



2024 - 2025

IMPACT REPORT

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR LAW AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE



"NCLEJ is uniquely positioned to answer the urgency of this moment. Poverty, racial oppression, and discrimination against people with disabilities are all interrelated—one cannot be eradicated without confronting the others. Through our impact litigation, targeted policy advocacy, and organizing efforts at the intersection of economic, racial, and disability justice, we are fighting alongside vulnerable communities to build the foundation for a better future."

Jason D. Williamson
Executive Director, NCLEJ



Our Mission, History, and Strategic Priorities

The National Center for Law and Economic Justice (NCLEJ) advances economic, racial, and disability justice for low-income families, individuals, and communities across the country. Everyone deserves to thrive, not just survive. That means ensuring that we all have full access to the resources, support, and services we need to live healthy, fulfilling lives that are free from the bigotry and discrimination that have plagued this country from its inception. There are countless barriers to economic access and equity for the most marginalized communities in our nation, which is why NCLEJ relies on high-impact litigation, policy advocacy, and support for grassroots organizing to create structural change for a better future.

Founded at Columbia University in 1965, NCLEJ has achieved significant court victories benefiting hundreds of thousands of low-income people nationwide, demonstrating that the law can be a powerful instrument for improving the lives of the most disadvantaged members of our society. Our work to define individuals' legal rights to welfare include the landmark 1970 Supreme Court case, *Goldberg v. Kelly*, which established the right to due process for benefits recipients and remains good law to this day. Since then, NCLEJ has worked to ensure access to benefits for hundreds of thousands of people—providing a baseline of economic security to stabilize low-income families and individuals, holding government agencies accountable when they fail to comply with the law, and safeguarding our clients' legal and constitutional rights.

In recent years, NCLEJ has achieved critical victories through our advocacy efforts, such as ending debt-based driver's license suspension in New York, forcing the New York State Housing Authority to clean up toxic mold that sickened residents, and launching a groundbreaking partnership with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in 2023 to advance human rights protections in modern global supply chains.

More broadly, NCLEJ addresses a range of economic, racial, and disability justice issues that impact vulnerable families and communities across the country:

Advancing the Rights of Lower Wage Workers: NCLEJ supports workers organizing for living wages and safe and fair workplaces. In particular, we provide legal support to the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and other members of the Worker-driven Social Responsibility movement. We champion the labor rights of incarcerated workers and draw attention to the ways in which the 13th Amendment has been manipulated to justify the ongoing exploitation and mistreatment of incarcerated people forced to work inside of prisons across the country for little to no compensation. Our work also addresses dangerous working conditions in the agricultural and home care industries, wage theft, gender pay disparity, pregnancy discrimination, and the sub-minimum wage.

Combating Abusive Debt Collection and Wealth Extraction: NCLEJ fights against abusive debt collection practices that undermine economic stability, particularly in communities of color. We work with grassroots leaders to seek justice and equity for people and communities terrorized by legally-sanctioned racial profiling, extreme police violence, the threat of being subjected to debtor's prison for failure to pay fines and fees, emerging environmental harms, and systematic underinvestment—financial and otherwise—by both the private and public sector.

Advocating for Disability Rights and Justice: NCLEJ utilizes disability rights laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, to improve access to government programs and services, such as public benefits, housing, and medical coverage, for those living with disabilities. NCLEJ also applies those laws in novel ways to pursue deinstitutionalization and non-carceral services and supports for people with disabilities.

Our Commitment to Movement Lawyering

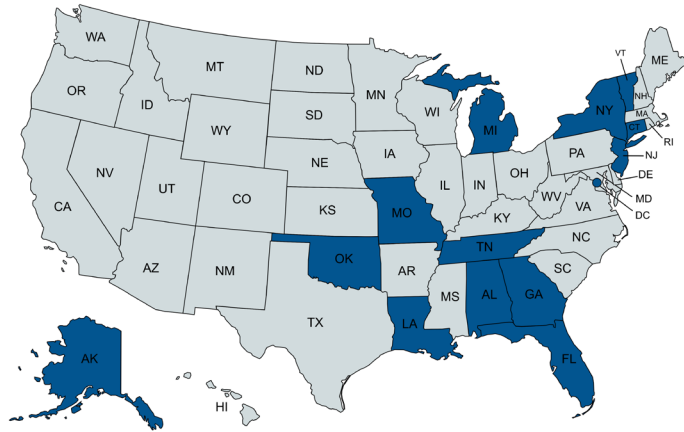
Our leaders and staff are highly skilled and deeply committed to social justice and strong community partnerships. Our lawsuits and campaigns require a massive, multi-year commitment of time and resources, yet they remain grounded in the wisdom, experience, and goals of local organizations and activists. Consistent with the movement lawyering ethos, we do not act on our own, but in partnership with impacted people and grassroots organizations committed to improving the wellness of their communities, and to preserving the rights of those who may not be economically powerful but deserve equal justice nonetheless.

