

# EBCLC

Answers the Call for Justice



# Dear EBCLC Community,

This past year, the rallying cry has been one of resistance. To resist the racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and transphobia of the current administration. To resist by showing up, en masse, to exercise our constitutional right to protest. To resist by giving of our time, talent, and treasure to those fighting the good fight against this hatred and division.

And it has been a powerful scene to witness, as folks have propelled themselves forward, asking “what can I do to make a difference?” Following the administration’s decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, hundreds of EBCLC’s supporters and friends reached out to us, to provide monetary support and to volunteer at our DACA renewal clinics. Thank you! You are a reminder to us that we are all inextricably linked to one another.

But resistance is a reaction. The very definition of the word is “the refusal to comply with something.” As we look ahead to a new year, we must continue to resist, but we must also adopt a new call to arms: **initiation**. The act of beginning something. EBCLC has always answered this call, in the pursuit of justice for our East Bay community, initiating new projects as the need arises, filled with hope. Our work with DACA recipients continues on, long past the October renewal deadline. And that is just one example of the ways in which EBCLC looks ahead.

As we reflect back on this year of resisting injustices, I am proud to share with you the stories of how EBCLC worked tirelessly to enact change, create spaces for justice, and foster inclusiveness in 2017. I look forward to continuing our work together, to initiate a more hopeful, secure, and just East Bay for our clients, our neighbors, and ourselves.

In gratitude,

Michael Ng  
Chair, Board of Directors

Tirien Angela Steinbach  
Executive Director

# Community Economic Justice Negotiates for Community Benefits



*Melissa Colón, Project Manager; Hewot Shankute, Staff Attorney; Jassmin Poyaoan, Director; and Sayaka Matsui, Student in CEJ Practice, at a Berkeley City Council meeting*

While our powerful Housing Practice deftly responds to tenants' immediate needs, EBCLC's Community Economic Justice (CEJ) practice has been hard at work devising long-term legal solutions to the East Bay's housing crisis. This year, the practice made its first foray into community benefits advocacy, actively engaging with local government and community groups to represent the needs of low-income tenants facing displacement. Through direct negotiations with the for-profit developer of a 50-residential-dwelling-unit luxury complex in EBCLC's neighborhood, the CEJ team negotiated for double the number of affordable units originally guaranteed, 80% of which would be set aside for Section 8 and Shelter + Care voucher holders. The team also secured funding for an Anti-Displacement Public Advocate to assist low-income tenants in an ongoing capacity. These terms were secured under use permits issued to the developer by the City of Berkeley. Under the innovative leadership of Director Jassmin Poyaoan, the CEJ practice continues to find new ways to hold real estate developers and local stakeholders accountable to long-term East Bay residents.

# Name and Gender Change Workshops

## Counter Discrimination

Through a new series of Name and Gender Change Workshops, EBCLC attorneys and students enable transgender clients to update the information on their government-issued IDs.

“After the election there were a lot of concerns about being able to update passports in a timely manner before the new administration made it more difficult,” said Daniel Faessler, an attorney in EBCLC’s Health and Welfare Practice who directs the project. “We held an emergency workshop (in December 2016) and began offering them regularly in spring 2017, and the workshops have been growing since then.”

The services offered at Name and Gender Change Workshops combat discrimination and keep clients safe. “If you have a very feminine trans woman, but on her identification it says ‘Mario’ and ‘Male,’ it can lead to all sorts of discrimination and harassment. Any time she has to show an identification, goes to her doctor’s office, goes to the grocery store, gets stopped by the police, there are all kinds of opportunities for bias to creep in and situations to escalate,” Faessler said.

At workshops, students walk clients through the process of updating the name and gender listed on their passports, driver’s licenses, and other state-issued IDs. Getting a court-ordered name change in California can require residents to fill out up to twelve different forms, and official gender changes require signed letters from physicians. Clients leave

workshops with the resources they need, and often with referrals for longer-term assistance.

“I think it’s developed a sense of community among our queer and trans students, and folks who are interested in advocating for LGBTQI and queer communities,” said Faessler. “It’s created this network of people really working together and getting to know each other before they go off and do that work as attorneys.”

