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The Ascend Justice Newsletter • June 2025



Another Amazing Celebration of Courage!

Every year we gather to celebrate our clients, our staff, and the community that makes our work possible. This year, we came together on June 12 at the Chicago Athletic Association to honor four women whose bravery, truth-telling, and hard work make life tangibly better for our clients and our communities. Our event theme was "United in Hope" because it takes a village to bring our clients' stories to light and to get justice. This year, we honored Elsa Andrianifahanana, Joanna Klonsky, Stacy St. Clair, and Dominique Ward for being part of our village and truly embodying what it means to be Champions of Justice. [Learn more about them in our 2025 Celebration of Courage video.](#)

We are so grateful to Marissa Perlman of CBS2 for MC-ing our event for the second year—not only is she an excellent journalist and public speaker, she is also a someone who cares deeply about our work and domestic violence survivors. We are also so incredibly thankful for everyone who showed up, purchased raffle tickets, sponsored the event, and helped us spread the word! **Thanks to our amazing community of supporters (YOU!), we raised an unprecedented \$228,600!**



[See more photos of the event here](#), and make sure to join us again next June!

Domestic Violence Co-Location Program Expansion

In May, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) announced that it was expanding the Domestic Violence Co-Location Program (DVCLP), in partnership with local domestic violence agencies. The DVCLP places professional domestic violence advocates from local organizations directly in DCFS offices to help the agency better assess and respond to the needs of families experiencing domestic violence.

With this new expansion into Springfield and Belleville, now six DCFS offices (including Waukegan, Rockford, and Chicago) have domestic violence advocates working to help DCFS keep parent and child domestic violence survivors safely together.

The DVCLP is funded through a grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services and is administered by Ascend Justice. [Read more about the new locations and the DVCLP here.](#)



Quincy Legal Partnership

Some places in our state face unique challenges, where both poverty and a lack of legal representation make them "legal deserts." Until 2022, domestic violence survivors in west-central Illinois faced incredible barriers to accessing justice. But through our legal partnership with Land of Lincoln Legal Aid and Quanada, Ascend Justice is helping survivors in Quincy and surrounding areas get the holistic legal services they need.

While we have been providing remote support for a few years now, two members of our Family Defense team, Bryan Liberona and Emory Robertson, recently went

down to Quincy for their first in-person DCFS hearing. And we are proud to report that our clients won!

Friend of the Year

We are thrilled to announce that our Managing Director of Advocacy and Partnerships, Sara Block, was honored in May by Between Friends, one of our partner organizations. Sara received their Friend of the Year Award for her dedication to survivors and advocacy for justice. Here are a few things they had to say about Sara:

“Sara has been a lifeline for clients, ensuring they receive the support they need.”

“Sara has helped us navigate complex cases and led trainings that empower both staff and survivors.”

“Sara shares her expertise selflessly—even her daughter has volunteered to support our programs.”

We are so proud of Sara’s incredible work and impact in the community, and we are proud to continue working together with Between Friends for survivors and justice!



Advocacy Update

Now that the spring Illinois legislative session is over, we are highlighting three bills that passed both Houses and are on their way to the Governor, plus two bills we're still watching for next year:

Bills Passed:

HB2682: TANF Family Violence Option - This bill amends Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to allow state agencies to waive TANF work and self-sufficiency requirements for survivors of domestic or sexual violence. It also requires DHS to inform families who have become unhoused due to domestic or sexual violence that crisis assistance funds are available.

HB1278: Amendment to the Victims' Economic Security and Safety Act - This bill prohibits employers from retaliating against employees who use employer-issued devices to document incidents relating to domestic violence, sexual violence, gender-based violence or any other crime of violence.

HB3352: Coerced Debt - This is the first coerced debt law in Illinois! This bill defines "coerced debt," which affects many survivors of domestic violence, and makes it so that debtors are not liable to collection agencies for debt they were forced by their abusers to accrue.

Bills We're Watching:

HB3365: Amendment to Juvenile Court Act - This bill would amend two existing acts dealing with juveniles to provide guidance about keeping children in the custody of their non-offending parents who are survivors of domestic violence.

HB2264: Community Safety through Stable Homes Act - This bill would protect survivors of domestic violence from being evicted for calling the police on issues relating to the violence.

Happy Pride!

At Ascend Justice, we are proud to celebrate Pride Month! We are proud that our community of clients, supporters, staff, and colleagues includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and gender nonconforming people. For us, Pride means celebrating the beautiful diversity of life experience, perspective, and expertise that makes our work not only possible, but more effective and impactful.

In June, we recommit to dismantling systems that disproportionately harm people in the LGBTQ+ community, and to building new systems that work for all survivors, especially those from historically underserved and marginalized communities.



There are so many ways to support us!

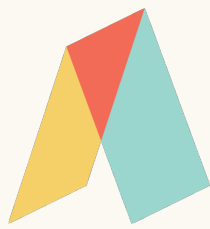
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