FAMILY VIOLENCE APPELLATE PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT



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Shuray Ghorishi

Senior Managing Attorney
Cory Hernandez

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Jodi Lewis

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Intake Specialist

Andrew Seko

Development & Grants Coordinator

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



DEBORAH SON

Executive Director/CEO

Dear Friends, Partners, and Champions of Justice,

Each year, I sit down to write this letter and find myself overwhelmed—not by the weight of the work ahead, but by the awe I feel for what we've accomplished **together**.

Amid a climate of political uncertainty and shrinking public resources, FVAP stood steadfast. We argued and won appeals that are changing how the courts understand domestic violence. We partnered with allies to advance legislation that addresses the deep inequities survivors face, particularly those in marginalized communities. And we trained hundreds of attorneys, providers, and advocates—spreading the impact of our work far beyond the courtroom.

This past year, we achieved a historic and hard-

fought victory: the California Supreme Court accepted our lawsuit challenging the lack of verbatim records in trial court proceedings—a systemic barrier that has long denied survivors the ability to appeal unjust decisions. This case represents not only a tremendous win for justice but also a critical step toward ensuring transparency, accountability, and meaningful access to justice in civil courts.

At FVAP, we are not merely responding to a crisis. We are leading an uprising to challenge the status quo—pushing back against a legal system that grows more complex with every precedent set. Lawyers, advocates, and judges throughout California have a clearer, stronger understanding of the rights and protections the law offers to domestic violence survivors. With every training we run, every bit of technical assistance we provide, every lawyer and law firm that joins our burgeoning network of pro bono representatives, the movement to end domestic violence grows stronger.

Thanks to your support, FVAP provided \$2.3 million in volunteer legal services in 2024, and has a healthy and growing reserve, empowering us to continue growing and improving our services. Our robust network of pro bono lawyers and law firms delivered over 10,000 hours of legal services to survivors at absolutely no cost.

We literally could not do this work without your support, and we rise because you lift us. We are, all of us, part of something extraordinary. In the face of every injustice, FVAP rises—not just with skill, but with heart. We rise because you lift us. Every dollar you give, every hour you volunteer, every time you share our story—you make it possible for us to keep fighting for safety, dignity, and justice. The battle for resources is real, but so is the power of our collective will. As we look to the year ahead, I invite you to stand even closer with us. The path to justice is long, but we are not walking it alone.

With gratitude and resolve,



MISSION

We believe no one should endure abuse. We ensure the safety and well-being of survivors of gender-based abuse, including domestic violence, and their children by helping them obtain effective appellate representation.

VISION

We believe justice should be available to everyone, not just those who can afford it. Our free, high-quality legal representation gives survivors the best possible chance at success in their appeal. Ultimately our goal is to break the intergenerational cycle of trauma and abuse. By making sure all kids have the chance to grow up in safe, healthy homes, we are building a better future for the next generation.

Pictured: front row: Zyreena Choudhry, Lucia Romo, Deborah Son, Renee G.; middle row: Tammi Relyea, Shuray Ghorishi, Jennafer Dorfman Wagner, Renee Boman, Taylor Campion; back row: Evangeline Stratton, Thao Weldy, Arati Vasan, Elissa Gray, Gloria Carolina Chong, Monica LaBoskey

KEISHA'S STORY

In 2014, when Keisha fled Texas with her young son to escape abuse, she hoped they were finally safe. But after her abuser kidnapped her son and took him across state lines, Keisha faced a long and painful legal battle that ultimately cost her the job that she loved. That's when she found FVAP. Our legal team represented her on appeal and won—affirming her right to full custody and the protections of a restraining order. The decision kept Keisha with her son and created legal guidance to help other survivors.

Today, Keisha and her son are safe and thriving. She has turned her experience into leadership and advocacy, joining FVAP's Board of Directors and serving as the Board's Chief Financial Officer to help FVAP and other survivors access safety and justice.

"It means so much to be able to channel what I went through into something positive," she says, "to use my story for good, to continue to work with an incredible organization, knowing I'm helping empower other survivors." Keisha's journey shows how one survivor's courage can ripple outward—creating change, hope, and safety for many others.



