




ANNUAL REPORT

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Gender Equality Law Center



OVERVIEW

GENDER EQUALITY LAW CENTER

OUR ORIGIN STORY

According to the United Nations Forum on Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law, equal access to justice is a necessary element of democracy, rule of law, and human rights protection. Unfortunately, for many who have been discriminated against, there are disproportionate systemic barriers in accessing justice which leads to many people falling through the cracks. This results in an overall imbalance of power which threatens a thriving, democratic society. The pandemic has only widened this gap.

After working in the private sector as a civil rights lawyer for 25 years and becoming increasingly frustrated by witnessing the lack of access many had in accessing and securing their rights, Allegra L. Fishel founded the Gender Equality Law Center (GELC) five years ago to close this gap and in turn, promote and further ideals of equality. Through an intersectional lens and a recognition that discrimination is rarely experienced in a vacuum, GELC is a Brooklyn-based 501(c)(3) legal advocacy center that takes a holistic approach in remedying individual instances of discrimination and redressing institutional barriers that limit the ability of women to thrive.

Since its founding, GELC has helped thousands of low-income New Yorkers access and secure justice in the face of discrimination through free legal services. We do this by not only securing damages for the harm an individual has suffered, but also by ensuring that systemic changes are made in order to mitigate future harms against others—this is done through legislative advocacy and injunctive relief in litigation settlements. However, the pandemic increased the needs of the communities GELC serves because of its disproportionate economic impact on women and communities of color which exacerbated already existent biases and marginalization. In response to the compounded needs of some of our community members during the pandemic, GELC expanded its mission in March 2020 to help all low-wage workers survive the moment and to help keep women in the workplace while not losing gains made over the past decades.

GELC's work falls into four primary program areas: advancing economic security for women, enforcing sexual harassment and assault prevention, combatting pregnancy and caregiver discrimination, and promoting LGBTQ+ rights. The focus of our work is to help empower low-income individuals who would not otherwise have access to legal representation, or who may not know their legal rights. To meet this goal, GELC employs a blend of strategies, including: counseling and advice through our legal hotline, impact litigation, legislative reform, organizational technical assistance, and community "know your rights" trainings.

MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

GENDER EQUALITY LAW CENTER

Dear Friends, Allies, and Supporters:

It is hard to believe that the world has spent yet another year struggling with the challenging and sometimes devastating consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. While many parts of our society and the world slowed down during 2021, GELC's gender justice and racial equity work continued at a brisk pace. However, with increased demand for our services came challenges in our capacity to meet those demands.

In 2021, we counseled over 500 callers about their legal rights. Overall, calls to our 24-hour legal hotline and referrals related to pandemic relief leveled off but calls seeking information about employment and school-based gender discrimination have increased. We also heard dozens of personal narratives related to other systemic challenges and were able to refer most of these callers to non-legal resources for assistance in an effort to have the greatest holistic impact.

We filed 11 new litigation matters and continue to actively litigate 15 cases. These cases include claims of pregnancy discrimination, sexual harassment in the workplace (in office settings, restaurants, construction sites, and factories) and sexual harassment and stalking on a college campus. All of the cases we bring allege novel issues of law or fact and seek institutional change and non-monetary relief. The vast majority of the claims we bring on behalf of our clients show clearly that gender-based discrimination rarely occurs in a vacuum, but rather that the intersection between gender, race, national origin, and immigration status impacts most. More than ever, GELC is committed to using the tool of public interest litigation to redress gender and racial inequities in the workplace and on school campuses.

Last year, we also ramped up our coalition-building and partnerships. We are currently working with national women's rights and workers' rights organizations across the country as part of a targeted effort to expand both equal pay laws and sexual harassment protections. On the local level, we are expanding our efforts to redress systemic issues at the EEOC and the New York City Commission on Human Rights. One of my personal goals last year—as the most experienced attorney on staff—was to co-counsel with and mentor less-experienced lawyers working in the non-profit and civil rights sectors. Not only was the objective to help increase the capacities of these lawyers to help their constituencies, but also to help foster and mentor more junior lawyers of color so as to both increase their opportunities to litigate complex cases and to bring more representation to the legal profession. As such, four of the cases we are litigating are with more junior lawyers from our partner organizations.

MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CON'T

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While GELC's trainings have recently decreased as many of our partners and constituencies are experiencing Zoom exhaustion, we are currently growing our virtual presence by providing more accessible and robust resources for individuals to learn about their legal rights and represent themselves when they cannot find counsel. This includes a revamping of our website and the development of a virtual resource hub for which we were awarded a generous capacity building grant from The New York Women's Foundation at the end of 2021.

As we begin this year with our hope that the pandemic will end (or become increasingly manageable), we are looking at its long-term impact on workers and women across the country. The statistics reflect what our own anecdotal information has made clear: women bore the brunt of the pandemic. This is not solely because we had a catastrophic worldwide pandemic —although this expedited the impact—but rather, the pandemic helped focus attention on ongoing systemic barriers grounded in outdated stereotypes that limit opportunities for women in the workplace, specifically because childcare, home care, and the education of children still fall disproportionately on women with the worst burden being felt by single mothers. For this reason, GELC will be focusing its efforts in 2022 on addressing both the impact and systemic roots of cultural norms and gender-based stereotyping.

We have a lot to do this year but looking back at the past couple of years and seeing what we were able to accomplish—despite the logistical and emotional/mental restraints of the pandemic—we are feeling more ready than ever and that is in part because of your support. Thanks for following along, for reading or listening to the stories of our clients, for sending us encouraging messages, making donations, and standing up for gender and racial justice.

Onward and upward,

Allegra L. Fish



LEADERSHIP

GENDER EQUALITY LAW CENTER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Chandra K. Smith

Board President



Shareema Abel

Board Vice President



Elizabeth Reinhardt

Board Treasurer



Allegra L. Fishel

Board Member

GELC started 2021 with an incredibly engaged board committed to propelling GELC forward with fierce leadership and governance. Chandra K. Smith was elected as Board President, Shareema Abel as Vice President, and Elizabeth Reinhardt as Board Treasurer.

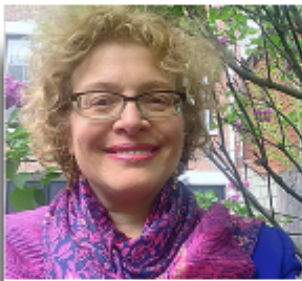
We were saddened by the end of Bonita's term in January of 2021, but thank her for her dedication to the mission of GELC and for her leadership in developing systems, Board responsibilities, and campaign processes that will help ensure the success of GELC programming, including by building a sustainable fundraising pipeline.

The board and staff also identified prospect new members with whom we are currently cultivating relationships with the hope of adding new members later in 2022.

LEADERSHIP

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STAFF



Allegra L. Fishel
Founder and Executive Director



Alex McAdams
Director of Development



Gabriela Rendon
Staff Attorney & Outreach Coordinator



Chelsea Maddred
Social Media Manager



Madeleine Morawski
Legal Fellow



Violet Fortier
Legal Intern



Serene Qandil
Pro Bono Scholar

GELC's staff is led by the fierce direction of Executive Director, Allegra Fishel, with 2021 leadership support from the Director of Development, Alex McAdams and Staff Attorney and Community Outreach Coordinator, Gabriela Rendon. Chelsea Maddred continued to help amplify our work as the Social Media Manager and Madeleine Morawski was able to extend her Legal Fellowship thanks in large part to funding from NYU Law School. We were also lucky to welcome Pro Bono Scholar, Serene Qandil, to the team as well as Violet Fortier as our Legal Intern. Additional support staff, including interns and volunteer attorneys, were also critical to our success.

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Direct Services

"Many of our clients come to feel empowered when telling their stories; and that is a privilege not everyone is afforded. And GELC furthers that sense of empowerment by taking on cases and advocating for people and making demands of the organizations and institutions that have wronged our clients."

