infrastructure that has sharply reduced our communication costs and increased the capacity of our collaborative tools.

CLS also continues to:

- work with the tenant group at Marina Village in Bridgeport, a subsidized housing project that has been demolished. CLS' work prevented the premature displacement of residents who did not have suitable housing alternatives, ensured the creation of necessary replacement housing, and facilitated the smooth transition of Marina Village residents to new decent housing. This work has extended to the Greene Homes which is slated for demolition and Harborview Terrace which is slated for conversion to property based Section 8. We also receive funding from the Fairfield County Community Foundation in support of these efforts.
- co-chair the Alliance for Children's Mental Health (ACMH), a statewide collaborative advocating for appropriate policies impacting children's behavioral health and wellbeing. CLS co-led organizational efforts of the Alliance by helping to draft organizational documents, enhancing and diversifying membership, and ensuring the Alliance addresses the legal issues impacting low-income families. The ACMH membership includes the Office of the Child Advocate, the Connecticut chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI), and directors of a number of nonprofit and community agencies dedicated to addressing these issues.
- lead its largest collaboration to provide civil legal help to victims of sexual assault and victims of domestic violence. This collaboration expands coordinated services to these victims of crime. The collaboration strengthens CLS, GHLA, and NHLAA's connections with the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence and all of its community based member agencies, as well as with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and all of its community based member agencies. In addition to the direct client services involved, the collaboration results in cross-training and cross-referral of clients among the agencies.
- provide support to the Waterbury Regional Continuum of Care collaborative, which addresses low income housing and homelessness issues in Waterbury and Litchfield County. CLS staff helped create a unified system of screening, assessment and service provision for homeless people in need of permanent supportive housing or rapid

rehousing assistance. The effort has successfully targeted subsidy vouchers to house individuals previously identified as chronically homeless. We also help allocate a pot of flexible funds used to solve housing crises for individuals.

In addition, CLS is an active participant in numerous Bar and Judicial Branch efforts to improve access to justice, including:

- The Judicial Branch Access to Justice Commission;
- The Task Force To Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters;
- The Conn. Bar Association's Pro Bono Committee;
- The Conn. Bar Association's Racial Justice Working Group;
- The Conn. Bar Association's Government and Public Sector Committee;
- The CBF's Pro Bono Colloquium working group; and
- The Judicial Branch Pro Bono Committee.

These groups have had the cumulative impact of increasing awareness of and support for efforts to address low-income legal needs, while also initiating specific projects that deliver impact for low-income people (for example, increasing private law firm services to victims of domestic violence, or establishing the limited-scope court appearance).

**9. If any government agency is obligated to provide any of the services that your agency provides, explain and include a description of how your work relates to that provided by the government (e.g. how it differs, how your agency has influenced the government agency's work, how your agency collaborates with the government agency).**

CLS has several projects that carry out work for which government agencies are obligated. In all of these projects, the government agency contracts directly with CLS to help fulfill the agency's obligations.

- The Office of the Chief Public Defender (OCPD) is obligated to ensure that indigent parties in child protection matters are represented by counsel. CLS receives funding from the OCPD to carry out such work in Bridgeport, primarily representing children in child protection matters. Our project demonstrates the value of including a social worker on legal teams representing children. CLS receives some additional funding support from the Judicial Branch to support the social worker's involvement in these cases.
- The Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are required to dedicate a portion of their federal funds to provide legal services to elderly residents in their area. CLS annually receives

these funds from the three AAAs in our coverage area, and provides legal services across a broad range of legal issues including housing, rights of grandparents, nursing home care, and access to medical care. We receive many referrals from the AAAs that provide this funding.

- The Office of the Chief Public Defender and Court Support Services Division are required to provide training to their staff and sub-contractors. CLS is a qualified trainer and regularly provides training to those agencies regarding education law, public benefits, and other legal issues impacting low-income clients.
- The Connecticut Department of Developmental Services is required to provide advocacy to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities and contracts with CLS to provide advocacy services to current and former residents of Southbury Training School;

**10. Identify and briefly describe other legal services providers, government agencies or entities which provide legal services similar to those offered by your agency within your service territory.**

CLS is the only agency within our service area that provides holistic legal services to low-income people, offers representation to clients across a vast range of legal issues, and addresses the legal issues from childhood to old age. There are a set of much smaller organizations (primarily CBF-funded) that provide assistance that is more limited in range and geography; we work with virtually all of them to cross-refer clients, identify common client issues and share knowledge. For example, Statewide Legal Assistance does not offer the direct and local representation provided by CLS but they are an essential legal services organization with which, by design, we dovetail. SLS' work supports CLS' work and is not duplicative.