Pictured: Keisha Wright with Simpson co-counsel Caitlyn Chacon and Anajali Kulkarni

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Revenue	
In-Kind Services	\$2,304,419
Government Grants	\$1,702,424
Contributions	\$425,632
Fundraising Events	\$98,540
Investment Gain, net	\$47,020
Other Income	\$6,981
Revenue Total	\$4 585 016

Ex	per	ises	

Program Services	\$4,135,717
Administrative Services	\$568,661
Fundraising Expenses	\$377,734
Expenses Total	\$5,082,112

FVAP operated at a planned deficit while running the Washington Pilot Project (see page 12), using funds raised during the Rise and Soar Campaign and our reserves. With that project now having concluded, we are projecting a return to positive operating margins in 2025.

This is an excerpt from our audit report for the year ending December 31, 2024. The audit report was prepared on an accrual basis using Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) in the United States. The full audit report is posted here and also available upon request.

PROGRAMS

Our programs are bridging gaps and eliminating disparities in our court system to ensure everyone has equitable access to justice and the safety they deserve.



We provide free legal aid to survivors of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse, stalking, and human trafficking.

Our mission is to empower individuals by using the legal system to challenge harmful court decisions that leave them vulnerable to ongoing abuse.

APPELLATE COURTS

Photo: Jennafer Dorfman Wagner Appeals Filed:

Win Rate

10

77%



- FVAP's Next Gen Program includes an internship/fellowship provided to law students in their second or third year. We also provide invaluable co-counseling opportunities to associates at law firms educating them about the issues facing abuse survivors.
- * FVAP invests in justice by mentoring the next generation of attorneys in appellate law and trauma-informed practices to better support survivors.

NEXT GENERATION

Photo: Arati Vasan

Clerks:

Hours:

7

1,599



In 2023, FVAP launched the Lifeline to Justice Program to help survivors access emergency relief from dangerous, unjust court orders that threaten their safety.

Thanks to initial funding from an Equal Justice Works Fellowship sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, LLP and The Clorox Company Foundation, we are building a system where writs are a lifesaving legal pathway available to all survivors.

EMERGENCY WRITS

Photo: Elissa Gray

Writs Filed

Win Rate:

3

67%



- Homelessness is a major obstacle survivors face when leaving an abusive relationship. FVAP bridges the gap between legal service providers and domestic violence advocates who are assisting survivors to secure and maintain safe housing.
- We train and inform survivors and survivor advocates on housing protections for survivors so the crisis of abuse is not compounded by housing instability.

HOUSING SAFETY & JUSTICE

Photo: Taylor Campion

Trainings:

Attendees:

11

404



Case law and new laws alone are not enough, if the attorneys and advocates assisting survivors at trial court are unaware of these updates.

To educate the community, FVAP creates case alerts, other written materials and trainings as well as self-help legal tools for survivors without other support. FVAP also provides free on-call technical assistance (TA) for attorneys and advocates.

LEGAL SUPPORT Photo: Jodi Lewis

Trainings Led:

1:1 TA Provided:

12

1,261



- While the bulk of FVAP's work is focused on representing survivors in appeals, we know that precedent and appeals aren't the only way to protect survivors and their families.
- Having a legal services voice at the table ensures that the unique concerns and perspectives of indigent litigants and survivors are included when important court rules and forms are developed.

POLICY ADVOCACY

Photo: Cory Hernandez

Bills Supported:

Bills Sponsored:

17

2



CRISIS: COURT REPORTER SHORTAGE

A constitutional crisis is threatening the rights of survivors of gender-based violence throughout California. Picture having to challenge a trial court decision without any documentation of what transpired at court. Unfortunately, this is the harsh reality for many in California.

For approximately 15% of the otherwise viable appeals FVAP turns away each year, it is only because there was no court reporter at the hearing. And our clients are not alone. Between October 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024, over 72% of the hearings in California had no provided court reporter present. It costs an average of \$3,300 per day for clients to bring their own, an impossible amount for most of the survivors FVAP serves. For FVAP that means turning away survivors' appeals even when we think the order is dangerous or wrong because, as the California Supreme Court said, the lack of a court reporter "will frequently be fatal" to an appeal.

In that case, Jameson v. Desta, FVAP filed an amicus brief and was hopeful when the court ruled that low-income litigants have the right to a free court reporter provided by the court. We then successfully lobbied for an additional \$30M in annual funding solely to recruit and retain court reporters. However, you can't hire someone who doesn't exist, and the bill we sponsored, SB 662 (Rubio), which would have authorized electronic recording of civil cases when no official court reporter is available, was defeated in the legislature in 2023.



