

**LCR** | **LAWYERS FOR  
CIVIL RIGHTS**  
BOSTON

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**



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## MISSION & HISTORY

**Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR)** fosters equal opportunity and fights discrimination on behalf of people of color and immigrants. We engage in creative and courageous legal action, education, and advocacy in collaboration with law firms and community partners. Our organization is a leading hub for litigation, advocacy, and resistance to discrimination.

Our organization was founded in 1968 in the midst of riots, the aftermath of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the findings of the Kerner Commission report concluding that the nation was “moving toward two societies. One black, one white – separate and unequal.”

With funding and pro bono legal services contributed by Boston law firms, the organization became the first of eight independently funded and governed affiliates of the Washington, D.C.-based Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, a national organization formed at the request of President John F. Kennedy to enlist the private bar in providing free legal representation to address racial discrimination. In 1973, we became the first pro bono project of the Boston Bar Association (BBA) and the only Lawyers’ Committee in the country directly connected with a major bar association. Although the organization is now separately incorporated with its own 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, we continue to maintain strong ties to the private bar in Boston.

Membership by private law firms still forms the working foundation of our organization. Member law firms fund a significant part of our annual operating expenses and provide millions of dollars in pro bono legal services by working closely with the organization. In this way, for decades, we have harnessed the resources and talent of Boston’s leading law firms to secure and protect civil rights.

Over the years, our organization has also grown; adding new projects and initiatives to respond to the changing face of discrimination locally, regionally, and nationally. While working closely with an ever-increasing number of diverse community partners, we remain true to our core mission to challenge and eradicate all forms of discrimination.

In 2018, we celebrated our 50th anniversary and we also rebranded. The U.S. Congress marked this landmark occasion with a Congressional Resolution honoring our organization and 50 years of impactful work. The Boston City Council also issued a resolution declaring October 18 as Civil Rights and Economic Justice Day in Boston.

The struggle continues, but the future is bright. Lawyers for Civil Rights will continue advancing justice and equality for decades to come.



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

With gratitude and pride, I work alongside a team of legal warriors who are courageously and creatively making history in communities and courtroom. Every day, this team advances civil rights by litigating precedent-setting cases; engaging in innovative legal and policy advocacy; leading comprehensive community engagement; reducing health disparities; and closing racial and gender wealth equity gaps. Our team is growing, our work is expanding, and our impact is reverberating locally, regionally, and nationally.

### **None of this is possible without you.**

This year, we have faced new challenges with attacks on civil rights impacting diversity, access to education, and an equitable pandemic recovery. But our legal warriors have persisted with courage and creativity to confront discrimination. Some highlights:

- We're leading the fight to ensure that colleges don't exclude students of color by seeking an end to legacy and donor admissions preferences. On a parallel track, we are also working to expand access to vocational education opportunities for historically underserved students.
- We're defending the rights of migrants, from securing humanitarian protections, to representing families flown to Martha's Vineyard.
- We're protecting hate crime victims and fostering police transparency and accountability.
- We're providing legal support to hundreds of low-income patients to promote health equity, and supporting thousands of small businesses to help close the wealth gap.

In 2024, we'll continue to change laws and lives with a growing team leading the way towards health justice, police accountability, fair elections, education equity, and wealth-building. This fight is long and the victories are hard-won, but our movement and impact are growing.

Here's to moving forward without fear – and without fail.

**Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Esq.**

Executive Director

Lawyers for Civil Rights (LCR)



## IN THE NEWS

# EDUCATION DEPT. OPENS CIVIL RIGHTS INQUIRY INTO HARVARD'S LEGACY ADMISSIONS

NEW YORK TIMES, JULY 25, 2023

“It is imperative that the federal government act now to eliminate this unfair barrier that systematically disadvantages students of color.”

- Michael Kippins, LCR Litigation Fellow

Learn More:



# THREE VENDORS CLAIM DISCRIMINATION BY FANEUIL HALL MARKETPLACE MANAGEMENT

BOSTON GLOBE, SEPTEMBER 21, 2023

“Faneuil Hall is one of Boston’s most historically significant landmarks, a symbol of freedom from oppression, and a major tourist attraction for the City. Lawyers for Civil Rights cannot and will not tolerate any improper targeting of its minority-owned businesses.”

- Jacob Love, LCR Staff Attorney



Learn More:



# RON DESANTIS CONTINUES TO USE MIGRANTS AS POLITICAL PROPS

MSNBC, JUNE 8, 2023

Learn More:



“This is a class-action suit filed on behalf of all immigrants who are induced to travel across state lines through fraud and misrepresentation on the part of Governor DeSantis and his co-conspirators.”

- Oren Sellstrom, LCR Litigation Director





## RACIAL JUSTICE

**Through sustained litigation and advocacy, LCR continued as one of the leading civil rights organizations in the country.**

### ENDING LEGACY PREFERENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Within days of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision limiting affirmative action in higher education, LCR filed a federal civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (DOE OCR), challenging Harvard’s discriminatory practice of giving preferential treatment in the admissions process to applicants with familial ties to wealthy donors and alumni (legacies). LCR filed the complaint on behalf of three community organizations—**Chica Project**, **African Community Economic Development of New England (ACEDONE)**, and the **Greater Boston Latino Network**—alleging that the donor and legacy admissions preferences systematically disadvantage applicants of color.