Chandra K. Smith
GELC Board President



The pandemic has had a disproportionate economic impact on women, caregivers, and communities of color. In response to the compounded critical needs of low-wage workers in New York, GELC expanded our mission in March of 2020 and has continued through to the present to fill gaps in services that will help low wage workers survive this moment and, importantly, to address legal issues that have arisen out of the pandemic. Notably, among other adverse consequences assisting women who have disproportionately been pushed out of jobs because of childcare responsibilities, home schooling demands and because they were often the first to be let go when businesses scaled back. This work has included providing rapid response assistance to low wage

workers seeking information about wage replacement, paid sick and family leave benefits, and health and safety issues. While the number of intake callers seeking counsel and advice about COVID-19-related issues has declined dramatically, we still receive calls from individuals needing information about benefits and leave protections, in addition to our more mission-based intake related to gender discrimination and in 2021, advised more than 200 individuals through our free and confidential hotline and responded to dozens of referrals from other organizations and from the private bar. In calls to our hotline where there were no viable legal claims or issues, we made referrals to other not for profits and government agencies for non-legal assistance.

Litigation

GELC took on several new matters in 2021, including filing 11 new lawsuits and continue to litigate 20 matters, including matters pertaining to pregnancy discrimination, LGBTQ discrimination, and sexual harassment in a variety of industries (from office settings to construction sites). Examples of the new cases we filed in 2021 include:

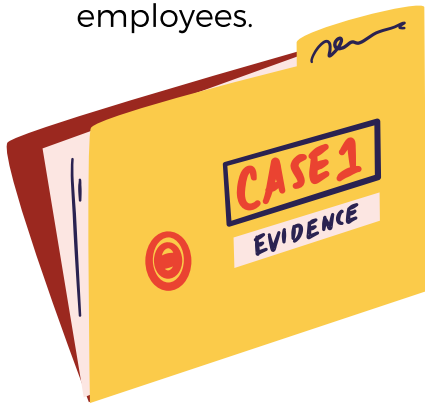
- A case against a large well-known family discount store on Staten Island where our client was sexually harassed and stalked by a co-worker and as a result forced to resign when the store would not make the harassment stop. Our client lived across the street from the store and as a

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result, in addition to suffering severe emotional distress, she was unable to shop at this store and was afraid to walk around her own neighborhood.

- A sexual harassment and intimidation case on behalf of three non-legal staff employees against law firm and named partner who had a history of sexually harassing and terminating female employees.



- A case involving purposeful misgendering and taunting of gender non-binary employee at Whole Foods.
- A federal court action on behalf of a low wage immigrant worker with limited English skills who for years worked for a large janitorial company where she was routinely discriminated against on the job on the basis of her gender and national origin. The company refused to intervene and make the harassment stop. Ultimately, after complaining, our client was fired.

In addition to these cases, GELC also co-counseled with other not for profit partners and private counsel with a special focus on co-counseling with junior lawyers of color on select litigation, to help mentor and increase experiences of lawyers of color in civil rights litigation.

Amicus Briefs

In 2021, GELC signed onto several Amici briefs before federal and state appellate courts, including but not limited to issues pertaining to pregnancy discrimination and sexual assault on university campuses and equal pay cases on the state level.

Legislative Advocacy

In 2021, GELC worked with partners and coalitions to help pass:

- NYC pay transparency law (effective May 22 2022) which amends the NYC Human Rights Law to mandate that employers with four or more employees in New York City must disclose pay ranges at the time they post jobs, and
- The New York State Salary history ban law (effective January 6 2022) which prohibits all employers public and private from asking questions about the previous salary history or compensation of applicants.

GELC is also actively supporting the federal Paid Family Leave Law and the federal Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, still pending legislation in Washington D.C.

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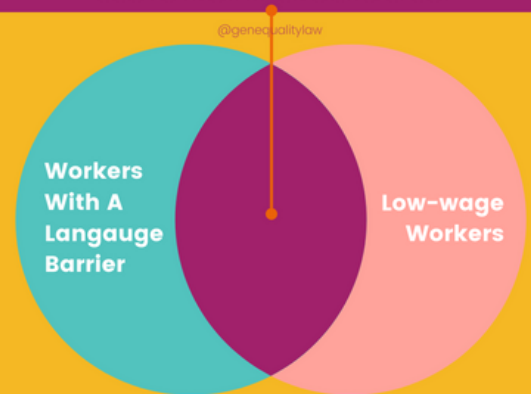
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Trainings

GELC facilitates know your rights community trainings as well as leadership trainings to build the capacity of other organizations and city agencies. Due to the on-going pandemic, we had fewer community trainings but were able to do some impactful training work, including:

- Legal trainings for other not for profits and community groups on various topics including the NYC Human Rights law provision which provides for reasonable accommodation for domestic violence victims, instances of sexual harassment, and New York State paid family leave.
- Trainings for students at various points of their educations about gender-based discrimination and how it applies to them, including for law students, high school students, and elementary age students. We are further expanding this work and have already held several school based trainings in 2022.