NCLEJ is a vital piece of the social justice landscape. Our attorneys are some of the country's best and hardest working, and we often collaborate with pro bono counsel from the nation's leading law firms to pursue the goals of our clients and coalition partners. Successful class action litigation requires specialized legal knowledge and significant financial resources, which often are not available within the communities where we work. Our staff collectively has decades of experience in the economic justice space and has established valuable working relationships with a broad range of advocacy and organizing groups from all over the country—from small grassroots partners working on a shoestring budget, to national policy experts with access to vast financial resources. We bring these skills and relationships to bear for our clients, enabling them to push back against government overreach and access the resources they need to survive and thrive.



Our National Impact

In recent years, we've secured significant legal victories and other exciting developments on behalf of low-income people across the nation. Whether expanding access to public benefits, ensuring the enforcement of protections under the ADA, or enhancing due process for marginalized people, we continue to make critical progress in our efforts to advance racial, economic, and disability justice.



The scope of our work is nationwide. Here are some highlights of our recent victories and ongoing legal advocacy across the country:

Alabama

In 2022, NCLEJ achieved a significant settlement in our [lawsuit](#) against the City of Montgomery over their operation of a modern-day debtor's prison, which was used disproportionately by law enforcement to target and detain low-income drivers of color for traffic violations. Those who could not pay immediately were placed on "probation" with Judicial Correction Services, a for-profit private company that charged extortionate fees, forcing detainees into a punitive cycle of debt and imprisonment.

Alaska

In January 2025, NCLEJ [won a preliminary injunction](#) against the State of Alaska in a case challenging the State's SNAP processing delays. We first sued Alaska over their massive SNAP backlog in January 2023. And in May 2023, we agreed to temporarily pause the litigation in return for the Alaska Department of Health [halving its 10,598 person SNAP backlog](#) within six months. The State cleared its backlog and issued \$6.6 million in SNAP benefits because of NCLEJ intervention. Unfortunately, NCLEJ was forced to resume the litigation last year, when the State once again [fell behind](#) on processing SNAP applications.

Connecticut

Former NCLEJ Executive Director Dennis Parker has been engaged in a multi-decade legal fight to desegregate schools in Hartford, Connecticut, through the landmark case called [Sheff v. O'Neill](#). Parker first joined the *Sheff* litigation team in 1992. In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court declared that school segregation in Hartford was unconstitutional. In response to the ruling, the state legislature created a new network of magnet schools and school choice options. A lottery system was implemented because of strong demand for the new school options, which resulted in a two-tiered system that perpetuated the historical racial and economic inequities among the Black students who were forced to attend less resourced public schools. In 2022, a settlement was reached to expand school choice seats and committed the State to increasing investment in magnet schools, bringing active litigation to an end. NCLEJ is monitoring compliance of the settlement over a 10-year period.

Florida

NCLEJ has [partnered with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#) to expand adoption of the award-winning Worker-Driven Social Responsibility model to protect human rights in global supply chains. Our innovative relationship is among the first of its kind in which a nonprofit law office serves as the legal support arm for a grassroots worker advocacy group. NCLEJ houses legal staff dedicated to advancing CIW's mission to improve the wages and working conditions of farmworkers and provides crucial support to CIW's campaigns to bring more participating buyers into their innovative program and maintain existing relationships with buyers.

