



**WASHINGTON LAWYERS' COMMITTEE**  
**FOR CIVIL RIGHTS AND URBAN AFFAIRS**

**Access to Justice Initiative**  
**Committee of the Whole Public Hearing on FY27 Budget**  
**D.C. Council**

**Joanne Lin, Executive Director**  
**Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs**

May 13, 2026

I am Joanne Lin, the Executive Director of the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs ("WLC"). Thank you for prioritizing Access to Justice ("ATJ") and providing full funding for ATJ in recent years. Your leadership and investment investment in ATJ over the past 20 years have been a gamechanger for justice and equality for DC residents.

At the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, ATJ is our single largest source of funding, comprising about 20 percent of our revenue. ATJ funding supports our strategic litigation to advance workers' rights, housing justice, and disability rights. We serve over 2500 low-income DC residents each year, across all eight wards in the District.

Return on Investment ("ROI"): Through ATJ funding, we function as a force-multiplier for justice and equality in DC. Since 1968, our business model has involved close partnership with the private bar. Every action we take involves pro bono partnership with Washington law firms.



For every dollar of ATJ funding received, we're able to leverage an additional 25 dollars in pro bono support from law firms. By pairing our staff attorneys with private firm lawyers, we're able to build large pro bono teams with the expertise and resources needed to tackle the greatest civil rights challenges of our time.

Workers' Rights Clinic: Our weekly Workers' Rights Clinic is the only DC clinic offering pro bono legal advice on workers' rights issues. We operate virtual clinics and in-person clinics at Bread for the City offices in Anacostia and downtown DC. Our staff and volunteers negotiate significant settlements on behalf of workers terminated unlawfully and recover lost wages from employers.

Fair Housing: Our housing justice litigation opens the doors to accessible housing for people in wheelchairs.

- We sue landlords who routinely violate DC law by illegally discriminating based on race, source of income, and/or criminal history. We challenge discriminatory tenant screening practices that exclude housing voucher holders and returning citizens.
- We work with tenant collectives who are fighting to end hazardous housing conditions, including pervasive mold, collapsing ceilings, rampant bed bug, roach and rat infestations.



Effective enforcement of housing rights allows D.C. residents to live in the District fairly and safely.

***What does success look like?***

- In March 2026 we reached a [cooperation agreement](#) with a management company to ensure a fair tenant screening process for all housing applicants, including renters with housing vouchers, past evictions, and criminal records. The agreement resolves allegations that the company illegally discriminated against prospective tenants at four D.C. properties.
- In August 2025 we reached a [\\$700,000 wage theft settlement](#) on behalf of a group of Latino construction workers on a D.C. affordable housing project. It is particularly egregious when wage theft takes place in public projects aimed at alleviating D.C. poverty.
- In August 2025 we published a report entitled [A Rotten Foundation: Wage Theft in DC's Affordable Housing Construction.](#) The report surveyed wage theft litigation involving DC affordable housing unit construction projects over the last decade. Based on the report findings, WLC proposed policy recommendations to the DC Council.



This is what success looks like... and it is only made possible by the DC Council's sustained investment in robust ATJ funding.

***What Would Happen Without Full ATJ Funding?***

The low-income workers who visit our Workers' Rights Clinic cannot afford an attorney. There is no other free clinic of this kind serving D.C. residents. Without ATJ funding, low-income D.C. workers will have nowhere else to turn to for help.

The ATJ program is a lifeline that keeps families in housing, kids in schools, and workers employed -- thereby reducing pressure on emergency services and improving the safety and security of all of DC. In these trying times, it is vital to maintain these desperately needed legal services in the critical areas of workers' rights and housing justice.

We urge the Council to restore full funding of ATJ to \$31.785M, so justice and equality can be made real for all DC residents, not just those who can afford it.