Like those with a language barrier, low-wage workers experience higher rates of workplace violence, and they also have less access to remedy the harassment due to their financial status.



Coalitions & Policy Work

In 2021, GELC continued to further its work with coalitions to review, change, and develop new policies both legislatively and in workplaces that furthers inclusion and equality. Some of this work we focused on in 2021 includes:

- Continuing to work with the Equal Pay Today Coalition which is a national coalition of women's rights groups working together to help close the wage gap for women with an emphasis on the disparities facing women of color, including the EPT Enforcement Committee.
- Continuing to participate as a member of the Stop Sexual Harassment State Network which is a national coalition of women's and civil rights groups working to enhance state and local protections and to advance better policies to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace and in school settings.

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- Participating in round tables with newly appointed federal agency leadership, including the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) and the Women’s Bureau.
- Participating in college student-led group working to pass the Equal Rights Amendment



GELC also expanded and strengthened its committee and leadership work which helps push for policy changes to support workers and individuals whom have been systemically marginalized, including:

- The National Employment Lawyers Association/New York Affiliate
- A Chair of the NY EEOC Working Group
- DOP-WARG (Dismantling Our Oppression – White Anti-Racist Group)
- The National Employment Lawyers Association, EEOC Working Group
- NELA DEI
- Legal Network for Gender Equity
- POWHER
- Anti-Racist Executive Group
- Equal Rights Advocates workplace discrimination and school discrimination committees
- NYS Paid Leave Coalition

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Organizational Partnerships

GELC approaches partnerships as being critical to the effectiveness and success of our programming. Through partnerships and coalition-building, we take a more holistic approach to social change by supporting shared goals, exchanging data to help identify need, and working jointly to best serve our constituents with the greatest impact. Some of our partners include:

- Make the Road NY
- Legal Aid Society
- NOW/NYC
- Safe Horizon
- PowHer NY
- New Immigrant Community Empowerment
- National Advocates for Pregnant Women
- Worker's Justice Project
- Ujima: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community
- Gender Justice
- National Women's Law Center
- NELA
- Legal Services, NYC
- Equal Rights Amendment Coalition
- Cornell Workers' Rights Coalition
- New Women New Yorkers
- Center for Anti-Violence Education
- NYC Anti-Violence Project
- Brooklyn Legal Services
- Urban Justice Center
- A Better Balance
- Generation Ratify

What is New York State Paid Family Leave (NYS PFL)?

Gender Equality Law Center

Who is eligible for New York State Paid Family Leave (NYS PFL)?

Gender Equality Law Center

For more information please contact the
Gender Equality Law Center

at 1-888-833-4363 or
help@genderequalitylaw.org

To learn more about our programming and upcoming events visit us on social media:



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gender-equality-law-center/



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SUPPORT

GENDER EQUALITY LAW CENTER

Community Briefing Event

Gender Equality Law Center



WATCH NOW ON YOUTUBE!

After a longer time than expected siloed in our individual work—from our partners, colleagues, and clients, we thought it made sense to hold a community briefing event in October of 2021. We thought this would be a great way to bring together the larger community with whom we work and serve along with some long-term and new or prospective funders. The event was an incredible success: not only did it raise significant funding for GELC (including helping to secure a new multiyear grant from a family foundation), but it helped illuminate both the need for our services and the impact we're having in New York. In addition to the entire GELC team—both the board and staff—we were joined by three of our clients who spoke to their experiences working with GELC and their novel legal cases and the differences their bravery

has made. We plan to continue doing these events in coming years and hope to have a similar formatted in-person event as well.