Georgia

In 2015, NCLEJ won a settlement in our lawsuit against the State of Georgia over their unreasonable delays in providing SNAP benefits, resulting in the issuance of \$22 million in retroactive benefits to some 48,000 households. Unfortunately, by the summer of 2023, the State's recertification processing times had been [significantly downgraded](#) such that only 40% of applicants were being processed in a timely manner. NCLEJ staff met with the State to review measures to address the backlog. And in November 2023, we established a helpline for SNAP applicants and trained attorneys from five major law firms to provide pro bono support to callers. Since then, we have spoken to over 5,000 Georgians seeking assistance, of whom more than 1,800 qualified for the informal relief process that was developed as part of our settlement with the State. As a result, more than 1,300 people received SNAP benefits of which they would have been deprived otherwise. We continue to work with the State to ensure that Georgians receive the support they need in a timely and consistent manner.

Louisiana

NCLEJ continues to pursue a [class action suit](#)—representing approximately 47,500 Louisiana Medicaid-eligible children and youth under the age of 21—seeking to require the State to provide sorely-needed community-based mental and behavioral health services to young people across the Louisiana. Currently, these critical services are provided only in hospitals and jails, leading to unnecessary institutionalization of disabled children who need these supports in order to survive and thrive.

Michigan

In January 2025, NCLEJ received court approval of a [major settlement](#) in *Waskul v. Washtenaw County Community Mental Health*, leading to more than \$110 million in additional State expenditures for Michiganders living with intellectual and development disabilities, who rely on Medicaid Community Living Support. This follows a [landmark ruling](#) secured by NCLEJ in 2020 in which the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that isolation at home constitutes violations of the "integration mandate" under the ADA.

Missouri

In May 2025, NCLEJ achieved a [major victory](#) in our federal lawsuit against the Missouri Department of Social Services over their massive SNAP application backlog, when a federal district court judge ordered the State to take remedial action within 60 days. This follows a [May 2024 ruling](#) in which the court ruled that the State's practices—including long call center wait times, wrongful denials of benefits, and lack of disability accommodations—violate both the ADA and the laws and regulations governing SNAP.

New Jersey

In 2023, NCLEJ Executive Director Jason D. Williamson and former Executive Director Dennis Parker joined the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice's [New Jersey Reparations Council](#) to research and bring attention to the State's involvement in slavery and its lasting impact on the contemporary life of Black New Jerseyans. In 2025, the Council published a [robust report](#) making bold policy recommendations for reparative justice policies designed to close the racial wealth gap.

Oklahoma

In Oklahoma City, we are currently investigating a range of discriminatory traffic enforcement practices. After learning that community members were afraid to come forward to challenge these practices due to severe police repression leveled against George Floyd protestors, we [filed a lawsuit](#) to advance the First Amendment rights of racial justice protestors in the city.

Tennessee

In 2020, NCLEJ [filed a lawsuit](#) challenging Tennessee's policy and practice of unlawfully depriving both children and adults of Medicaid coverage, known in Tennessee as TennCare. A defective bureaucratic process for the redetermination of eligibility of TennCare enrollees has resulted in thousands of low-income individuals being terminated from coverage without due process, and in a manner that discriminates against persons with disabilities. Litigation remains ongoing.

Vermont

NCLEJ represented Migrant Justice in a federal lawsuit against ICE, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles, alleging that ICE targets Migrant Justice leaders in retaliation for speaking about their rights in violation of the First Amendment, and challenging the DMV's practice of information-sharing and collaboration with ICE, particularly targeting Latino applicants. In January 2020, we [reached a settlement](#) with the DMV to restrict communication and information-sharing between the DMV and federal immigration agencies. In October 2020, we [reached a settlement](#) with ICE and DHS, ending the deportation cases against our clients', granting deferred action, paying damages, and agreeing to instruct officers about their First Amendment responsibilities.

NCLEJ also represents Migrant Justice in their [Milk with Dignity](#) campaign, a groundbreaking human rights program organized by dairy farmworkers. In October 2017, Migrant Justice and Ben & Jerry's signed an historic agreement making Ben & Jerry's the first major dairy corporation to join the Milk with Dignity Program, which requires its supplier farms to comply with better working conditions in dairy supply chains. In October 2025, the Milk with Dignity Program expanded through a new partnership with Vermont Way Foods, whose cheese will be wholly sourced in collaboration with the program.

Washington D.C.

