

# TEXAS CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT



## IMPACT REPORT 2022



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# Mission

We are Texas lawyers for Texas communities, boldly serving the movement for equality and justice in and out of the courts.

# Vision

We envision a Texas where all communities thrive with dignity, justice, and without fear.

# Theory of Change

We believe that legal advocacy and litigation are critical tools to protect and advance the civil rights of everyone in Texas, particularly our state's most vulnerable populations, and to effect positive and lasting change to law and policy. We believe that by serving the rising social justice movement in Texas with excellent legal representation and bold strategies, we can respond to the needs of the communities we serve.

# Letter from the President

Dear friends,

It is with great honor that I stepped into the role of President of the Texas Civil Rights Project on February 1, 2023. After many years of working alongside TCRP staff members in and out of the courts, I am thrilled to lead an organization that I have admired for so long!

I was raised in Brownsville, Texas, in my beloved Rio Grande Valley. My parents met at a public high school when they were both teachers. Together, they taught me that every person is deserving of dignity and respect. I saw them live these values. My oldest brother, Robby, suffered a traumatic brain injury during childbirth and grew up with disabilities. Whether it was seeing my parents fight with insurance companies over basic coverage, like a wheelchair lift Robby needed to get to school, or watching my mom testify against a bill that would have made it harder for families like ours to access health care, advocacy started at home.

So I became a lawyer for the people — fighting for the civil rights of children, immigrants and families — and for all Texans.

As a civil rights attorney, I fought to keep families together during the implementation of the “zero tolerance” immigration policies that separated families and denied access to asylum. I also fought and won for the reproductive rights of immigrant teens in detention in the *Garza v. Hargan* case. My work on that case resulted in the “Garza Notice,” a federal requirement that ensures teens in immigration detention control their reproductive health care choices, which is still in effect today.

After almost a decade as a movement lawyer, I ran for Attorney General of Texas in 2022 to reestablish equity and justice for all Texas communities. Most recently, I was appointed by President Biden to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights which is tasked with informing and advising Congress and the President on the status of civil rights in the country. In each of these fights—along with so many others—I have been guided by the principles of community lawyering: creating trusting relationships and centering community voices. For years TCRP has been a leader in championing these values in its legal and advocacy programs and I am thrilled to expand this work as TCRP's new president.

Under the leadership of outgoing president Mimi Marziani, TCRP has become the go-to civil rights organization in Texas over the past decade, leading

the state in the fight for voting rights, border justice, and criminal legal reforms. It is my mission to build on this legacy and expand our influence in and out of Texas, while also bringing a new perspective as a Latina, border resident, and mother to a young daughter.

Texas faces unprecedented threats to our most basic civil rights and freedoms. In recent years, state lawmakers have taken aggressive steps to curb the freedom to vote — rolling back decades of progress by our coalition. Our border continues to be a hotbed for anti-immigrant policies and increasing militarization. Texans across the state are subject to a criminal legal system that is weaponized against institutionally oppressed communities. This year alone, TCRP is tracking over 700 bills proposed by the Texas Legislature that will continue to chip away at the civil rights of Texans.

There is much work ahead — but with your partnership, I'm confident we can build a Texas where our communities thrive with dignity and justice, and without fear.

You can continue to support our work by making a monetary contribution, volunteering your time, or spreading our message through your social media channels to your family and friends. Thank you for all that you do for TCRP!



In solidarity,

**Rochelle Garza**  
President, TCRP

# Election Protection in The Rio Grande Valley



“It meant a great deal to our south Texas hotline callers to speak to someone who was actually from their community, and I believe this allowed for a greater sense of trust from those coming to us for help with voting issues.”