LCR’s groundbreaking complaint garnered media attention worldwide, sparking a national conversation and leading numerous colleges and universities—including Wesleyan University, Virginia Tech, University of Virginia, Occidental College, and University of Minnesota Twin Cities—to voluntarily abandon their use of legacy preferences.

DOE OCR also announced that it has opened an investigation into Harvard’s use of these preferences. The investigation is ongoing. In October, LCR participated in a **Congressional Briefing** on the issue in Washington, D.C.



## DEMOCRATIZING ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL TECH SCHOOLS

LCR is advocating for equity in the admissions process of career vocational technical education (CVTE) high schools, with a specific focus on addressing the exclusion of students of color, English language learners, and students with disabilities. In February 2023, LCR filed a federal civil rights complaint on behalf of the **Vocational Education Justice Coalition (VEJC)** with the U.S. Department of Education, highlighting the systematic and disproportionate exclusion of

students due to the selective admission criteria used by CVTE schools. Far too often, the CVTE admissions process resembles private school selectivity rather than enrollment in public schools that should serve all students equally.

Since filing the complaint, LCR and VEJC have pressed the matter legislatively as well, including testimony before the Massachusetts Legislature's Joint Committee on Education.

### **Vocational Education Justice Coalition (VEJC) Members**

Black Educators Alliance of Massachusetts  
Brockton Interfaith Community  
Center for Law and Education (CLE)  
Citizens for Public Schools  
Collaborative Parent Leadership Network  
Conference American Federation of Teachers  
Greater Boston Building Trades Council  
Greater Boston Latino Network  
La Colaborativa  
Lawyers for Civil Rights  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
Massachusetts Communities Action Network  
Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance  
Massachusetts Teachers Association  
NAACP - New England Area  
North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters  
Pioneer Valley Project  
Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts  
United Interfaith Action  
Worcester Interfaith

# MASS. NEEDS MORE VOC-TECH SCHOOLS — AND A FAIRER WAY FOR STUDENTS TO GET INTO THEM

BOSTON GLOBE, FEBRUARY 8, 2023

“There is a good deal of political rhetoric these days around building more housing, fixing the MBTA, and dealing with crumbling infrastructure — but not nearly enough effort is being exerted on producing the workers who can get that done... the least the state’s vocational education system can provide is fairness — and that falls right back on state education officials doing the right thing and mandating an open lottery admissions system.”

- Boston Globe Editorial Board

Learn More:



## DISMANTLING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

After a Black nine-year-old child with special needs was handcuffed by police and forcibly removed from his classroom, LCR and pro bono counsel from **Anderson & Kreiger LLP** sent demand letters to Walpole Public Schools and the Walpole Police Department, demanding wide-ranging reforms and an apology for the student. Following a dysregulation episode in his classroom, the child was placed in an ambulance with his arms and legs restrained, and taken to an adult psychiatric ward, where he was held in police custody. He was released only after being subjected to an evaluation, which determined that he was not a threat to himself or others. LCR continues to seek justice for the young child and his family.

## PROTECTING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

The U.S. Supreme Court’s 2023 affirmative action decision put diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts at the forefront of a national discussion. To respond to increasing calls for community legal education and to combat misinformation, LCR created a practical and legal guide to DEI. With pro bono assistance from **Goodwin Procter LLP**, our guide provides school administrators, school boards, teachers, parents, and students with the tools they need to maintain a safe educational environment. It streamlines complex legal principles into an easy-to-understand guide, including a “Frequently Asked Questions” section. This accessible resource—praised as “super helpful” by the Superintendent of a major school district—will continue to advance DEI principles in public school education.



*Congressional Briefing*

## ENDING HAIRSTYLE DISCRIMINATION

LCR took a stand against discriminatory hairstyle policies after three Black female middle school basketball players were told by a white referee that they could not play in an upcoming game unless they tied back their long box braids. LCR issued a demand letter to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)—an organization that creates and enforces high school athletic rules—demanding immediate action. An NFHS rule limits the use of hair adornments in school athletic events, but the referee in Clinton, Massachusetts, only applied the rule to the three Black players, allowing white players with similarly long hair to play irrespective of the rule. This matter demonstrates continued bias against Black hairstyles, despite Massachusetts’ Crown Act legislation prohibiting this type of discrimination.



