

# Looking Back, Looking Forward — Vermont Bar Foundation Accomplishments and Goals

As I near my two-year anniversary as the Executive Director of the Vermont Bar Foundation I've been reflecting on our achievements. I find myself invigorated by the strides we've made and the ambitious goals that lie ahead. In 2023, our work resulted in grants totaling nearly a million dollars. These funds were distributed among 12 deserving organizations, which turned that money into action to help our communities. Raising a million dollars was a major accomplishment, though it fell shy of the \$1.3 million that was requested by these groups. The pressing needs we strive to address are never far from my mind.

That said, now is a good time to reflect on what we have accomplished. One of our proudest endeavors is our ongoing support of the Poverty Law Fellowship—a transformative two-year program empowering attorneys to champion legal access for Vermont's low-income population. Maya Tsukazaki, our 2022-2024 Vermont Poverty Law Fellow, embodies this commitment by tirelessly advocating for justice within Vermont's immigrant communities. The impact of our work, coupled with the endeavors of our Poverty Law Fellows, resonates far beyond immediate relief—it contributes a remarkable \$11 for every dollar donated directly into Vermont's economy.

At the heart of our mission is the swift and strategic allocation of grants, primarily sourced from Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA). IOLTA is a lifeline for civil legal aid. By pooling interest from lawyers' trust accounts to fuel justice we serve without burdening attorneys, clients, or the public. Yet, the unpredictability of IOLTA funding means we must also rely on the generosity of our donors — many of you. Last year, your support included nearly \$200,000 in donations. In 2024, we are aiming higher, setting our sights on a stretch target of more than \$200,000.

In 2023, we embarked on a mission to fortify IOLTA rates. We continue to work with banks to offer better rates on these accounts. Our second annual online silent auction, building on the triumph of last year's event, that raised an impressive \$10,000, is a testament to our innovative approach and the generosity of individuals who believe in our cause.

We invite you to be a part of our journey in the year ahead. There are many ways you can make a difference:

- Make a donation, no matter the amount, today.
- Rally your colleagues, family, and friends to support the VBF.
- Help us forge connections with busi-

nesses that may provide support.

- Explore IOLTA account options with higher interest rates.
- Contribute an item for our upcoming online silent auction.
- Extend an invitation to our current Poverty Law Fellow to speak at gatherings or social events.

Your involvement is not just appreciated; it's crucial. It's what propels us forward, fuels our impact, and empowers us to be a force for positive change.

And now, a piece of exciting news—the 2024-2026 Poverty Law Fellow will be dedicated to removing obstacles for the unhoused, an urgent cause as Vermont currently ranks second in the nation for per-capita homelessness. Your support is the catalyst for tangible change in addressing this pressing issue.

With just one staff member, supported by 12 dedicated Board members and committee volunteers, we're proving that size is no barrier to significant impact. The Vermont Bar Foundation is alive with exciting initiatives, and we extend a warm invitation for you to join us in a way that holds personal meaning for you. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we express our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support. Together, let's continue our journey of justice, equity, and transformative impact.

*José Herrera is the Executive Director of the Vermont Bar Foundation.*



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