Institutional Funders



Valentine Perry Snyder Fund



SUPPORT

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GELC is extremely grateful to have received continued institutional support from the New York Women's Foundation in the form of a very generous multi-year general operating support grant. We were also awarded an additional capacity building grant from them to support an extension of our services through the building of a multimedia website and resource hub. In 2021, we also continued our partnership with The New York Bar Foundation in support of our post-COVID project "Centering Women in the Transition to a post-COVID New York". Additionally, we were awarded funding from the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund in support of our litigation on behalf of low-wage workers who have experienced gender-based discrimination or harassment, funding from New York University Law School, and we were thrilled to resume our partnership with the Valentine Perry Snyder Fund who awarded us with a multi-year grant at the end of 2021. Thank you also to Outten & Golden, The Darnell-Moser Charitable Fund, and Rich & Bander, LLP, from whom we also received support.

Individual Donors

Individual donors are not only one of the critical financial backbones of our organization that gives us the ability to do the work we're doing, but their contributions are also a meaningful representation of the community's support of our work. We are very appreciative of our major donors, one-time donors, and sustaining recurring donors. In 2021, we nearly doubled our recurring donor base, which is an incredibly important piece of our projected annual income. We also welcomed many new individual donors to our base. Because of this, we are not able to thank them all by name, however, we would like to highlight a few, below who have made significant contributions.

Change Makers

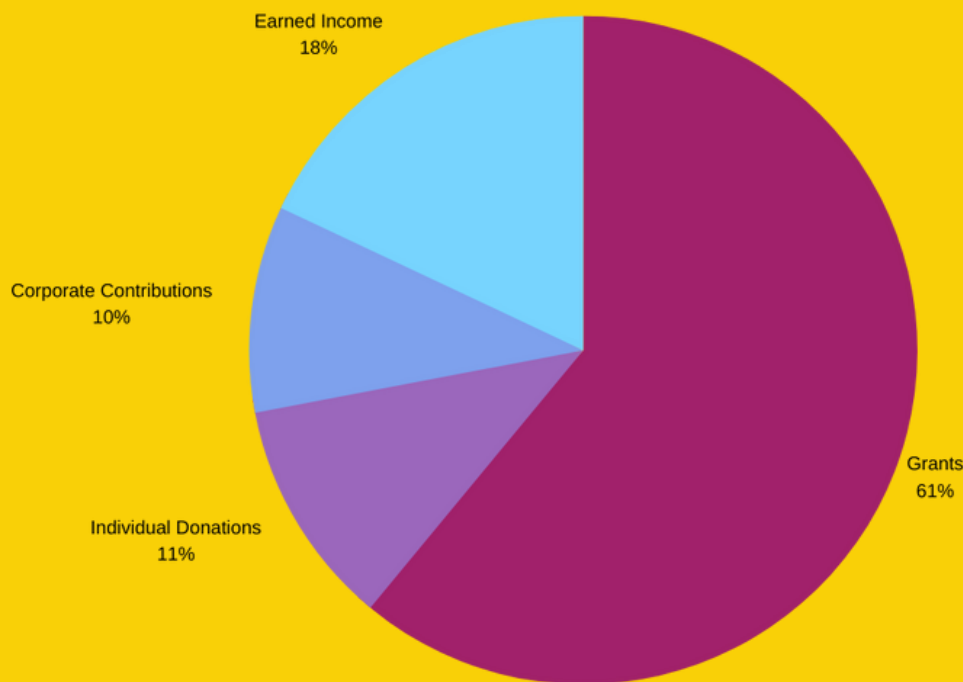
Romy Abbey
Shareema Abel
Bonita Betters-Reed & Gary E. Reed
Elisabeth Genn
Janice Goodman
Frederic Albert Herter
Michelle Issa
Rich & Gina Kelley
Sean & Regina Kenney



Brendan V. McAdams
Deborah and Gregory McAdams
Elizabeth A. McGee
Juliet Moser
Benjamin Pinczewski
Elizabeth Reinhardt
Linda Riefberg
Andrea Riquier