— Alexis Bay

**Alexis Bay, Election Protection Fellow**

*Photo: Omar Casas*

**E**lection Protection Fellow Alexis Bay has deep roots in the Rio Grande Valley. Her years working on reproductive and environmental justice campaigns, in addition to her work on TCRP's Beyond Borders team, made her the perfect person to launch TCRP's election protection efforts in South Texas. In the lead up to the 2022 midterm election, Alexis and our Voting Rights team **held in-person and online legal know-your-rights training for south Texas voters** and for organizers at LUPE and ARISE. Alexis also conducted TCRP's very first Spanish-language poll monitoring training for LUPE, who was an invaluable partner for us on election day as a counterpart to our legal volunteers.

Together with Hidalgo County Bar Association, Alexis and our Voting Rights team hosted an Election Protection legal training for South Texas lawyers and legal adjacent workers, **training 17 local legal volunteers and all South Texas staff** at TCRP. Community partners Texas Turn-out and UTRGV Texas Rising displayed our signs at tabling events in the community and at university campuses, along with our palm cards and one-pagers in Edinburg and Brownsville, Texas. Across the state, our team **trained more than 400 legal volunteers, totaling 4,550 hours of protecting Texas voters' ability** to cast a ballot that counts!



# Building a Thriving Border Community



“I do this work for my family, my ancestors, and my home community in the Rio Grande Valley. I strive for that day when our beautiful river culture is for helping and providing dignity for all.”

— Roberto Lopez

**Roberto Lopez, Senior Advocacy Manager**

**W**ith core partners Grassroots Leadership and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC), Roberto Lopez and our Beyond Borders team launched a collaborative advocacy campaign to halt the unlawful and xenophobic program known as Operation Lone Star (OLS). Under OLS, state officials are terrorizing border communities by targeting Black and Latinx migrants for arrest, jailing, prosecution, and deportation. Our partnership has **focused on organizing border communities, providing public education on how OLS harms border communities, and leading community advocacy** in counties such as Kinney, where more migrants have been arrested under OLS than any other county in Texas.

Our partnership has also pursued local, state and national legal strategies to bring an end to OLS. In December of 2020, our coalition **filed a Title VI complaint with the Department of Justice (DOJ) that outlined clear evidence of racial profiling and discrimination** in the implementation of OLS. Along with more than 20 national civil rights, immigrant and criminal justice partners, our coalition continues to lead talks with the DOJ and the Biden Administration to act on this complaint and launch an investigation and federal intervention into the unlawful implementation of OLS.

# Keeping Students Safe in School



**“When we organize for a common demand—for better educational services and a less punitive school system—it shows those in power that our communities are determined to fight for a better future for their families.”**

**— Chris Rivera**

**Travis Fife, Legal Fellow**  
**Christopher Rivera, Outreach Coordinator**  
**Sumaya Siddiqui, Digital Coordinator**

**L**ast year our Criminal Injustice (CI) team launched an investigation into student discipline and school policing across the state. Our investigation found that Pasadena ISD, located just outside Houston, disciplines and arrests students at higher rates than larger school districts like Dallas, Austin, and Fort Worth. Black students are particularly affected by these policies. Black students make up 7.5% of the PISD student body, but accounted for 15.3% of disciplinary actions over the last three years. As horrifying as this data is, it likely underestimates the actual role of law enforcement on PISD campuses because of in-person learning interruptions over the past three years.

In response to the discovery of these troubling numbers, CI staff Travis Fife and Christopher Rivera sent a letter to the Pasadena ISD School Board to alert them of these alarming numbers and demand an explanation. Fife and Rivera also held town hall meetings in Pasadena to inform and engage the community around the school policing practices that are impacting their children. Our Criminal Injustice team is challenging these oppressive systems by continuing critical community engagement work and standing with students, parents, teachers, and other advocates calling for police-free schools.

# How We Fight for Change: Community Lawyering



“True and just change comes from action driven by the lived experiences of impacted people. Advocates and lawyers have a unique expertise that, combined with community partners and knowledge, can be a real catalyst for prolonged, systemic change.”