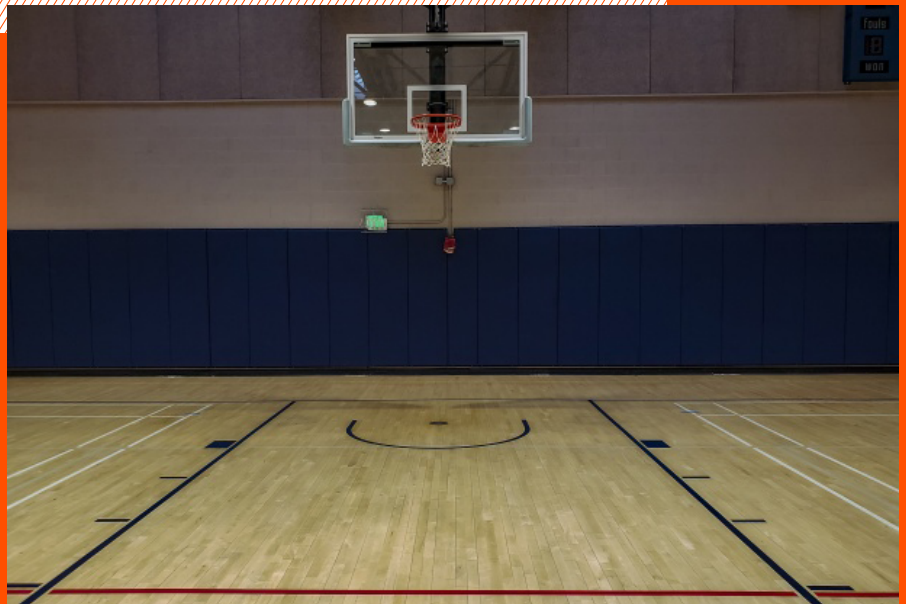
# ATTORNEYS CALL ON HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS AGENCY TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST BLACK ATHLETES' HAIRSTYLES

BOSTON GLOBE, SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

**"It's infuriating to see how Black children continue to be punished for simply existing, when they deserve the same space to formulate their identities and grow, just like any other child."**

**- Erika Richmond, LCR Litigation Fellow**

Learn More:



## ROOTING OUT BIAS IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

In a groundbreaking opinion examining the role of bias in the judicial system, Massachusetts' highest court concluded that a Black Muslim man's right to counsel was violated when he was represented by a racist and Islamophobic attorney. In *Commonwealth v. Dew*, the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) held that animus constitutes an inherent conflict of interest entitling defendants to a new trial. The SJC ruling affirmed arguments made by LCR and pro bono counsel from **Foley & Lardner LLP** in an amicus brief filed on behalf of the **Council on American-Islamic Relations–Massachusetts, Muslim Justice League, Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys, Hispanic National Bar Association, Prisoners' Legal Services of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Justice Resource Institute, and Citizens for Juvenile Justice.**

## PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC SAFETY AGENCIES

Working with our community partner, the **Boston Society of Vulcans**, a non-profit organization of Black and Latinx firefighters that expands access to public safety careers, LCR has long advocated for the development of a cadet program to promote diversity in the Boston Fire Department (BFD). As a predominantly white male institution, BFD has long failed to reflect the increasingly diverse community it serves. This year, the dream of a cadet program was realized. The 2023 inaugural cadet class—which represents more than 50% cadets of color—is the result of legislation passed in 2021 by the Massachusetts State House. This program is a key step in reducing systemic barriers and ensuring that these positions are available to all.



LCR and Boston Society of Vulcans

# POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

**Through litigation and policy advocacy, we uphold the dignity and rights of communities of color as they interact with law enforcement.**

As the rollout of police reform efforts continued in 2023, LCR worked to ensure effective implementation and outcomes for our client communities.

## CULTURALLY COMPETENT POLICE TRAINING

With pro bono counsel from **Fick & Marx LLP**, we continue to fight for culturally competent training for police interacting with people living with disabilities. LCR is representing the family of Terrence Coleman in federal court, seeking justice for the 31-year-old Black man with schizophrenia who was shot and killed by a Boston police officer in October 2016. The victim's family had called 9-1-1 for an ambulance, but the police arrived and killed Mr. Coleman.

## ENDING RACIAL PROFILING

Alongside pro bono counsel from **WilmerHale**, we successfully settled our federal court case on behalf of Marvin Henry, a Black father of four who was racially profiled, handcuffed, arrested, and detained on false suspicion of shoplifting in Needham. The settlement secured damages for Mr. Henry and systemic reforms and training to ensure that people of color are treated fairly by law enforcement.

Joining forces with pro bono counsel from **Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP**, we are advocating for Donovan Johnson, a 20-year-old Black man who was racially profiled, illegally stopped, and forcefully arrested within view of his home by Arlington police. Police officers were in pursuit of a known white male offender, yet accosted Mr. Johnson instead. This case is currently pending in federal court.



*Donovan Johnson*

LCR also answered the community's call for action after a racial profiling incident in Newton at one of the nation's most famous road races, the 2023 **Boston Marathon**. After a racially diverse group of spectators was surrounded by police using a military-style formation, LCR took immediate action. LCR also testified about the need for reform during public meetings with Newton officials.

## TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

Transparency remains a key ingredient to effective police reform. Regular and timely access to public records can illuminate inequities across police practices, including employment. LCR and our pro bono counsel from **Birnbaum & Godkin** achieved a major litigation victory this year, overhauling the public records practices of the Boston Police Department (BPD). Our lawsuit challenged BPD's longstanding practice of failing to produce public records. The settlement requires BPD to eliminate its existing public records backlog and adopt reforms to ensure timely response to public records requests. This is a major victory for transparency and accountability.

# IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

**From fighting for the Martha's Vineyard migrants, to seeking justice for Reina Carolina Morales Rojas, our advocacy is effective and impactful.**

In 2023, LCR continued to champion immigrants' rights.

## **LIMITING ICE PRESENCE**

In January 2023, LCR achieved a significant victory as the Barnstable County Sheriff's Office terminated its "287(g) agreement" with U.S. Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). This agreement had wrongly entangled local law enforcement with federal immigration authority sowing mistrust in the community and draining taxpayer dollars. The sheriff's decision came in response to LCR's lawsuit, *Russo v. Cummings*, in partnership with **Rights Behind Bars (RBB)** and the **Cape Cod Coalition for Safe Communities**, challenging the legality of the agreement with ICE. As a result of this lawsuit and prior cases won by LCR, all 287(g) agreements between ICE and Sheriff's Offices have now been terminated in New England.



Community Outreach in Mattapan



## MARTHA'S VINEYARD

LCR's legal warriors continue litigating *Alianza Americas v. DeSantis*, challenging the infamous scheme of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and his accomplices to transport nearly 50 Venezuelan migrants to Martha's Vineyard under false pretenses. Working with pro bono co-counsel from **Foley Hoag LLP**, our legal warriors have filed hundreds of pages of briefing before the federal court this year. In June 2023, DeSantis struck again. This time he preyed on over 30 migrants and flew them to Sacramento, California. As in Martha's Vineyard, no arrangements for their arrival were made. The migrants were simply abandoned on the doorsteps of a local church. Once again, LCR's legal warriors took immediate action, lending legal assistance to allies on the ground in Sacramento, including **Sacramento Area Congregations Together (Sacramento ACT)**, and sharing lessons we learned from community-based efforts following the Martha's Vineyard flights.

In September 2023, we reunited with many of our clients on Martha's Vineyard, for the world premiere of **Martha's Vineyard v. DeSantis**, a documentary telling the human stories behind the headlines. The 45-minute film was produced for MSNBC Films by Oscar-nominated filmmakers Kate Davis and David Heilbroner. The film is the latest installment of "The Turning Point" documentary series from Executive Producer Trevor Noah. Following the screening of the documentary to a standing room only audience, a panel discussion featured LCR attorneys and community partners. The film aired on MSNBC and Peacock.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR DACA RECIPIENTS

In *Juarez v. SoFi*, LCR and pro bono counsel from **Outten & Golden** successfully resolved a nation-wide class action lawsuit against SoFi, a major online personal finance company, to help secure equal access to lending products such as student loans and home mortgages for DACA recipients.

In another comment letter submitted to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, we supported a proposed rule expanding affordable healthcare for DACA recipients, highlighting how the measure would reduce costs to the healthcare system, enhance health equity, and benefit the economy.



*Martha's Vineyard v. DeSantis Film Screening*

Film Trailer:



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## EQUITABLE POLICE PROTECTION FOR IMMIGRANTS

We also advocated for equitable police protection for immigrants, joining forces with **Latinos Unidos en Massachusetts (LUMA)** to fight for **Reina Carolina Morales Rojas**, a Latina woman who disappeared in East Boston around Thanksgiving in 2022. The Boston Police Department failed to publicly announce the disappearance for six weeks. The police also failed to conduct a timely and thorough investigation surrounding the disappearance. For many immigrant women who have fled domestic violence and femicide in Central America seeking safety in Boston, the fact that a mother can go missing and that law enforcement won't act fast enough is terrifying. LCR will continue to hold the police accountable and provide legal support to Ms. Rojas' family, including her two children in El Salvador.

While in El Salvador, our legal warriors also met with the family of Reina Carolina Morales Rojas. The family reflected on the magnitude of the botched police response to the disappearance in East Boston. The lack of any meaningful developments compounds the tragedy. The family wonders if the police would have taken the disappearance more seriously if Reina was affluent or white.



*Family of Reina Carolina Morales Rojas in El Salvador*





## LEARNING JOURNEY TO EL SALVADOR

In August 2023, LCR conducted a fact-finding trip to El Salvador aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the political and social conditions driving migration to the United States. During our visit, LCR connected directly with human rights organizations and journalists, including **Cristosal, Alharaca, El Faro, Revista Factum, and Revista La Brújula**. While gang violence has seen a significant decline in recent years, many Salvadorans continue to grapple with the harsh realities of poverty. They are also living under the growing threat of authoritarianism.

## WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

LCR is successfully fighting for immigrants' rights in the workplace. In October 2023, alongside **Justice at Work**, we successfully settled a workplace discrimination case before the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD), bringing about workplace reforms at a New Bedford fishery after years of pervasive sexual harassment against our client, a Black Cape Verdean woman.