FINANCES: REVENUE

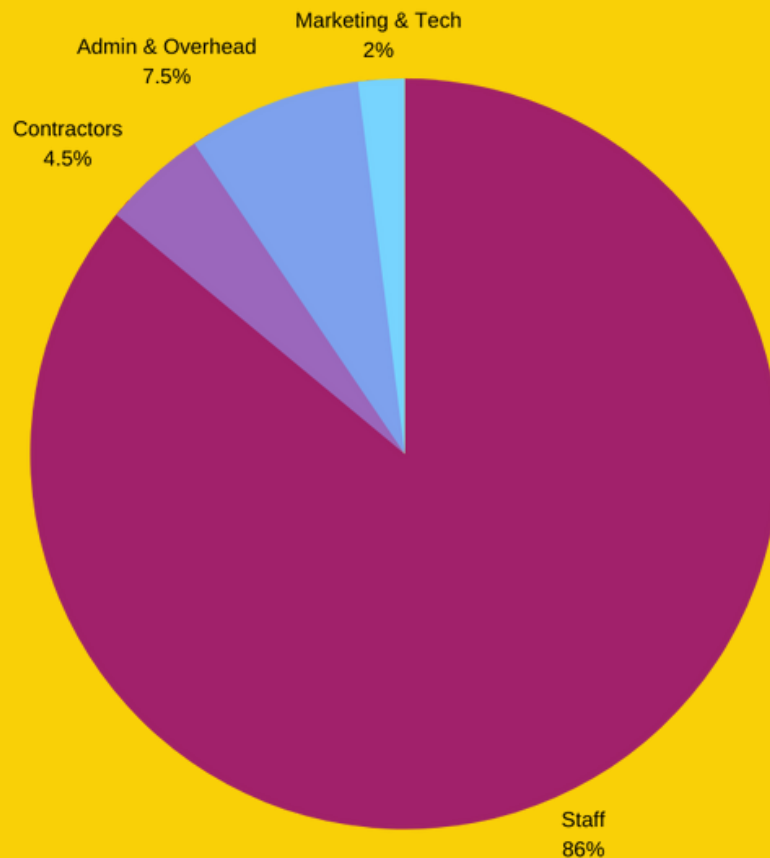
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Our total revenue in 2021 was \$255,434 and reflects our goal for diversifying revenue as we plan to grow and expand our capacity to have an impact on the communities we serve. After not earning attorney fees in 2020 because of the court closures related to the pandemic, we were finally able to continue and initiate new cases which allowed us to collect just under \$50,000 in attorney fees. We hope to double that in 2022 which we have successfully done in year prior to the pandemic. Despite the on-going pandemic, we managed to grow our institutional funding base with an increased multi-year grant from The New York Women's Foundation and an additional \$10,000 capacity building grant from them to support extending our reach through the building of a new website including a multimedia resource and pro se hub. We also secured another—and larger—grant from The New York Bar Foundation in support of our new *Centering Women in the Transition to a Post-COVID New York* project. Additionally, we resumed a previous partnerships with the Valentine Perry Snyder Fund and received a generous multi-year grant from them as well. Lastly, we have continued our critical partnerships with both the TimesUp Legal Defense Fund and NYU Law in support of our litigation efforts. We started 2021 off with a generous \$25,000 matched donation from corporate donor Rich & Bander, LLP. which helped maximize and increase our individual donor base. Additionally, our recurring donor nearly doubled in 2021 and we maintained our relationship with the major donor we cultivated in 2020.

FINANCES: EXPENSES

GENDER EQUALITY LAW CENTER



Our total expenses in 2021 were \$243,045 which means we ended the year with a profit of \$12,839. This in part, is attributed to our considerably lower overhead costs related to the hold and then temporarily closing of our offices because we were not able to gather and work in-person due to the pandemic. However, those expenses—which we did have part of the year—are minimal anyway because we rent office space in a collaborative work space which includes utilities and shared office equipment. The majority of expenses in 2021, like other years, were related to personnel and staffing, professional fees, and licensing for our attorneys.

WOMEN LOW WAGE WORKERS IMMIGRANTS LGBTQ PEOPLE



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This report was created by Alex McAdams with graphics made by Alex McAdams and
Chelsea Maddred on behalf of GELC
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