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The Ascend Justice Newsletter • June 2026

Thank you!



Our Celebration of Courage was last week, and though the night was super stormy, it was a huge success! With the help of our incredibly generous sponsors and supporters, we raised an unprecedented \$255,845!

We also debuted our new video, which highlights our **2026 Champions of Justice**—our clients, Adeya and Musa, who fled gender-based violence to find safety in the US, and a doctor and forensic expert we rely on to provide testimony documenting abuse and violence in immigration cases, Dr. Nora Rowley. Check it out:

Resilience - Adeya and Musa's Story

Ascend Justice



Watch on

A huge thank you to **Delahoyde Projects** for your amazing and compassionate video production team. You all were a joy to work with. Thank you for helping us tell this story.

And another huge thank you to our incredible event photographers this year, **Ronit Bezalel Photography**! Take a look at these gorgeous event photos (and click through for more!):



If you weren't able to join us this year, we hope you can make it next year! It is always such a meaningful, joyful, hopeful night, and we love sharing it with you all!

Letter to the Editor: Child Welfare

We read a truly terrible opinion piece in the *Chicago Tribune* last month that argued for a return to 1980's-style punishment-first approaches to child welfare that have been shown to harm children and families.



So Ascend Justice, along with several of our partner organizations, responded with Letters to the Editor.

[Read them here to learn more about research-backed, effective ways to keep families together and children safe.](#)

Letter to the Editor: Safe Homes Act

We read another recent *Chicago Tribune* article about a woman suing her landlord for not allowing her to break her lease after a sexual assault, which failed to mention a critical piece of state legislation for people in exactly these circumstances: the Illinois Safe Homes Act.

Our Senior Attorney for Economic Justice, Elizabeth Yoo, responded with an informative Letter to the Editor that all Illinois residents who rent should read.

[Take a look \(second letter on the page\).](#)



Practice Spotlight: Economic Justice

Domestic Violence places extraordinary financial burdens on survivors. For instance, many of our clients experience **financial abuse**, which occurs when an abuser controls, manipulates, or restricts access to money, or forces a survivor to take unwanted loans. A survivor may have thousands of dollars in debt because an abuser opened credit cards in their name without their knowledge or consent. Or a survivor may co-sign an automobile loan because their abuser manipulated them or threatened them with harm.

Even when direct financial abuse isn't present, the **secondary costs** of domestic violence are high. Survivors may have overwhelming medical debt due to injuries and chronic conditions arising from domestic violence. To escape or hide from an abuser, a survivor may need to move residences multiple times – incurring new relocation costs with every move. Other survivors face job insecurity because they miss work to receive medical care or seek safe housing.

So our Economic Justice Program helps survivors access the legal remedies available to them in Illinois, many of which are under-used and under-publicized. Laws **protecting crime victims** are particularly useful for domestic violence survivors. In Illinois, victims of violent crime may be eligible to take protected leave from work to seek medical treatment, attend court, or address issues arising from the crime. Survivors may also be eligible for **crime victims compensation**

for medical bills, relocation costs, and lost earnings. And housing laws provide a pathway for survivors to **lawfully end a lease** when there is an imminent threat of domestic or sexual violence.

An important new Illinois law provides a legal pathway for survivors to dispute “**coerced debt**,” which includes any debt incurred because of “identity theft, fraud, duress, intimidation, threat, force, coercion, [or] undue influence.” This definition explicitly includes debt that arises because of abuse or exploitation between family or household members.

Our Economic Justice team uses these laws to help our clients find **financial safety and security** – often a critical step on their journey out of domestic violence. If you know someone who might need our economic justice services, please let them know [help is available](#).

Illinois Access to Justice

Our Incarcerated Survivors team went down to Springfield last month for Illinois Access to Justice (A2J) day at the capitol. We were there to talk to legislators about how important this funding is to organizations like ours. Our A2J funding helps immigrant and incarcerated survivors – two groups who often need more legal representation than is available to them – and funding is more crucial now than ever.

Attorneys Jess Cokins and Zaynab Zaman are pictured to the right with Rep. Yolanda Morris, bottom left with Rep. Jehan Gordon-Booth and Live Free staff, and bottom right with all A2J day participants.



Congratulations, Emory Robertson!

We are absolutely thrilled for Ascend Justice Staff Attorney, Emory Robertson, for being named a Chicago Bar Foundation and Chicago Bar Association 2026 [Pro Bono & Public Service Award Honoree](#)!



Emory, a rockstar attorney on our Family Defense team and all-around excellent person, will receive the [Kimball R. Anderson & Karen Gatsis Anderson Public Interest Law Fellowship](#) at the upcoming [annual awards luncheon](#) on July 9.