From founding the first HIV Law Practice of its kind west of the Mississippi, to forging a medical-legal partnership with county hospitals, EBCLC’s Health and Welfare Practice has always led the way in providing responsive, holistic legal services. With the continued support of our incredible partners and funders, we will continue to remove economic barriers to health services and do everything we can to build healthy communities.



*Daniel Faessler, Health and Welfare Attorney*



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## Clean Slate Clients and Attorneys Work Hand-in-Hand

Months after a major stroke, the last thing on Rickey Gibbs's mind was changing state policy. It took all of his focus just to walk down the hill to his car following a neurology appointment at Highland Hospital. "I still had a cane, and the parking lot had filled up," he recalled. "I had a bunch of tests run on me that day, taking a little bit longer than two hours, so I ended up getting a ticket."

Soon, late fees on that \$160 parking ticket had ballooned to over \$700. When Gibbs had recovered enough to drive for a rideshare service, his license had been suspended as a penalty for unpaid fees.

As a longtime Berkeley resident, Gibbs knew he could find help at EBCLC. When Clean Slate attorney Theresa Zhen took on his case, she recognized the plight of countless clients at EBCLC's weekly traffic court clinics. "A lot of clients come in who can't find jobs because their driver's licenses are suspended," said Zhen.

In the past year, the Clean Slate Practice has focused on fighting back against a court system that saddles low-income Californians with fees, fines, and license suspensions. Efforts include drafting bills, meeting with policymakers, and testifying on bills in Sacramento. Zhen encouraged Gibbs to testify on behalf of AB503, which limits the DMV's ability to suspend licenses for unpaid fines.

"I really didn't know what I wanted to say, but I knew what I wanted them to feel: the helplessness of someone who has parking tickets and gets shut out of the system," Gibbs said of speaking to the Senate Transportation Committee in July. His moving testimony had the desired effect: that day, AB503 passed out of committee, 12-0.

"I'm glad I had an opportunity to speak up about the issue," said Gibbs. "The bottom line is that low-income people have to make choices, whether they want to pay for rent, or food, or tickets... and the system has gotten to the point where they are making money off of poor people."

Looking forward, EBCLC's Clean Slate Practice will continue to advocate for policy solutions that decriminalize poverty. "We're trying to find the pressure points where there can be systemic change that has broad impact," said Zhen. "There are racial and economic inequalities that continue to be perpetuated unless organizations like EBCLC- through listening to and serving our clients - can reveal opportunities for change."



*Rickey Gibbs and Assemblymember Tom Lackey in Sacramento after Senate Transportation Committee Hearing*

# Housing Policy Work Protects Immigrant Tenants

Immigration has been front and center in the news cycle this year. EBCLC's own Immigration Practice has been working tirelessly with clients to stabilize status. One unexpected point of light, in so much darkness, comes from the Housing Practice, in the form of Assembly Bill 291.

Shepherded by Jith Meganathan from the Western Center on Law and Policy, AB291 seeks to protect immigrant tenants from intimidation and retaliation from landlords and gives tenants a right to sue if landlords intimidate or threaten to report tenants based on their immigration status.

One such tenant, "Bianca," came to Housing Director Laura Lane. Bianca had rented a studio apartment in Oakland in 2015, and she was dealing with an aggressively neglectful landlord. "It was in bad condition, but it was all I could afford," she said. "The landlord refused to replace a broken refrigerator for a month. He did not unclog the toilet for 2 months, and we had to use the bathroom at a nearby restaurant. He never installed a lock on the back door, or made the windows secure."

Bianca lived under these conditions for over a year, while continuing to make complaints to the landlord about the state of the apartment. "One day, he realized my daughter did not have a social security number, and found out that she was undocumented," Bianca said. He threatened to report Bianca's family to ICE if they kept complaining. But the landlord's harassment didn't end there. He called and texted them angrily at night,

and told their neighbors that Bianca's family was undocumented. "We could not sleep because of the stress of our family breaking up. We could not afford to move, even though we wanted to," Bianca said. "All we had done was ask for repairs, but the landlord had found a tool to abuse us."