In May 2025, NCLEJ [sued the USDA](#) over the Trump administration's unlawful attempts to obtain the personal information of millions of SNAP recipients. The USDA requested "unfettered access to comprehensive data," including records stored by private companies that process SNAP payments, with no clear explanation for how this data will be used. The USDA letter indicated that any failure to comply with the order could result in the withholding of funds to state agencies. In response to our lawsuit, the [USDA paused](#) their illegal demands in June 2025, before once again threatening states with the same unlawful request. Litigation remains ongoing.

Our Impact At Home

Since our founding at Columbia University at the height of the Civil Rights Era, NCLEJ has delivered justice for low-income New Yorkers. Over 40% of our casework focuses on empowering low-income communities within the state we call home, and we have deep, collaborative relationships with legal services and nonprofit advocacy groups within New York City and across the state.

Here are highlights of our recent victories and ongoing advocacy in New York:

Originally filed in 2018, we continue to litigate our [groundbreaking lawsuit](#) challenging the Buffalo Police Department's unconstitutional and racially discriminatory traffic enforcement practices. For at least a decade, the City of Buffalo has [systematically targeted](#) Black and Latino neighborhoods for unjustified, aggressive traffic enforcement, in a transparent effort to capture revenue for the city budget on the backs of communities of color. Though the City has ceased some of the most extreme practices in response to our advocacy, the policy and practice of ticketing for profit in communities of color remains widespread, and the Buffalo police continue to operate with no meaningful oversight.

In October 2024, we [filed a lawsuit](#) against GreatCare Inc., CenterLight Health System Inc., and one or more managed long-term care plans (MLTCs) under contract with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) for unlawfully underpaying homecare workers for only 13 hours of their 24-hour shifts, in what amounts to all out wage theft. NCLEJ has been engaged in a multi-year effort to secure justice for NYC homecare workers, all of whom are low-income immigrant women of color. In August 2023, [we sued](#) the New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) to force them to reopen their wage theft investigation after hundreds of unpaid wage claims were suddenly closed. This follows the [filing](#) of a Federal Title VI complaint in October 2022.

In July 2024, NCLEJ [filed a lawsuit](#) against the City of Buffalo over their failure to implement the Proactive Rental Inspections (PRI) Law intended to protect residents in rental housing from lead paint and other health and safety hazards. Our litigation is ongoing.

In June 2024, NCLEJ [filed a class action lawsuit](#) against the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) over the agency's failure to provide timely fair hearings to people receiving adverse decisions regarding their SNAP or Temporary Assistance (TA) benefits.

NCLEJ is currently litigating [Andersen v. Roberts](#) in New York's highest court. The issue before the Court of Appeals is whether disabled New Yorkers have the same right to receive credit for work performed as a requirement of receiving public assistance as non-disabled people do. Though a 2015 ruling held that Public Assistance recipients who are required to participate in the Work Experience Program are protected by the Fair Labor Standards Act and must receive credit for their work, New York State continues to deny such credit to people with disabilities.

NCLEJ continues to enforce the pathbreaking 2014 settlement in [Baez v. NYCHA](#), which obligates the New York City Housing Authority to ensure timely and effective remediation of toxic mold and moisture in public housing. The Baez consent decree, also the first of its kind in the nation, sets out detailed protocols mandating abatement of these deplorable living conditions, under the oversight of a court-appointed [Special Master](#), along with mold and data analyst experts, as a reasonable accommodation to public housing tenants' respiratory disabilities under the ADA.

NCLEJ reached a favorable settlement in our [Federal Title VII complaint](#) against Apple Metro, the NYC-area Applebee's franchisee, which exposed retaliation towards a worker who organized against discriminatory wages.

Apple Metro paid the full minimum wage of \$15 an hour, plus tips, to predominantly non-Black and white Applebee's workers in Midtown, while paying only the subminimum wage of \$10 an hour to predominantly Black and Brown South Bronx Applebee's workers. Following our legal challenge to their racially-discriminatory pay structure, Apple-Metro subsequently fired our client from his position at Applebee's in the South Bronx. In response, [we amended](#) our legal complaint to include a retaliatory filing charge. Under the settlement, Apple-Metro must notify former workers of their organizing rights under federal law. This victory is a powerful affirmation that retaliation against workers who speak out against workplace injustice will not stand.

