



A YEAR OF IMPACT
2024-2025

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The Bronx Defenders



The Bronx Defenders

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Founded in 1997, **The Bronx Defenders** is a public defender nonprofit that has developed a nationally recognized model of representation called **holistic defense**, which provides people with teams of lawyers, social workers, and advocates to defend them zealously in court while addressing the underlying drivers and enmeshed penalties of legal system involvement.

Since opening our doors, we have grown into an organization of more than 400 staff members defending nearly 20,000 New Yorkers each year in criminal, family, civil, and immigration proceedings who face incarceration, family separation, eviction, and deportation, among other devastating consequences.



Today we are reimagining the role of public defense even further, using community organizing and engagement, legislative advocacy, and impact litigation to work with the communities we represent to bring about long-lasting systemic change.

We also share our model and lessons learned with current and future public defenders. We run two legal clinics at NYC law schools and train public defenders from one end of the country to the next on how to move to a holistic model of representation.



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



2,100

families with over
4,400 children
reunited or steered
clear of separation



9,362

people **secured their**
release from jail or
avoided incarceration
altogether



987

people stayed in
their homes,
preventing **455**
evictions



\$750,000

in **personal property**
returned from
state seizure



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



\$100,000

in **one-time funding** for transportation, rent, medication, baby supplies, and funerals provided to those we represent



\$3 million

in **public benefits** such as transitional housing, jobs, and others obtained or preserved, averaging \$875 per person



185

people obtained **legal status** to keep families and communities together



2,600

people received **social work** support



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



Governor Hochul tried to make it harder for New Yorkers to see all the evidence in their cases, known as discovery. We **co-led a statewide coalition that blocked the Governor's proposal**, protecting every New Yorkers' rights to a fair trial and due process.

Together with other NYC defenders, **we supported litigation that stopped the Mayor from restoring ICE offices on Rikers Island** and ensured solitary confinement remained banned in all NYC jails.



Photo Credit:
Abolish ICE NY-NJ



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



Photo Credit: Sarah Duggan

For decades, anonymous calls to government agencies have resulted in thousands of separated families and ruined lives. **Now, that's no longer the case, thanks to the incredible advocacy of our parent advocates and family defenders to change the law.**

Through stories from dozens of Black and Latine families, **our new report highlights, for the first time, the brutal impact of ACS's racism against children, their parents, and their families, and the lengths ACS will go to ignore its own policies, court orders, and the law.**



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



Through poetry, essays, and original artwork, we **brought together stories from Bronx youth** who have experienced foster care, incarceration, and family separation — inviting the public to see these harms through the eyes of those most impacted.

Our new Social Work Toolkit provides a **blueprint for how public defender offices can integrate social work** into their public defense practices, synthesizing our holistic defense model in a new and shareable format.



OUR IMPACT IN THE LAST YEAR



Three years ago, we launched the Bronx Cannabis Hub to help people who were criminalized by past marijuana usage to participate in the new legal cannabis market.



DISPENSARIES

Our latest impact report shows that for every \$1 invested to support the Hub’s inaugural cohort, a remarkable \$32 in tangible social and economic value was generated to the benefit all New Yorkers.

This finding underscores the power of our model to act as an economic justice accelerator in support of the State’s social equity in cannabis goals.



SUPPORT OUR WORK

The Bronx Defenders was founded on a simple premise – that our job is to reimagine what a public defender office can, and should do, for the people we represent.

Every day, we challenge the systemic forms of oppression that separate families, criminalize New Yorkers, and destabilize our communities for generations.

But we cannot do it without your help.



Reach out to development@bronxdefenders.org for further information.



DEFENDING NEW YORKERS

We defend nearly 20,000 Bronx residents each year across criminal, civil, family, and immigration cases—and reach thousands more through holistic advocacy, social work, and community-based services.



CIVIL ACTION

A sweeping array of civil punishments are triggered the moment someone faces arrest, deportation, or family separation. The people we represent risk losing their jobs, homes, income, property, and basic civil rights – struggles that can be more devastating and long-lasting than the charges themselves. This year, we helped 2,800 people obtain concrete benefits like maintaining their jobs, homes, income, property, and rights.