## HUMANITARIAN PAROLE FOR HAITIANS

At the national level, LCR filed an amicus brief on behalf of **Haitian-Americans United (HAU)**, supporting the federal government’s humanitarian parole program for nationals from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. We emphasized the vital work of HAU in helping people flee life-threatening conditions in Haiti to be reunited with family and highlighted the substantial economic contributions of Haitians upon arrival in the United States.

We also submitted advocacy letters on federal immigration issues. In one comment letter to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, we highlighted flaws in the immigration system impacting Haitians. Problems arise due to the failure of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to translate critical information and materials into Haitian Creole, as well as the government's use of a flawed and racist app: CBPOne. During the required photo upload process, the app fails to recognize individuals with darker skin tones.

**BizGrow provided free legal assistance, business support, and technical assistance to over 1,500 minority-owned and women-owned businesses in 2023—ensuring they encounter fewer obstacles and more opportunities.**

## VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING

BizGrow virtual offerings ensure entrepreneurs have the resources they need to thrive at every stage of their growth. From entity formation to winding down a business, our virtual workshops provide the necessary legal and technical assistance to successfully own and operate a small business. Led by community leaders and experts in their field, BizGrow's programming offers both education and networking opportunities for entrepreneurs. BizGrow receives powerful pro bono support from the region's leading law firms, including **Goodwin Procter, WilmerHale, Ropes & Gray, Kirkland & Ellis, Nixon Peabody, and Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.**

In 2023, BizGrow has continued to grow community partnerships across Massachusetts and Rhode Island. We have led legal workshops in collaboration with organizations such as **Hope & Main, Commonwealth Kitchen, Launch Space, Dream Venture Labs, Community Valley CDC, Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge College, Empower Children for Success, Small Business Strong, Boston Impact Initiative, Amplify Latinx, Harvard Ed Portal, EforAll, and the Rhode Island Black Business Association.**

In addition to our expert-led workshops, BizGrow provides one-on-one support for entrepreneurs during biweekly legal clinics. Clients have the

opportunity to meet with specialized attorneys who can provide specific technical advice and guidance on how to move forward with their business issues. Through partnerships with pro bono firms such as **Goodwin Procter, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, Weil, Gotshal & Manges, and Nutter McClennen & Fish,** and community partners such as the **Kierstein Business Library & Innovation Center at the Boston Public Library,** our clients speak with experts on issues such as intellectual property, contracts, employment, real estate, and taxes.

Expanding on our work with community partners, in 2023 BizGrow joined forces with **Boston Impact Initiative** and the **Massachusetts LGBT Chamber of Commerce** on two joint technical assistance programs. These unique opportunities allowed for small businesses to not only get the legal help they need but also provide them business coaching and financial mentoring to take a more holistic approach to their small business needs. These important connections and resources allow our clients to have support in a timely manner, grow their professional networks, and accomplish their business goals.





## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

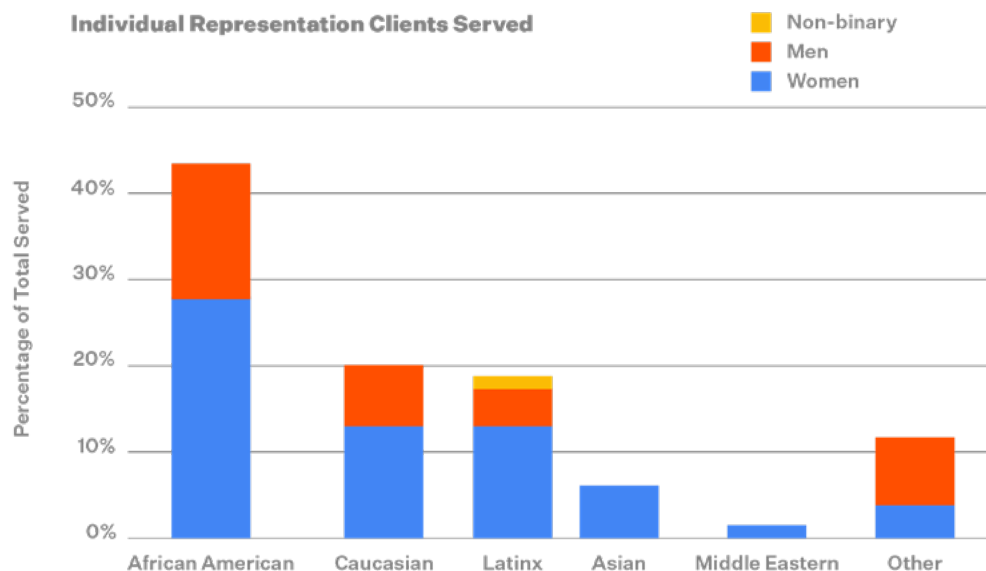
**Roundhead Brewing Company** is a taproom, restaurant, and brewery owned by Luis Espinoza and Craig Panzer. As owners of Massachusetts' first Latino-owned brewery, they launched their business in the diverse and neighborhood-oriented area of Hyde Park. For Roundhead Brewing, the business is more than beer. It is about building community and bringing people together: “Great beer is just the starting point for our mission: *Cerveza que reúne*.” The space is now home to the 5-barrel brewery, a taproom with options to host private events, and fresh baked pizza. The owners contacted BizGrow for assistance with trademarking, corporate entity formation, and commercial leasing issues. The BizGrow team was able to match the owners with attorneys at **Morgan, Lewis & Bockius** and **Choate Hall & Stewart** to get their legal needs met and help the business thrive.