**11. Detail and provide examples of community involvement and support for your organization's programs.**

Many of the collaborations described above are based on our community involvement. Our seven local offices offer the opportunity for CLS to engage in community involvement of this type in virtually every population center in our coverage area. In the past, we have garnered significant local community support for CLS' (and the CBF's) funding and for issues that directly affect the lives of our client population. Community residents and social service agencies demonstrate their support of our work by calling and writing their legislator(s) and/or testifying in support of legal services funding and/or client issues. Throughout 2018 and 2019, community stakeholders participated in our strategic planning process to help us

define our strategic vision through a four-year strategic planning implementation process.

**12. Describe your most recent priority setting process including the involvement of your clients and other stakeholders.**

In 2018, CLS hired consultants (partially funded with capacity building grants from several community foundations in our service area) who guided us through a comprehensive year-long strategic planning process that resulted in a four-year strategic plan, garnered an unprecedented level of staff and Board participation, and created overall excitement for its implementation. We evaluated our mission, methodology, and systems to ensure that the activities in which we engage and the work on which we focus is consistent with our purpose and relevant to our client population. The process included focus groups and discussions with Board, staff, and community stakeholders. We also surveyed our clients for their input into our process. In addition, all staff participated in regional discussions and a Client Journey Mapping exercise, where we placed ourselves in the shoes of our clients and examined their touchpoints with CLS, the challenges they face, and the ways we could improve our interactions with them.

On July 1, 2019, we implemented our strategic plan which is guided by annual work plans that detail measurable goals and activities to be achieved over the next four years and allows for adjustments as we move forward. Our six overarching goals are to: evolve our services to increase our positive impact on individuals, communities, and systems; to evolve our roles, policies, and practices in order to improve workflow, supervision, internal communication, and climate; to improve our financial sustainability by further diversifying our revenue and examining approaches to address our expenses and long-term liabilities; to expand our reach, support, and impact by developing a strong brand and communications program and leveraging strategic relationships; to enhance our infrastructure to support the evolution of our work; and, to empower our board of directors to be more active contributors and partners in achieving our vision and impact.

We believe that our efforts in achieving those goals and strategies will move us forward in our mission. The Strategic Plan was designed to be malleable in order to stay relevant amidst fluctuating funding and other influences on our work. We are very pleased that we are able to adjust and modify our efforts in light of the current pandemic and our cost saving measures, without losing momentum toward our overall goals.

## **Management and Staffing**

**13. Describe the organization's management and staffing and include how changes in IICJ funding have impacted the organization (i.e., hiring and downsizing, furloughs, reduction in services, etc.) over the past two years. Please attach an organizational chart showing your staffing structure.**

CLS currently has a 69 person staff, 47 of whom are attorneys. While CLS staff agreed to significant furloughs to avoid layoffs in 2009 and during the spring/summer of 2015, CLS has shrunk over 20% by attrition since 2009. In 2017, however, CLS funding was stable enough to make up that loss by hiring ten new attorneys and one legal assistant. As a result, CLS saw a net gain of only two attorney positions over our pre-recession staffing level. In 2018, we hired to replace attorneys who left the agency and to increase our fund-raising efforts by adding a development associate to the development office. In 2019, we hired our Singer Fellow permanently to CLS' staff. In 2020, we are committed to cost savings due to the effects of COVID-19 on our funding stream and are taking temporary attrition for those positions that become vacant, with one distinct exception—a family law attorney position in Eastern Connecticut. This position was filled for several months on a temporary basis. As of October 2020, the position will be filled with a permanent part-time attorney. Filling this position was necessary to provide urgently needed services to victims of domestic violence in Windham and Tolland Counties, and allow us to take advantage of available funding for victims of crimes.

CLS manages our services through a middle-management and a senior management team. The middle management team includes:

- managers of offices (who supervise and evaluate staff, ensure local compliance with grant requirements, ensure collaboration with the community, and assist with local grant acquisition and maintenance, along with handling their own case and other advocacy responsibilities); and
- managers of substantive law units (who support and coordinate CLS attorneys in our substantive areas of focus, along with handling their own case and advocacy responsibilities).