As a member of the [13th Forward](#) Coalition's steering committee, NCLEJ is fighting for the passage of legislation that would abolish forced prison labor in New York State; raise wages for those inside, without unfair garnishments; protect worker health and safety; and create job training programs that provide real pathways to employment post-release. Our legislative agenda for 2025-2026 includes advocating for the passage of: the Prison Wage Act, which would guarantee incarcerated workers a minimum wage of half the state minimum wage; a Commissary Bill to place a cap on commissary prices; a statutory version of the No Slavery in NY Act to end slavery as punishment for a crime; the Fairness & Opportunity for Incarcerated Workers Act, which would create a Labor Board to ensure that work opportunities on the inside lead to real opportunities post-release, provide health and safety protections, and take away the preferred vendor status of Corcraft; and the Gate Money Bill to raise the amount of money that individuals receive upon release from \$40 to \$2,500.

In 2022, NCLEJ secured a [settlement](#) requiring the Suffolk County Department of Social Services to provide reasonable accommodations to persons with disabilities to allow them to access critically-needed SNAP, Medicaid, and emergency shelter services. NCLEJ continues to monitor compliance with the settlement.

In 2021, NCLEJ filed a [Title VI administrative complaint](#) with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies, challenging the racially discriminatory construction and operation of a fracked gas pipeline running through Black and Latino neighborhoods in Brooklyn. National Grid built the pipeline without notice to the impacted communities, without a public hearing, and without considering the environmental and public health consequences for the low-income people of color who live along the pipeline route, and whose rates will be raised to pay for it. An informal negotiation process to resolve the complaint is underway.



Our Community Partners

NCLEJ proudly partners with community organizations on the ground to advance our mission. We understand that the fight for economic, racial, and disability justice is not dictated by strategies created at a distance, but in collaboration with the local communities most affected by the problems we seek to address. Collaborating with local and community-led organizations improves our ability to provide practical and direct legal assistance and expands our geographic reach. In return, we boost the capacity of our partners to achieve their goals.

In recent years, we've partnered with many local organizations across the nation, including:

A Little Piece of Light	Legal Aid of Southeast and Central Ohio
Abolish Slavery National Network	Legal Aid Society of Cleveland
ACLU Foundation of Vermont	Legal Services of Central New York
ACLU of Oklahoma	Legal Services of Eastern Missouri
Alabama Appleseed	Make the Road NY
Alaska Legal Services	Manhattan Together
American Civil Liberties Union	Mi Casa Resiste
Asian American Legal Defense Fund	Migrant Justice
Atlanta Legal Aid Society	Milk with Dignity Standards Council
Black Lives Matter-Oklahoma	Mobilization for Justice
Black Love Resists in the Rust	NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
Brownsville Green Justice	NAACP of Oklahoma
Building with Dignity and Respect Standards Council	National Consumer Law Center
Center for Children's Advocacy	National Employment Law Project
Center for Constitutional Rights	National Employment Lawyers Association – NY
Center for Economic Justice	National Health Law Program
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	National Health Law Project
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha	National Immigration Law Center
Chinese Staff and Workers' Association	National Legal Aid and Defender Association
Citizen Action	National Mobilization Against Sweatshops
Coalition of Immokalee Workers	Neighborhood Legal Services
Color of Change	New Economy Project
Consumer Federation of America	New Jersey Institute for Social Justice
Consumer Reports	New York Legal Assistance Group
Disability Rights Louisiana	Northern Justice Project
Disability Rights Michigan	Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation
Don Bosco Workers Inc.	NYCLU
Empire Justice Center	Ocean Hill-Brownsville Coalition of Young Professionals
Empower Missouri	One Fair Wage
Environmental Advocates NY	People's Council
Fair Food Standards Council	Public Utilities Law Project
Flushing Workers Center	SC Appleseed
Focus on Labor Exploitation	Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Foundation for Liberating Minds	South Bronx Churches Sponsoring Committee, Inc.
Frack Outta Bk	Southern Poverty Law Center
Georgia Legal Services Program	Tennessee Justice Center
Indigenous Kinship Collective	The Action Lab
International Trade Workers Federation	The Legal Aid Society
Kentucky Equal Justice Center	Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy
Laundry Workers Centers	Western New York Law Center
Legal Aid of Society of Eastern Virginia	