# CONNECTING AND EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS

- Pro Bono Legal Services
- Office Hours
- Legal Clinics
- Workshops & Technical Assistance
- WinterFest
- BizGrow Conference
- Arts & Culture Entrepreneurship Series
- Partnership with Boston Impact Initiative



Individual Representation Clients Served



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## THE BIZGROW CONFERENCE

In July 2023 we held our annual BizGrow Conference, a full-day event geared towards minority, immigrant, and women entrepreneurs and small business owners. For the first time since the pandemic, we were back at Suffolk Law School, holding classroom-style workshops throughout the day taught by industry experts, and coordinating one-on-one legal assistance for over 250 entrepreneurs through the generous support of over 150 pro bono attorneys. Thank you to all our participating law firms: **Foley Hoag, WilmerHale, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, Morrison & Foerster, Ropes & Gray, Kirkland & Ellis, Brown Rudnick, Nutter McClennen & Fish, Goulston & Storrs, Goodwin Procter, McCarter & English, Anderson & Krieger, Nixon Peabody, and Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.**

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## BIZGROW WINTERFEST

The winter season can be a season of high productivity for small businesses, so in 2023 we launched the first annual BizGrow WinterFest. This unique virtual event matches pro bono attorneys with clients who need legal help – getting them assistance immediately and jumpstarting their businesses. At this one-day event held in February 2023, we helped over 150 entrepreneurs through the generous support of our participating firms: **Goodwin Procter, Kirkland & Ellis, WilmerHale, Nixon Peabody, Foley Hoag, Latham & Watkins, Ropes & Gray, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, Nutter McClennen & Fish,** and **Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.**

## FREE INDIVIDUAL REPRESENTATION

As pandemic recovery continues, and with inflation and growing concerns about an economic downturn dominating headlines, our resilient entrepreneurs continue to thrive, opening, expanding, and adapting their small businesses. Through the generous pro bono support of our partner law firms, we match small business owners with attorneys who provide them with free transactional legal assistance. Common small business legal issues include entity formation, contracts, intellectual property, and employment issues. Many of our law firm partners provide direct legal representation to our clients, including **Goodwin Procter, Brown Rudnick, McCarter & English, Weil, Gotshal & Manges, Morgan, Lewis & Bockius, Morrison & Foerster, Foley Hoag, Goulston & Storrs, WilmerHale, Fish & Richardson, Kirkland & Ellis, Ropes & Gray, Latham & Watkins, Choate Hall & Stewart, Foley & Lardner,** and **Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo.**

## CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

When a small community business needs urgent legal assistance, BizGrow is there. After receiving a desperate message that a woman-owned, local yoga and somatic coaching studio in Greater Boston had received a cease-and-desist letter over a trademark issue, and was in danger of closing, the BizGrow team sprang into action. The owner was intimidated and didn't know what to do. BizGrow was able to help parse the language of the letter, explain what it meant, and then find pro bono attorneys to negotiate a name change for the business. Once the business successfully changed its name, a second group of pro bono attorneys secured by BizGrow helped trademark the new business name. This business is now going strong, thanks to BizGrow.

## ARTS & CULTURAL ECONOMY

As the cultural economy of Massachusetts continues to grow and expand, BizGrow stepped up in 2023 to make sure that minority, immigrant, and women-owned small businesses do not get left behind. In Fall 2023, we launched the **Arts & Culture Series**. This 4-week course provided aspiring and current small business owners and entrepreneurs in the creative economy with the legal foundation to successfully run a business. Participants learned from experts who presented on topics such as entity formation, intellectual property, fundraising, and contracts. Over 70 aspiring artists and entrepreneurs built skills and networks through this new series. In 2024, BizGrow will refine and expand the series to continue meeting the community's needs.

## RAPID SMALL BUSINESS RESPONSE

BizGrow is always innovating to meet the needs of the small business community. This year brought numerous changes and challenges to the business landscape, and BizGrow responded. When Silicon Valley Bank and First Republic Bank collapsed, we organized an emergency response, including community briefings led by the BizGrow team and local banking experts to help assess the situation on the ground, assuage the concerns of the community, and provide resources in a time of uncertainty. In a similar way, when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in 303 Creative, a public accommodation case, BizGrow responded with a helpful guide for small businesses explaining the ruling and its impact. BizGrow also produced a series of toolkits for small business owners to provide invaluable knowledge on common legal issues small businesses face.