CRIMINAL DEFENSE

The Bronx is one of the most aggressively policed boroughs in New York City. As a result, we represent thousands of people each year, nearly 40% of whom are charged with low-level offenses such as shoplifting, traffic offenses, and drug possession. As part of our holistic approach, we spend time getting to know the people we represent and gaining a deeper understanding of their lives and needs.



FAMILY DEFENSE

As residents of the most underinvested borough in the city, families in the Bronx experience the highest rates of family policing and parent-child separation. We serve as the primary institutional provider defending parents and caretakers against the painful and unnecessary removals of their children in the Bronx. Together, our attorneys, social workers, and parent advocates provide the legal defense and support necessary to keep families together and interrupt generational cycles of family court involvement.



IMMIGRATION

Nearly a third of the residents of the Bronx were born outside of the United States, and many face the unprecedented threat of detention and deportation by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Our attorneys help people facing criminal, family, and civil proceedings make informed and strategic decisions to protect their rights. We are also one of the three public defender organizations leading the nation's first-ever universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation.



SOCIAL WORK

Effectively fighting for people facing legal charges requires knowing and understanding their goals and needs beyond those related to a single case or legal matter. Our Social Work Practice provides an understanding of people's lives and the challenges that are connected to their involvement in various legal systems. The expertise of our Masters-level social workers and non-legal advocates helps people secure positive case outcomes and address the issues that drove them into the legal system in the first place.



EARLY ADVOCACY

While traditional public defense comes into play once a case has already been filed, The Bronx Defenders' Early Defense team is an innovative program that helps identify and address legal issues *before* they become legal cases. We advocate for people during investigations by the family policing system (otherwise known as the NYC Administration for Children's Services), the NYPD, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement; connect people in danger of eviction with benefits and housing support; and work with immigrants to file affirmative applications to secure their status in this country. Through our 24-hour hotline and community intake system, we have built a proactive advocacy program that prevents legal system entanglement for those at risk.



SPECIAL DEFENSE PROJECTS

Through our holistic model, we are constantly innovating our defense work to better defend against the nuanced punishments of legal system entanglement. From defending adolescents to LGBTQ+ New Yorkers, to new parents, students in and out of jail, and people who are currently incarcerated, we are constantly tailoring our holistic defense model to better address the highly varied and nuanced needs of the people we represent.



TRANSFORMING LEGAL SYSTEMS

Our proximity to the legal system and the experiences of the people we represent compel us to fight for fairness, justice, and equity beyond the courtroom. As a result, we partner with people in the Bronx to identify systemic problems and leverage our collective expertise to develop long-term solutions.



POLICY ADVOCACY

Our policy experts collaborate closely with our practices and community engagement team so that our reform efforts are a comprehensive reflection of what Bronx residents need. Our policy advocacy work includes developing solutions to systemic injustices, coalition building, legislative drafting and consulting, lobbying, talking to the media, testifying before legislative bodies, and serving on bar committees and task forces.



IMPACT LITIGATION

Our Impact Litigation Practice seeks to identify, develop, and litigate challenges to systemic violations and injustices that affect the communities we represent, including racially discriminatory policing, government seizure of property, lack of access to justice and due process rights, curtailment of parental rights in family court proceedings, and immigration abuses.



NARRATIVE CHANGE

Systemic change happens when the right people, at the right time, are motivated to act. By leveraging our proximity to the legal systems we seek to change, we are constantly working in coalition with others to refine a compelling vision of justice, told through multiple channels and trusted voices, that grabs attention and inspires people to demand more for all New Yorkers.



SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

We are committed to supporting and partnering with the communities we represent. By working in coalition with Bronx-based leaders, we are contributing skills, expertise, and resources to bring about a world where Bronx residents are free from harmful legal entanglement and able to thrive.