FIGHTING TO BE HEARD

On December 4, 2024, FVAP, represented by Covington & Burling, LLP and Community Legal Aid SoCAL, and Bay Area Legal Aid, representing themselves, filed an original writ petition in the California Supreme Court to challenge the state's ban on litigants using electronic recording in most civil court hearings, when a court reporter is unavailable. In 2025, the California Supreme Court accepted FVAP's case addressing the ongoing court reporter shortage—a major step toward resolving this constitutional crisis. Our legal team is working tirelessly to defend the rights of low-income litigants across California.

- To date, 13 organizations and legal experts filed powerful amicus briefs in support of our case, underscoring how much is at stake. The California Attorney General also weighed in with a brief on June 30, 2025.
- Visit <u>fvaplaw.org/court-reporter-shortage</u> for more information about the case, from filings to amicus briefs to court orders and more. Follow the case on the California Supreme Court's online docket (Case No. S288176), where you can sign up for email alerts.





COMMUNITY AWARDS



ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR: SUSAN EGGMAN

Former Senator Susan Eggman's leadership on California's 2022 SB 1017 Lease Terminations and 2024 SB 1051 Lock Change bills, both of which FVAP proudly co-sponsored resulted in landmark victories for survivors across the state. Her advocacy exemplifies how powerful change can happen when leaders partner with FVAP to advance justice and safety.

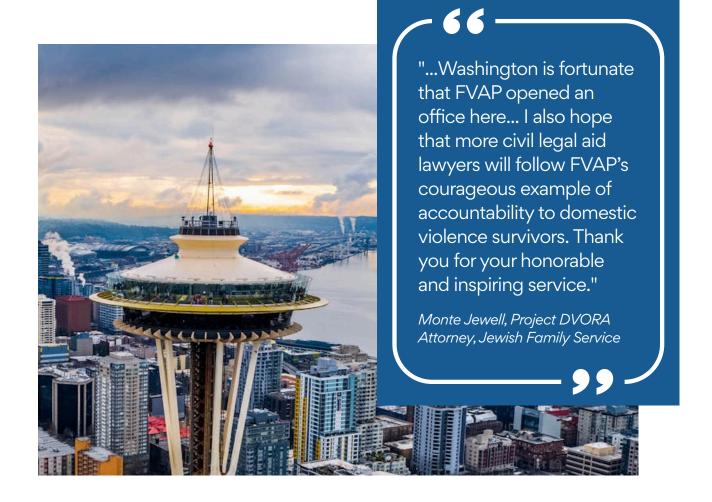
VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: ERIN SMITH

Erin Smith's unwavering dedication, time, and legal expertise have helped transform the landscape of justice for domestic violence survivors. FVAP's former Executive Director took an active role in FVAP's Supreme Court writ soliciting and coordinating amicus support, working with over 30 organizations and experts, resulting in 13 powerful amicus briefs filed in support of FVAP's original writ petition. This outcome simply would not have been possible without Erin's leadership, deep relationships, and unrelenting commitment to justice.

PRO BONO AWARD: COVINGTON & BURLING

Over the past two years, the Pro Bono team at Covington and Burling has worked tirelessly to prepare, file, and successfully advocate for the California Supreme Court to accept an original writ petition on FVAP's behalf—an incredibly rare achievement. This critical project seeks relief from the ongoing court reporter shortage that is denying survivors meaningful access to the courts. Their work included investigating practices across all 58 California county courts, drafting and processing extensive Public Records Act requests, and conducting thorough legal analysis to identify the appropriate respondents for an original writ proceeding. Covington also led the development of a compelling legal strategy that resulted in the Supreme Court granting review—an exceptional outcome.

WASHINGTON PILOT PROJECT



A DEDICATED STAFF. A PROVEN MODEL. A PRODUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT. THE MISSING PIECE? DURABLE FUNDING.

When FVAP brought our work to Washington State, we brought with us a simple but radical belief: survivors of domestic violence deserve to be heard, believed, and protected—not just in the trial courts, but at the very highest levels of justice. In the life of our Washington pilot, that belief came alive.