Lane told Meganathan about Bianca's case, and Housing attorney Ubaldo Fernandez worked with Bianca to present testimony before the state Assembly. "She did a great job," Fernandez said. "With her own words and her experience, she really brought this issue to life for the Assembly. Even the opponents of the bill said 'we can't support behavior like this.'"

On October 5th, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB291 into law. Clients like Bianca contributed so much to this victory, by advocating for themselves and helping to increase rights for others in similar situations.

"We need this law to protect undocumented families from this type of abuse," Bianca said. "No one should have to experience the fear, pain, or harassment my family has suffered, just because they are undocumented."



*Ubaldo Fernandez, Housing Attorney*

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# Thomas J. Long Foundation Funds Law Center of the Future

Thomas J. Long, co-founder of Longs Drug Stores, built his career on taking care of his neighbors in the Bay Area. For nearly half a century, the foundation named for him has been motivated by the same values, providing funding for K-12 education, support for seniors and those with developmental disabilities, and safety net services for vulnerable residents. The Thomas J. Long Foundation seeks to make its community more secure, healthy, and hopeful, sharing in the mission of EBCLC.

Since 2013, the Long Foundation has supported EBCLC's safety net legal services for low-income East Bay residents. Nancy Shillis, senior program officer at the foundation, sees legal aid as a way to prevent the cycle of poverty. "Sometimes, legal action is the only avenue to remedy problems, and if you don't have the means to hire a lawyer, you can get stuck," she said. "Legal aid is all about gaining access to justice, and giving everyone the chance to present their case. If clients can access an attorney, they are less likely to fall into a hole from which they can't get out."

Shillis was struck by the holistic nature of EBCLC's services, noticing that many clients come seeking a specific service, and then learn that EBCLC's attorneys and law students can help them with co-existing issues. "EBCLC

provides an entry point to help folks identify other areas where they need assistance," Shillis said.

*Thomas J. Long*  
FOUNDATION

"And it's not only lawyers—EBCLC has social workers and social work students to help clients too."

In 2016, the Long Foundation granted EBCLC \$1.5 million,

spread over two years, to help the law center amplify its impact in our community, and look to the future. The grant will allow EBCLC to realize its goal of mobilized legal services, and create more flexible points of presence in the communities we serve, enabling us to work with clients where they most need us.

This investment is crucial to expanding our reach and impact in a way that is true to our aspiration to be client-centered, community driven, and culturally responsive. Moreover, Shillis believes that it builds a sense of community, and humanity. "We are all in this together," she said. "We need to help each other."

EBCLC is pleased to recognize The Thomas J. Long Foundation as a transformational partner, ensuring that this new generation of mobile and nimble attorneys will efficiently bring legal services to those in need.



*Nancy Shillis and Tirien Steinbach*

# Our Immigration Work – By The Numbers

Our School-Based Immigration Project, founded in 2015, provides holistic services to students and families at schools in Berkeley and Oakland. This special program made incredible strides this year, and we are excited to share the results:

**238** students provided individual legal consultations

**100+** cases taken on by our attorneys for full legal representation

**100+** applications filed for legal status or work authorization

**550+** students and immigrant families educated about their rights, and about college options for undocumented students



*Staff and students in our Immigration Practice at EBCLC's 2017 graduation event*

**1602** Immigration Practice clients served this year

**423** Clients who worked with our team to successfully obtain or renew their DACA status

**59** Clients whose \$495 DACA renewal fee was completely covered by generous EBCLC supporters



# The Impact of Your Donation This Year



## Service

6,256 low-income clients received completely free legal services from EBCLC



## Security

At least 150 clients got to stay in their homes because of EBCLC's legal support



## Advocacy

618 low-income youth dealing with issues of education access, juvenile justice, and immigration status found help at EBCLC



## Knowledge

451 seniors learned to protect themselves from financial abuse by attending one of 16 EBCLC Scam-Prevention workshops



