

Tenacity & Transformation

Our Campaign for DC Children

New Legal Tools for Lasting Change

We work with thousands of children and families every year to help them overcome barriers to health, stability and education – and advocate for policy changes that help tens of thousands more. We secure hard-fought wins for families, but sometimes those wins are stymied by new or different hurdles:

- We secured an education plan for a student with a disability that included the services they need to thrive, but their school bus stopped showing up to bring them to school.
- We took a landlord to court and forced them to remedy unhealthy conditions for one family, but the rodents in their apartment moved to a neighbor's unit. Since the landlord wasn't required to fix anything else in the multi-family building, the rodents didn't go away – they just impacted other families.
- We lined up a housing voucher for a family that had been living in a shelter, but then the government attempted an unlawful mass termination of families from their program before they could secure long-term housing.



Children's Law Center innovates to meet the evolving needs of the District's children and families. **Our tenacious staff are always exploring new legal avenues to ensure we resolve problems for as many children as possible – with solutions that last.**

We are constantly adding new tools to our legal toolkit:

Class action litigation to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to education: Partnering with a pro bono law firm and other non-profits, we filed a class action lawsuit against the District for failing to provide safe and reliable transportation to and from schools – denying nearly 4,000 students with disabilities equal access to education. Buses regularly arrived hours late – or not at all – and students missed critical services.

“My motivation is obviously to have the bus system fixed for my son, but it’s also to have it fixed for all the other kids that are affected.”

Plaintiff and mom, Ms. Elizabeth Daggett

Class action litigation helps us reach more families and improves our ability to get systemic relief. The case is ongoing, but it has already led OSSE to invest an additional \$10 million to address the problem.

Leveraging financing for whole-building repairs: Through an innovative partnership with the National Housing Trust, we are securing funds to be used to directly remediate housing conditions for hundreds of families. These renovations will improve the health and well-being of the children and families who live in properties with unhealthy housing conditions.

Emergency class action lawsuit delays housing assistance terminations:

When the District announced it would end short-term rental assistance for 800 families, we successfully advocated for long-term vouchers to prevent the 2,000 children in these families from becoming homeless. When the government moved forward without screening families to determine their eligibility for the vouchers, we filed a class action lawsuit along with The Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, prominent DC law firms and affected families which allowed additional time and enabled all families to secure long-term vouchers.

“One plaintiff came home with a newborn to no heat or hot water. Another had sewage streaming through the apartment, putting their child’s health in danger. In all of these cases, rapid re-housing failed to support these families in their times of need despite the promise of case management. Despite not having this help, the District still attempted to terminate them from housing.”

Kathy Zeisel, Director of Special Legal Projects

These are just the first ways we are using new legal tools to build on our individual and city-wide advocacy successes and help ensure lasting change.