Our small but mighty Washington team stood beside survivors when their lives and safety hung in the balance. They won appeals that pulled people back from the brink of danger. They worked to change laws so the next survivor wouldn't face the same impossible barriers. They lit a fire in the state to show what is possible when the ferocity for survivor advocacy only strengthens.

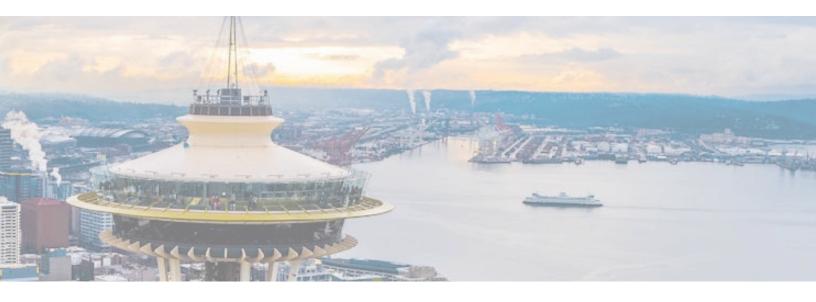
Despite these victories, the pilot could not be sustained and the office stopped accepting new clients at the end of 2024—not because the vision failed, but because the resources did. The hard truth is that funding structures nonprofits rely on are fragile, competitive, and flawed. In the very systems designed to protect survivors, there are cracks wide enough for life-saving programs to fall through.



Our support for FVAP Washington was not misplaced, though. We proved that the FVAP model works in multiple states—securing legal victories, overturning dangerous decisions, and inspiring systemic change that will echo for years. The lesson is clear: our model is not just needed—it is a proven, effective pathway to lasting justice.

We now have a bold blueprint for the future—rooted in real-world success, informed by hard-earned lessons. The Washington pilot showed us what's possible, and what structures need to be in place for any future expansions. With your continued partnership, we will turn that possibility into permanence. This is just the beginning.

Pictured: Boardmember Michelle Osborne, Renee G., Zyreena Choudhry, Shuray Ghorishi, Thao Weldy, Lucia Romo, Deborah Son



FUTURE PLANS

The Washington State pilot demonstrated FVAP's bold leadership and commitment to our mission. Despite concluding due to funding constraints, the pilot achieved life-saving legal outcomes. strengthened community partnerships, and generated critical insights into effective service delivery. With this tested, datadriven blueprint, FVAP is now positioned to guide future expansion with greater agility, strategic focus, and operational foresight. Moving forward, FVAP will leverage these lessons to craft a deliberate, organization-wide roadmap toward our moonshot—that "justice happens the first time"-emphasizing growth that amplifies outcomes rather than diluting effectiveness. Thanks to the work of the tireless attorneys and intake personnel who served in the FVAP WA office, we were able to spur lasting change and elevate the ongoing needs of survivors in WA through the publication of our WA-based research study, the Appellate Justice Report 2024, authored by Kellie Colemon and Anna Kashner.

This report is slated to be publicly available in early 2026. FVAP extends its heartfelt gratitude to all who made this report possible, to fearless advocates who breathed life into FVAP WA, and to everyone who believed in our mission.

KEY LESSONS

- Conduct comprehensive needs
 assessments that include asset mapping of
 local donors, potential funders, and Interest
 on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA)
 resources.
- Prioritize investment in administrative, fundraising, and public relations capacity before expanding the program team, ensuring operations and funding development are established prior to opening service doors.
- Pause or slow expansion when resources do not align with need, to allow internal stabilization before scaling.



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Jose Ramos, Jr., Child Care Resource Center
Edie Zusman, Neuroscience Partners

Sonya Passi Alexandrea Scott Erin Smith FVAP Co-Founder, FreeFrom Network for Victim Recovery of DC FVAP Co-Founder, Author

Pictured: Samantha S. Low, Ming Chen, Mariya Pamnani, Nora Puckett, Deborah Son, Scott Johnston, Keisha Wright, Jose Ramos, Jr., Michelle Osborne



MAJOR DONORS

Family Violence Appellate Project relies on the generous financial support of committed supporters like you. Without your donations, grants, and funding, survivors would be left without the representation they need and the fierce advocates they deserve.