The senior management team is comprised of CLS' Executive Director, Deputy Director, Litigation and Advocacy Director, Finance Director, and Development Director.

An organizational chart showing our staffing structure is attached.



**14. Describe your organization's use of volunteers, students, interns, and other non-full time employees to provide any or all of the services offered or to support the provision of such services. Explain any limitations or constraints on the use of such resources.**

CLS uses volunteers, students, interns, and *pro bono* assistance extensively to further our mission. CLS welcomes interns and volunteers to work with us in our offices. Law students usually come in three waves – fall semester, spring semester, and summer – and are assigned to work directly with our attorneys. We occasionally have help from undergraduate or paralegal students who do a mix of legal support and administrative support. CLS also has numerous attorneys who volunteer in our offices (often retired, or otherwise not currently working full-time). Some of these attorneys have been working with us several days a week for many years, producing enormous impact for our clients.

CLS has an organized system for the on-boarding, training, and supervision of volunteers and interns. The basic criterion for volunteers and interns is that their time in our office must produce a net benefit for our clients, taking into account time to train, support and supervise the volunteers and interns. Occasionally, CLS managers have been required to end the volunteer relationship when the volunteer's contribution to our work is insufficient to meet this policy, which is necessary for the effective and efficient use of resources in providing client services. During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, there were 18 volunteers and interns working in CLS' offices, contributing approximately 3,000 hours of work to our efforts. In addition, CLS receives support for our services from *pro bono* attorneys working closely with us. For example, attorneys from the Office of the Chief Public Defender, the U.S. Department of Justice, Carmody Torrance, Sandak & Hennessey LLP, Robinson & Cole, Shipman and Goodwin LLP, Hinckley Allen and Snyder LLP, McCarter and English, and Finn Dixon & Herling LLP all have donated time to serve our clients directly, to train CLS staff, or otherwise support us in our work.

In addition, CLS receives substantial *pro bono* assistance on pension, personnel, collective bargaining, and real estate matters from Jackson Lewis, Day Pitney LLP, Cummings and Lockwood, Robinson and Cole, Wiggin & Dana LLP, Verrill Dana LLP, McCarter and English, and Pullman and Comley LLC. Our Board, of course, works on a volunteer basis, as do our local fundraising committee.

**15. Explain your quality assurance practices and procedures, including a description of:**

**a. Methods for case and/or work assignment**

- The program establishes global service priorities and distributes them among its service teams: housing, family and domestic violence, benefits and employment, elder and consumer law, Social Security disability, developmental/intellectual disabilities, child protection and education, and immigration.
- The program sets case, community education/outreach, and class project targets for each team.
- Each team assigns specific work roles and sets specific productivity targets for each of its advocates.
- In team meetings and annual personnel reviews, CLS managers monitor the number of cases handled by the team and its individual members to ensure that team members are working to their full capacity, using good judgment in case selection, and not taking on more work than they can handle responsibly and effectively.

**b. Procedures for reviewing/supervising work**

- Each employee (including managers) is assigned a supervisor and benefits both from a yearly formal work review and periodic less formal check-in meetings.
- Statistical reports on cases, community education/outreach events, and class projects—by teams and individual advocates—are reviewed monthly.
- The Board reviews the Executive Director.

**c. Methods for obtaining and responding to client feedback**

- We get regular feedback from SLS, state and local social service agencies, and others who refer clients to us.
- We inform clients of their right to complain to Managing Attorneys of our offices, the Executive Director, and Board about services. There are very few complaints.
- We conduct focus groups of social service providers and clients during our strategic planning processes.
- We send clients a client satisfaction survey at the conclusion of their case. We also post our complaint procedures in client interview and waiting areas.

**d. Any other significant quality control methods or practices**

- Each substantive law team sets and monitors standards of practice in their fields to preserve and improve the knowledge and proficiency of CLS staff.
- The Litigation and Advocacy Director sets and monitors standards of practice in affirmative and appellate litigation and compliance with the Rules of Professional Conduct.
- Our substantive practice teams set goals for policy and legislative advocacy at least once each year (prior to the legislative session); and evaluates success against those goals at least once each year (at the conclusion of the legislative session).