## Education

139 law students gained hands-on experience in our Berkeley Law clinics

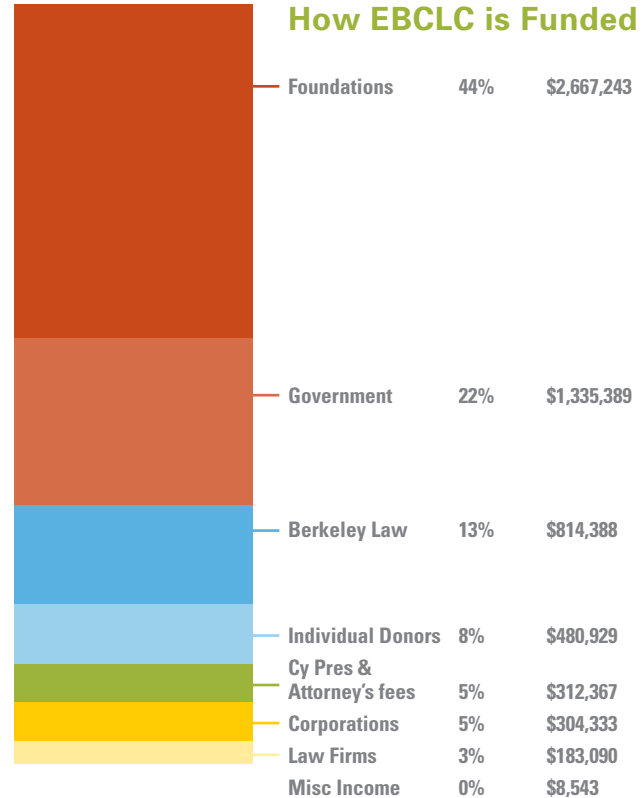


## Relief

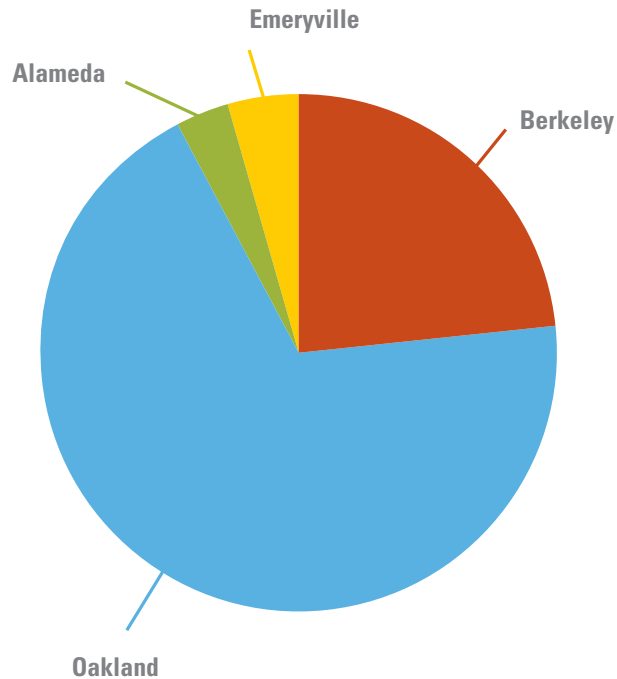
\$490,000 in debt was discharged and returned to the pockets of low-income consumers clients, bringing our total in discharged debt to over \$2 million.

*Thank you for your support!*

## How EBCLC is Funded



# Who We Serve – 2017 Clients By City of Residence



## Berkeley's Legal Aid Clinic

EBCLC gratefully recognizes the City of Berkeley's efforts to address the housing crisis and mitigate its impact on low-income community members this year. Berkeley City Council expanded legal assistance and significantly increased emergency housing retention funds to help economically and culturally vulnerable tenants stay safely and securely housed. We are proud to work with the City of Berkeley to protect tenants and fight displacement of Berkeley residents.

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2921 Adeline Street | Berkeley, CA 94703

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T 510.548.4040 | F 510.548.2566 | E [info@ebclc.org](mailto:info@ebclc.org) | **ebclc.org**

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