— Karla Marisol Vargas, Senior Attorney

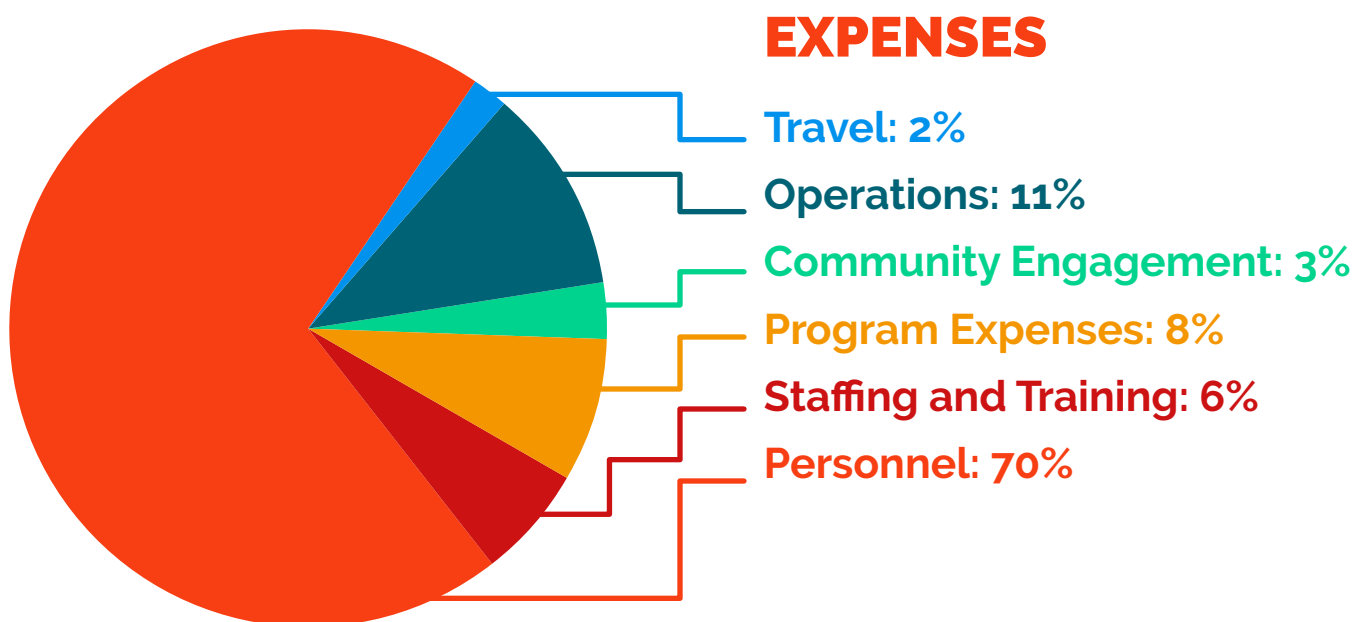
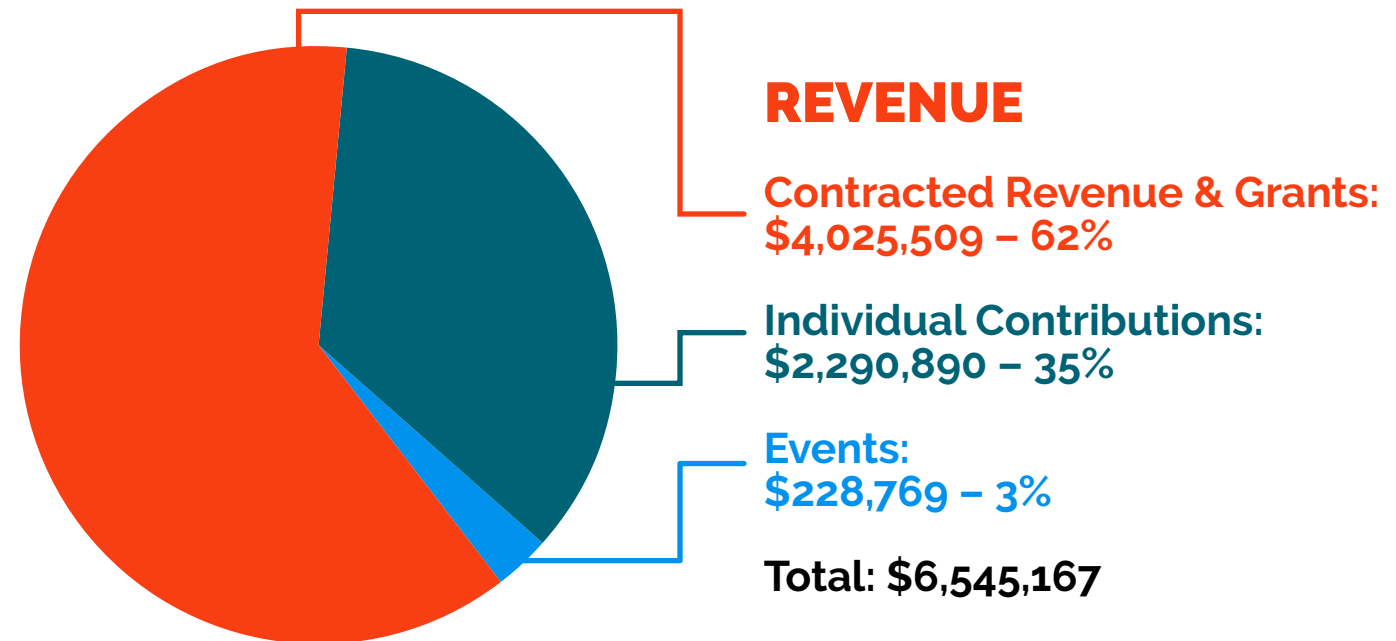
**TCRP** harnesses the power of the law to protect the civil rights of all Texans and to empower communities that have been institutionally oppressed. In the fight for a fairer Lone Star State, TCRP serves as the go-to lawyers, policy experts, and advocates for grassroots organizations, local leaders and impacted community members who share our goal of protecting civil rights. Our unique approach is one of “community lawyering,” rooted in deep community relationships, excellent legal services, and a creative approach to policy change.