## **Evaluating Programs and Operations**

### **16. Describe any evaluation and assessment tools the organization uses to measure effectiveness.**

CLS evaluates its programs and its effectiveness in meeting client needs and achieving client goals through two specific tools. The first is CLS' client database, Legal Files, which is a comprehensive computer based legal case tracking and management system that every person (who needs to use it for their work) at CLS is trained to use. Legal Files contains all of the personal, demographic, and case specific information for each client to whom CLS provides services. It allows CLS advocates to record all of the work done and maintain copies of all important documents in a case. At the end of each case, the CLS advocate indicates the outcome(s) of the case through a pre-populated list of outcomes that has been created, maintained, and updated based on our experience in each specific substantive area of law in which we practice. Through this tracking of outcomes and goals achieved in each client case, we are able to create reports and review the substantive outcomes we have been able to achieve for a client and determine the value of any financial outcomes of the client's case. These reports are run regularly to ensure that advocates are meeting their client service goals.

The second tool, client satisfaction surveys, was implemented broadly in 2015. Each client is sent a client survey at the end of their case, excepting cases (e.g. domestic violence) where it would be harmful to our client or otherwise inappropriate. Clients are asked about specific areas of their experience with CLS and the services we have provided—were they treated with respect, were things explained clearly, were they given useful information and advice, were they kept informed about their case, and were they allowed to participate in decision making during their cases, were their calls returned promptly, and their overall satisfaction with the results of their case. An overwhelming number of the clients who have responded to the surveys have been “very satisfied” with our services as fully laid out below. During the pendency of their action, we also inform clients of their right to complain to Managing Attorneys of our offices, the

Executive Director, and the Board of Directors about services. There are very few complaints. A summary of the responses we received in 2019 is described below.

**17. Identify current priorities and provide any existing documents which identify such priorities.**

CLS has identified its primary areas of law in which it provides services—housing and homelessness matters; consumer issues for elders; domestic violence, child support, divorce and other family matters; immigration assistance for victims of domestic violence, childhood immigrant arrivals, and other groups affected as federal immigration reform takes shape; public benefits and employment; social security disability; health law; education and child protection law; and developmental/intellectual disabilities. Within those individual areas of law, CLS has identified and adopted the client needs it seeks to address, the service goals for addressing that need, and case acceptance criteria. Each of these priorities, as well as a description of the principles supporting the setting and use of these priorities, a description of the general case acceptance rules, and the context in which the priorities have been established are set out in the service priorities document we have attached to this application. Due to the breadth and length of the priorities description contained within that document, we have not duplicated any of the information within the body of this application.

There are times, however, such as the current pandemic where CLS must adjust its priorities to protect and enforce the rights of our client population. During the last six months, we provided direct legal services in court determined priority cases that were not suspended because of the pandemic and focused our efforts on broad systemic advocacy to ensure that the policy changes made do not adversely affect our clients and that policy changes that protect them are implemented. As noted above, we were successful in our efforts and we continue to monitor those rules and regulations as the pandemic persists.

**18. Provide any evaluation reports, along with any management response from any formal or informal, internal or external, evaluations of your programs or operations received within the past twelve months.**

CLS, as a recipient of federal funds through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and the Office of Victim of Services, is required to participate in annual site monitoring visits. During these visits, representatives from the entity administering these funds make sure that CLS is complying with the obligations of the funding and that its processes are consistent with program requirements. Given COVID-19, we engaged in one remote site visit this past year and are attaching the follow up letter from the CDBG funder with whom we met, the Town of

Fairfield. We met with a representative from the Office of Victim services to monitor our administration of funds as the lead agency in a statewide effort to provide legal services to victims of crime. We were found in compliance with all requirements and have attached that letter to this application. We also met with a representative from Equal Justice Works which awarded us funding to support a legal fellow who was providing services around issues of human trafficking. Our monitoring visit involved both our financial and supervisory oversight of the program. We were found to be in compliance with all of their requirements and also have attached the follow up letter from that visit.