SUSTAINERS CIRCLE

Donors who gave regularly throughout 2024

Adrian Winder Michelle Osborne

Alberto Tovar Michelle White

Anonymous Ming Chen

Emily Stout-Garcia Nell Green Nylen

Joan Haratani Nitin Subhedar

Joanna McCallum Nora Puckett

Keh-yueh Fu Shira Cole

PLATINUM CIRCLE

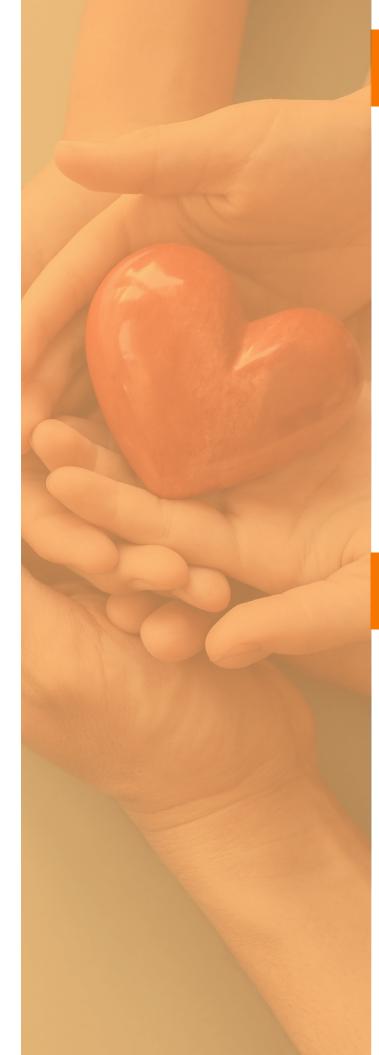
\$100,000+

Anonymous State Bar of California

GOLD CIRCLE

\$50,000 - \$99,999

Equal Justice Works The Bellwether Foundation II



SILVER CIRCLE

\$5,000 - \$49,999

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> Mary Lu Everett Anonymous

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Stacey Wexler & Michael Page

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Foundation

The Pittsburgh Foundation,

The Community Foundation

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van Löben Sels/RembeRock

Foundation

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\$1.000 - \$4.999

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Google Inc.

High Ground Divorces





FVAP's staff is dedicated, passionate, and skilled, but we do not do this work alone. Thanks to the support of law firms and attorneys throughout the state, our yearly impact is more than doubled through pro bono and volunteer representation.



11,063

2024 Pro Bono Hours



\$2.3M

In-Kind Donations

DIAMOND CIRCLE

1,000+ hours

Covington & Burling Gibson Dunn

RUBY CIRCLE

500 - 999 hours

Hanson Bridgett Perkins Coie Morgan Lewis & Bockius

SAPPHIRE CIRCLE

100 - 499 hours

Alisa McKissick Jones Day

Anissa Hall Katten Muchin Rosenman

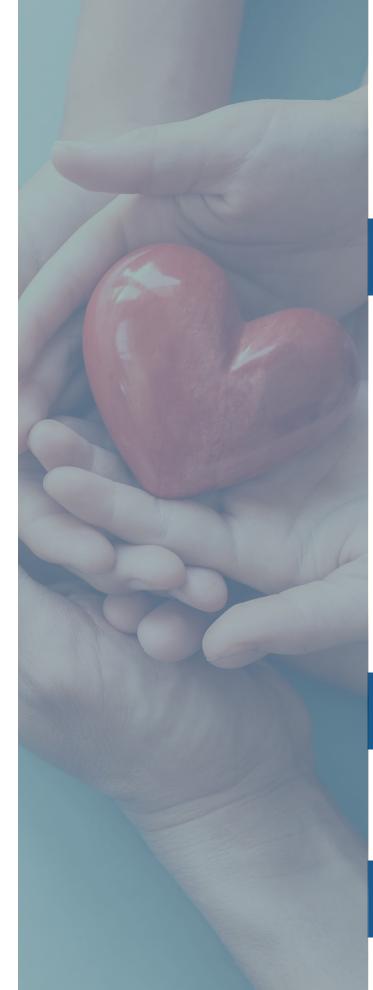
Dorothy Wu Kokoro Terukina

Erin Smith Orrick

Horvitz & Levy Stoel Rives

James Taylor Tiana Pereira

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EMERALD CIRCLE

0 - 99 hours

Adobe Inc Hoge, Fenton, Jones &

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Richard

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PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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FAMILY VIOLENCE APPELLATE PROJECT