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## SMALL BUSINESS MENTORING

In 2023, the BizGrow team also expanded its role as business mentors through **Santander's Cultivate Small Business Mentors** program. We provided technical legal expertise to businesses in virtual sessions. BizGrow also partnered with **Junior Achievement of Greater Boston**, a youth-focused organization, to mentor a cohort of high school students for six months to help them launch a small business. BizGrow staff mentored this diverse cohort on a range of topics, including how to start a business, crowdfunding, using 3D modeling to create products, and fostering collaboration. After carefully deliberating on a product, the students chose to make a set of pens with 3D printed pen grips. The students observed that their fellow high school students were too often dealing with wrist and hand pain when using pens to take notes in school. To fix these issues the students focused on making pen grips that were ergonomic, practical, and affordable. In this manner, BizGrow is at the forefront of helping to close the wealth gap through entrepreneurship and innovation.

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## SUPPORTING MINORITY-OWNED BUSINESSES

LCR continues to fight for equity and inclusion for minority-owned businesses through advocacy and legal representation. These businesses are resilient in the face of adversity, including the lingering effects of the pandemic and systemic exclusion from public contracting opportunities.

In February 2023, LCR filed a federal lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) for its failure to investigate allegations of systemic exclusion of Black-owned and Latinx-owned businesses from the City of Boston's public contracting opportunities. This lawsuit, representing the **Black Economic Council of Massachusetts (BECMA)**, **Greater Boston Latino Network (GBLN)**, and **Amplify Latinx**, originated from a Title VI complaint concerning Boston's discriminatory municipal contracting practices. Our legal action seeks to compel an investigation, emphasizing the DOJ's crucial role in ensuring that recipients of federal funds do not engage in racial discrimination.

Race-conscious programs designed to correct longstanding barriers for marginalized communities have been under attack, and Massachusetts is not immune. As part of a COVID-19 economic relief bill, the State Legislature enacted the Inclusive Recovery Grant Program—a grant program designed to alleviate the effects of the pandemic on under-served businesses. The program was challenged in federal court by two white, male business owners claiming reverse discrimination. On behalf of **BECMA** and **Amplify Latinx**, LCR moved to intervene in the case to protect the interests of minority business enterprises. Unfortunately,

before our motion could be heard, state officials voluntarily changed the grant criteria to eliminate the focus on minority-owned businesses. We will continue to fight to preserve legislative protections aimed at ensuring equitable access to economic opportunity for minority-owned businesses.

LCR's persistent advocacy for minority-owned businesses in Massachusetts has caught the attention of other community groups in New England, including the **Rhode Island Black Business Association (RIBBA)**. Rhode Island's state agencies have a history of discriminatory practices that mirror the issues that persist in Boston: systemic exclusion of minority-owned businesses from contracting opportunities. In support of **RIBBA** and their continued fight for the advancement of minority-owned businesses, LCR sent a demand letter to Rhode Island officials emphasizing the persistent disparities in contracting opportunities and offering both race-based and race-neutral solutions to alleviate disparities. LCR is dedicated to solution-oriented collaborations that facilitate business stability and prosperity for owners from historically marginalized communities.

Finally, LCR worked with our community partner, **African Community Economic Development of New England (ACEDONE)** to represent Roxbury-based small businesses owned by immigrant women of color who were threatened with displacement by a deceptive landlord vying for approval of a mixed-use project. With pro bono assistance from **Anderson & Kreiger LLP**, we successfully defeated the eviction cases, allowing these small businesses to stay in Nubian Square.



## Working at the intersection of healthcare and the law, HealthJustice demonstrably improves health outcomes by helping our clients stabilize.

Through our HealthJustice Project, LCR provides free, life-changing legal support that empowers low-income clients to address the social determinants of health impacting their lives.

The heart of HealthJustice is our longstanding collaboration with community health centers and community-based organizations, which refer patients navigating health issues directly to LCR attorneys for free legal assistance with housing matters, disability benefits, and immigration issues. These partnerships demonstrate the power of holistic support in tackling systemic and entrenched health disparities. Doctors, lawyers, and community advocates work together to address pervasive disparities in health outcomes and access to healthcare resulting from race, language, income, and immigration status. This work is more critical now than ever, as low-income communities of color face the disproportionate and long-lasting impacts of the pandemic and continue to experience an uneven recovery.

In 2023, HealthJustice joined forces with **Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center** to deepen our work addressing health disparities. This new partnership will serve to combat health inequities in communities of color and low income communities by embedding attorneys into clinical care settings, and helping families access resources, overcome barriers to stability, and significantly improve health outcomes over the long-term.



*Centro Presente and LCR*



We also joined forces with **La Colaborativa** to serve more than 250 individuals. Attorneys met with clients on-site in Chelsea providing one-on-one direct legal advice and representation on housing, disability, and immigration issues.

HealthJustice launched a series of community-based legal clinics designed to empower individuals and families. The legal clinics focused on vulnerable populations, including survivors of domestic violence, victims of crime, and people who have fled persecution abroad. The clinics were developed in partnership with **La Colaborativa**, **Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI)**, **Rosie's Place**, and **Margarita Muñiz Academy**. In the midst of the unfolding migrant crisis, the clinics provided free legal assistance to more than 200 newly arrived migrants.