Effective community lawyering requires our team to maintain trusting relationships with our partners and center the needs of the communities in all that we do. Part of maintaining trust, and an equally critical part of effective community lawyering, is the ability to approach Texas communities with humility, cultural competency and an ability and willingness to actively listen to people impacted by systemic injustice.



# Finances and Operations

TCRP's Finance & Operations Department works hard behind the scenes to ensure our programs run smoothly and our staff are well supported. Thanks to their dedication, TCRP continues to maintain strong financial and operational controls that have positioned us to expand our work fighting for equity and justice in Texas.



# Our Board of Directors



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**Oscar Rodriguez**



**Salina Mostajabian MD**

# DONATE

You can advance the movement for equality and justice by contributing to the Texas Civil Rights Project.

## ONLINE:

[txcivilrights.org/take-action/contribute](https://txcivilrights.org/take-action/contribute)

## BY MAIL:

Please make checks payable to the *Texas Civil Rights Project* and mail to:

**Texas Civil Rights Project**  
**PO Box 17757**  
**Austin, TX 78760**

## OTHER WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE

**JOIN THE JUSTICE CORPS, TCRP'S COHORT OF DEDICATED SUSTAINING SUPPORTERS!**

**DO YOU HAVE A DONOR ADVISED FUND? DOES YOUR EMPLOYER OFFER MATCHING GIFTS?**

Visit to learn more: [txcivilrights.org/take-action/join-the-justice-corps](https://txcivilrights.org/take-action/join-the-justice-corps)

To contact TCRP, please reach out to us at [development@texascivilrightsproject.org](mailto:development@texascivilrightsproject.org)



[txcivilrights.org](http://txcivilrights.org)