ACCESSING PUBLIC BENEFITS

Our Community Intake team and Benefits advisors offer in-person meetings and hotline services with attorneys and non-attorney advocates to assess people's needs and provide meaningful referrals and support. This proactive advocacy has reached thousands of Bronx residents and, alongside the Early Defense team, helps identify and address legal issues before they become legal cases.



CLIENT EMERGENCY FUND

Almost one-third of Bronx residents live in poverty and cannot meet their basic needs. Based on direct requests from individuals, the Client Emergency Fund provides small monetary stipends in an effort to address these unmet needs. Over the last year, CEF provided \$100k in emergency funds for immediate needs, such as food, rent, and transportation, as well as many of which are closely related to people's cases. When needs are met, people obtain long-term stability and restore their sense of dignity.



BRONX LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZING CENTER (BLOC)

The Bronx Leadership & Organizing Center (BLOC) is a coalition of over forty Bronx-based organizations, co-founded by The Bronx Defenders, that seeks a future in which community members are inspired, educated, and elevated to take action to change their community. The BLOC is part of a larger effort funded by philanthropy to spur the development of new solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty and to promote dynamic leaders who will change the national conversation around social and economic mobility.



BRONX CANNABIS HUB

In partnership with our pro bono network, the Bronx Cannabis Hub provides clinical legal support for systems impacted people interested in joining the legal cannabis economy and serves as a clearinghouse for the resources and connections people will need to succeed. The Hub launched to help communities who had been disproportionately policed build generational wealth in the wake of the War on Drugs. The Hub screened over 600 people for the State's first batch of social equity licenses and helped forty submit applications to the program. Twenty-five of our cohort have received conditional licenses, and 10 have already opened licensed dispensaries.



TRAINING PUBLIC DEFENDERS

Every year, we mentor, train, and guide public defenders in New York City and beyond on our unique model of holistic defense through The Center for Holistic Defense, our flagship trial skills training program called Defenders Academy, and our various legal clinics.



THE CENTER FOR HOLISTIC DEFENSE

The Center for Holistic Defense is a national training resource center located at The Bronx Defenders that provides in-depth technical assistance to public defender offices across the country. Since its inception, the Center has trained public defender offices in over forty-one states and U.S. territories and twelve countries in holistic defense.



DEFENDERS ACADEMY

Defenders Academy is a unique trial skills program for public defenders and private attorneys across the country with a focus on performance. Our faculty includes actors, storytellers, voice coaches, and our experienced trial lawyers.



LAW SCHOOL CLINICS

The Bronx Defenders offers clinics at law schools in New York City to help train the next generation of public defenders. At Columbia Law School, students are trained in our nationally recognized model of holistic defense, while our Family Defense Practice exposes students at Cardozo School of Law to recognize the realities and challenges of the family policing system.



ANNUAL EVENTS



Community Block Party

Every summer, we share with Bronx community members a day of music, dance, free food, games, health and legal information, community advocacy, and much more.

ANNUAL EVENTS



Youth Justice Summit

Each year, Bronx youth host a summit for, and by, youth leaders in the Bronx to share ideas and discuss strategies for how New York must change to work for them and their futures. This year's summit focused on the school to prison pipeline – the systems that criminalize youth and funnel them into the legal system, rather than support and invest in their futures.

ANNUAL EVENTS



Dining with Defenders

On Thanksgiving Day, we host Bronx community members, their families, and guests at our community reception space for a free feast of turkey, sides, and delicious pies. We also distribute coats, toys, and other goods to support families.



ANNUAL EVENTS



Holiday Gift Drive

At the end of each year, we collect toys and other donations for the people we represent and their families, ensuring that everyone we work with who is impacted by the legal system has an opportunity to experience some joy during a difficult time in their lives.

ANNUAL EVENTS



Annual Gala

Once a year, we honor the people and organizations whose work has had a significant impact on the well-being of the people we represent in the Bronx. It's also an opportunity to celebrate our most recent accomplishments with our supporters.



SUPPORT OUR WORK



THE BRONX DEFENDERS