*La Colaborativa and LCR*



*Fall into HealthJustice*

In October, we launched our inaugural **Fall into HealthJustice** event in East Boston helping more than 50 people simultaneously access health and legal services. In partnership with **Whittier Street Health Center** and the **Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences**, we provided medical screenings, physicals, COVID-19 and flu vaccines, and other healthcare services at the **Veronica Robles Cultural Center**. As patients waited for providers, LCR attorneys provided free legal consultations and immigration assistance. This innovative community intervention created a highly successful and impactful one-stop shop in East Boston.

## HOUSING



*LCR in Roxbury with Community Leaders*

To combat the affordable housing crisis and racial inequities in housing, LCR led the charge in defending the Commonwealth’s MBTA Communities Zoning Law in 2023.

LCR took pioneering action throughout 2023 to support the MBTA Communities Zoning Law—a critical new statute designed to reduce the “exclusionary zoning” and stratospheric housing prices currently plaguing families in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts is mired in an affordable housing crisis and remains highly residentially segregated by race. These issues inflict disproportionate harm on families of color and low-income families. One of the biggest problems is exclusionary zoning: the practice of inhibiting affordable housing development in favor of expensive single-family homes.

Massachusetts recently enacted the MBTA Communities Zoning Law to curtail exclusionary zoning and its negative effects. The law requires that 177 cities and towns near MBTA service “shall have” a zoning district where more affordable multi-family housing can be built.

Many predominantly white and affluent suburbs have resisted the Law. Citing racially coded concerns for preserving their “character” and “New England charm,” these towns prefer to maintain their exclusionary status quo. LCR sent demand letters to get towns to fall in line.

By August 2023, two towns—Holden and Berkley—still refused to comply. Public officials in Holden publicly declared that compliance with the law was optional despite the statute’s mandatory language.

LCR and **Brown Rudnick LLP** filed a groundbreaking lawsuit in August 2023 to prevent Holden’s interpretation from sparking a domino effect and causing other towns to resist. The suit—brought on behalf of the **Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance**, a homeless family, and Holden residents—seeks a court ruling that compliance with the law is mandatory. This effort has already had an impact: Berkley filed an action plan within hours of our lawsuit. The case against Holden is ongoing.

— IN THE NEWS —

# HOLDEN WANTS TO HOLD THE LINE ON HOUSING. IT MUSTN'T WIN THE FIGHT.

BOSTON GLOBE, AUGUST 10, 2023

“Holden has made itself the poster child for exclusion, for the kind of ‘not in my backyard’ mindset that has helped make housing the scarce—and expensive—commodity it is in Massachusetts today. But Holden has had plenty of company along the way. This see-you-in-court moment shouldn’t be necessary, but in fact it couldn’t come at a better time.”

-Boston Globe Editorial

Learn More:





## COMMUNITY OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

In 2023, LCR continued to nurture deep community connections. Through our community engagements, we connected with over 5,000 families.

We expanded our work with longstanding allies such as the **Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI)**, **African Community Economic Development of New England (ACEDONE)**, and **Rosie's Place** offering pro bono assistance through community-based legal clinics. We also fostered new creative interventions such as providing free legal support to low-income mothers at community baby showers hosted by the **Eliot Family Resource Center**. By embedding LCR's free legal resources in community-based events, we are dismantling barriers to legal aid and expanding access to justice.

We are also responding directly to community needs. For example, we hosted a series of know-your-rights workshops to help immigrants navigate the process of obtaining drivers licenses under a new state law. Through these workshops, we helped hundreds of people. In this manner, we are educating and empowering individuals and families while keeping LCR in touch with the pulse of our client communities. This work often informs future legal action.

Through in-person workshops and virtual forums, LCR has strengthened its role as a convenor building bridges across diverse communities. In partnership with **Roxbury Community College**, we convened dozens of community leaders and organizations in response to an unprecedented spike in identity-based hate crimes.

We also organized our first annual Civil Rights Summit bringing together LCR's pro bono attorneys and community partners to explore opportunities for collaboration and partnership at the intersection of racial justice, immigration, public health, and entrepreneurship.



*LCR's Civil Rights Summit*

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## LAUREN SAMPSON FELLOWSHIP



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We are committed to honoring the memory and legacy of our colleague **Lauren Sampson**. As part of that effort, we recently created a legal fellowship dedicated to deepening and expanding Lauren's impactful work from housing to climate justice and beyond. The **Lauren Sampson Fellowship** will nurture the next generation of civil rights leaders to help fully realize Lauren's vision of justice and equity.

The Lauren Sampson Fellowship is dedicated to the memory of LCR's legal warrior Lauren Sampson, who passed away on January 30, 2022. Lauren was a distinguished civil rights attorney and community leader.

Through the creation of the Lauren Sampson Fellowship, LCR will honor Lauren's powerful legacy while growing and broadening her inspiring work. The fellowship will also help inspire the next generation of civil rights attorneys and leaders.

If you, your firm, or your organization are interested in supporting the fellowship, please contact LCR's Executive Director Iván Espinoza-Madrigal ([iespinoza@lawyersforcivilrights.org](mailto:iespinoza@lawyersforcivilrights.org)) so that we may add you to our donor list.

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