**19. Provide any outcome reports or measurements and describe any program or delivery service changes made in response.**

**Client satisfaction**

CLS requests client feedback at the conclusion of our assistance through a client satisfaction survey. The following is a summary of the responses returned to us in 2019:

**You were treated respectfully and with dignity?  
(1% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	84%
Satisfied	11%
Not Satisfied	4%

**Things were clearly explained?  
(4% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	76%
Satisfied	15%
Not Satisfied	5%

**You were given useful information and/or legal advice?  
(2% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	78%
Satisfied	13%
Not Satisfied	7%

**You were kept informed about the case?  
(13% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	62%
Satisfied	19%
Not Satisfied	6%

**You were allowed to participate in making important case decisions?  
(13% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	61%
Satisfied	18%
Not Satisfied	8%

**Your telephone calls were answered timely?  
(7% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	69%
Satisfied	19%
Not Satisfied	5%

**Results with your case so far?  
(9% of clients left this question blank)**

Very Satisfied	65%
Satisfied	15%
Not Satisfied	11%

**Outcome measurement**

CLS has a system of measuring outcomes from direct client services that was established not only to measure our success in achieving clients' goals but also to report that success to all of our funders and show full grant compliance. A copy of CLS' outcomes report for calendar year 2019 is attached.

**Financial Outcomes**

CLS has a system of measuring the financial impact of cases, to the extent it can be known or estimated. (Some legal work is less measurable in this manner, e.g. the value of safety and stability for victims of domestic violence, the value to a family of avoiding homelessness, or the value of an appropriate school education to a child's future.)

CLS' financial outcomes for calendar year 2019 were:

Child Support	\$ 476,438
Consumer	\$ 570,543
DSS Benefits	\$1,002,307
Employment	\$ 62,881
Family	\$ 1,086,665
Housing	\$2,101,406
Immigration	\$ 567,875
<u>SSI Social Security</u>	<u>\$ 898,555</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,766,670</b>

As described above, CLS provided legal assistance to low-income households being pursued for debt in small claims court. The project was subjected to randomized controlled trial by experienced academics (including Professor Greiner, lead author of the Massachusetts study cited above). Because of the formal experimental structure of the project, CLS will have

remarkably detailed outcome information about the impact of this work when the results are analyzed and interpreted (likely in late 2020 or early 2021).

#### **Other**

**20. Describe efforts your organization engages in to promote racial and/or gender equity in areas such as staffing, employment policies, board composition and recruitment, and/or client services, if any. If available, please include staff and board demographics for your organization.**

CLS has been actively working towards cultural competence, linguistic access, and race equity for more than 10 years. We have addressed structural racism and prioritize approaches that address the impact of race and racism in America. Our hiring practices ensure that we continue to improve the cultural and linguistic competence of our program; and, CLS' talented and dedicated staff consists of people from different religious and social backgrounds. As an agency, we review and implement best practices for culturally competent delivery of services but also recognize that there is always room for progress and growth. We are an equal opportunity employer, and have a nondiscrimination policy for our delivery of service to our clients as well as in our internal interactions.

Over the last few years, CLS has taken an even closer look at issues of race, racism, and implicit bias in our work and in our agency. CLS created a Race Equity Working Group (REWG), led by CLS staff that completed a six-month fellowship program at the Shriver Center for Poverty Justice's Racial Justice Institute. The REWG is implementing initiatives actively throughout the agency to increase our diversity within the agency and to increase our cultural competence in our client interactions. For example, their efforts resulted in us adding a race equity lens to our policy advocacy work and affirmative litigation, as a deciding factor in that work. We also have added bias related questions to our interview process and have included CLS' Human Resource Manager in the Race Equity Working Group so there is crossover between the REWG goals and our hiring processes. In addition to reviewing CLS' practices internally and externally and using an outside facilitator to conduct focus groups on these issues with CLS staff, the REWG has coordinated and conducted implicit bias training each year which is mandatory for all CLS staff. This year's remote training is a series of race equity seminars scheduled between September and November. As we move forward, we will continue to look at structural racism, implicit bias, and issues of appropriate service delivery to diverse communities. With the recent incidences of racial injustice and the imbalanced racial impact of COVID-19, racial considerations in our work is more important than ever.

Our focus on racial and gender equity also extends to our diversity efforts with our Board. In fact, increasing diversity on our Board is an explicit goal resulting from our strategic planning process and is included in years one and two of our four-year implementation plan. The Board's efforts has resulted in one additional person of color scheduled to join the board at CLS' September Board meeting. The Board also is instituting a board mentoring program to help all members, regardless of race, feel comfortable and engaged in our Board activities. In addition, the Board's Nominating and Governance Committee is starting a review of our matrix of desired board member characteristics to help our recruiting efforts in which race, ethnicity, and gender will be significant factors in Board recruitment. In order to support these efforts, CLS' Board Chair and Executive Director attended a two-day workshop on Diversity and Inclusion this past year (sponsored by the Fairfield County Community Foundation) which focused on diversity issues in board recruitment and retention.