This award is so well deserved. Emory helps people every day who have been wrongly accused in child welfare cases, and our clients benefit greatly from their compassion and expertise. We are so proud and thankful for all the work they do on behalf of our clients!



Legislative Update

Stable Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services Funding: This year's budget includes level funding for both Domestic and Sexual Violence services across the state, which is a relief during a challenging budget year.

Fresh Program and VTTC Funding: Due to the implications of HR1, known at the federal level as "One Big Beautiful Bill," two initiatives were introduced in Illinois to support vulnerable families:

- Families Receiving Emergency Support for Hunger (FRESH) is a program that provides a one-time payment covering three months of a household's lost or reduced SNAP benefits due to work requirements that came down from the federal government. FRESH will keep food on the table for vulnerable families and individuals who are cut off from SNAP and was included in the state's budget.
- Victims of Trafficking Torture and other Crimes is a program that has existed in Illinois for a number of years which supports lawfully present immigrants with food assistance. Due to HR 1, approximately 16,000 lawfully present immigrant neighbors – including asylees, refugees, and others – will lose access to SNAP due to new eligibility restrictions. Illinois' budget bill included level funding for this program to ensure survivors of torture and trafficking pursuing lawful status can remain eligible for these benefits until funds are exhausted.

IDVA Modernization Bill (SB 3020): This bill modernizes the Illinois Domestic Violence Act by clarifying how and when petitioners can obtain an Order of Protection extension; increasing protections from electronic harassment along with a new remedy to remove or delete harmful electronic information; and allowing petitioners to request virtual hearings in all counties. This bill passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support and awaits the Governor's signature.

Karina's Law Trailer (SB3329): This bill makes technical changes to Karina's law by supporting survivor notification prior to changes being made in a search warrant through the Order of

Protection process. This bill passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support and awaits the Governor's signature.

Human Trafficking (HB 4654): This bill amends the Human Trafficking Resource Center Notice Act to require the Department of Transportation to post human trafficking resources at public restrooms at roadside rest areas.

Coerced Debt Relief Continuation (HB 4659): This bill amends the Consumer Installment Loan Act, which governs small loans (typically under \$40k) to allow for survivors to establish an affirmative defense if they were coerced into taking out the debt. The bill passed unanimously out of the House and Senate and awaits the Governor's signature.

Emergency and Plenary Orders of Protection (SB 3044): This bill ensures that default plenary protective orders are immediately enforceable by law enforcement, so long as the respondent was properly served with the earlier emergency protective order and summons. These documents notify the respondent that they have to attend the next court date on the summons or a default can be entered and that they can be held criminally liable even if they do not show up, so long as the same relief was granted in the emergency order. The bill passed unanimously out of the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

Statewide Toolkit for Lethality Assessments (SB 3048): This bill creates a statewide workgroup with oversight from the Illinois Department of Human Services to create an optional toolkit for local law enforcement and domestic violence programs to work together on conducting lethality assessments when responding to domestic calls. This bill passed unanimously out of the House and Senate and awaits the Governor's signature.

Domestic Violence Orders of Protection (HB 4741): This bill ensures protective orders cannot be denied solely because the petitioner or respondent is incarcerated, which is language already included in Illinois' civil statutes, and guarantees that Illinois criminal and civil statutes mirror each other. The bill passed unanimously out of the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature.

Family Justice Centers (HB 4949): This bill creates the Family Justice Centers Act, outlining that cities, counties, the state, and community-based nonprofits can establish multiagency, multidisciplinary Family Justice Centers to serve survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, and human trafficking, and setting requirements for center operations, including survivor consent and confidentiality policies, privacy protections, collaboration with law enforcement and community providers, operating agreements, survivor feedback processes, and annual training standards. The bill passed unanimously out of the House and Senate and is awaiting the Governor's signature

Non-profit bill package: HB 4206 helps donors transfer gifts to nonprofits easier, setting timelines for gift notifications and transfers. And HB 4340 improves timeliness of state government contracts, makes grant terms clearer, and modernizes the Court of Claims process for grantees to recover grant funds.



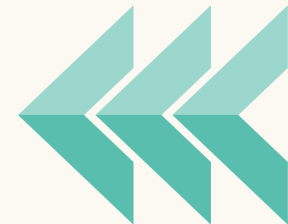
There are so many ways to support us!

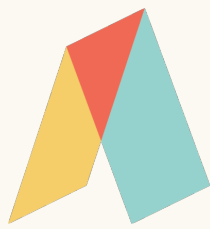
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