The following table shows the relevant demographics for our staff and board.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>African-American</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Bi/Multi-Racial</b>
<b>Staff</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>2.9%</b>
<b>Board</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<b>5.00%</b>	<b>0.00%</b>

**21. Describe any effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on your organization including effects of reduction in CFGIA funding from the levels projected in the 2020 grant award on the organization's operations, services provision, and planning and steps taken in response; unanticipated reduction in revenue other than IICJ in 2020; new or supplemental funding awarded or anticipated for 2020 and 2021 related to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The measures necessary to slow the spread of COVID-19 placed restrictions on the services we could provide and the manner in which we could provide them. For example, courts were closed to all but those cases the court deemed "Priority 1" cases and are now only slowly re-opening. This resulted in a decrease in the number of cases in which we could provide direct legal representation. This, in turn, lowered reimbursements under conditional grants that required a certain number of cases be handled or a number of hours of work be performed within the grant term. Challenges to our service model due to court closures and technology limitations have resulted in revenue reduction of about 5% from non-IICJ funds from mid-March through June 30, 2020. We expected this reduction to be much higher but we communicated regularly with our funders and renegotiated funding requirements to allow us to use the systemic advocacy, training, and other work that we increased during this time as a replacement for the individual direct legal services that we were not able to engage in, given



the circumstances. There were also some grants in which we over-performed at the beginning of the grant term, pre-COVID-19, that allowed us to meet the overall requirements of the grant despite the pandemic. We have also seen a decrease in individual donations from major donors. Specifically, law firms that gave in excess of \$10,000 to our annual campaign have not been able to give at the same level if at all because of their own COVID-19 related financial challenges.

In addition, we saw a reduction in CFGIA funding that spurred activation of cost reduction measures that will ultimately result in reduced services to clients. We have begun negotiations with our staff union about furloughs, salary reductions, and/or layoffs beginning as early as November 1, 2020 to address the budget shortfalls projected as of July 1, 2021. We also applied for and received the PPP Loan that has allowed us to maintain services temporarily at near pre-pandemic level while the agency addresses its future with reduced funding and staffing. As reductions in funding from CFGIA, IOLTA, and possibly JBGIA continue, we will see additional reductions in direct program services and staff. Through all of this, CLS leadership and its Board regularly discuss and strategize the way forward for the agency as it adopts these changes. There are further existing risks that cannot be quantified including the duration of this crisis, the possibility of virus resurgence later in the year, or a new normal that cannot sustain the same support systems for low-income individuals through and following the current crisis. These factors play a large role in creating uncertainty in determining financial projections for the agency and outcomes for our clients; however, we are optimistic that our efforts will be successful in getting through these difficult times albeit with some decreases in staffing and services.

In the midst of these funding challenges, we were able to secure over \$100,000 in COVID-19 related funding for our agency. This includes funding to support some technology upgrades in our Willimantic and New London offices, training and support for community agencies working directly with immigrant tenants, and additional general support from foundations to help us provide COVID-19 related services.

**22. Briefly share any other information about your organization which will assist the Grant-making Committee in evaluating your application.**

CLS is a strong and resilient organization because our staff continually steps-in and steps-up to help ensure that we provide excellent client services to as many people as possible, despite challenges such as our lean staffing and the current health crisis. Our staff has always

demonstrated its commitment to our mission and our clients and never more so than in times of financial crises. In fact, we believe we were the only full service legal aid agency in the northeast to avoid layoffs during the previous crisis when our staff took significant cuts in compensation instead. As we face another financial challenge and approach a critical line in our capacity to continue to take attrition without significant cuts in services, we recognize that it is unrealistic for us to expect staff to stabilize our funding through deep salary cuts. We are taking every opportunity to increase and diversify our revenue as well as increasing our impact as we provide services to clients across a vast geographic coverage area. We look forward to a continued partnership with the CBF as we tackle these serious financial issues while maintaining the high-quality legal services we provide.