



## BLC Quarterly Newsletter Launching

We are excited to announce that we are now launching our quarterly newsletter!

This newsletter is an important medium for us to communicate real-time information about BLC's current projects, community partners, gracious funders, events, and wonderful volunteers. We're excited to share this opportunity for our community to stay up-to-date on everything happening at BLC.



## Honoring the Dedication of Our Valued Volunteers

We want to take a moment to shine a light on our incredible volunteers; they serve as an integral part of BLC, helping us in so many different ways. From pro bono attorneys to legal externs, high school interns, and event volunteers – we appreciate your many contributions.

In 2023, BLC's 20 volunteers generously shared their knowledge on challenging cases, brainstormed solutions to complicated legal issues, worked hard behind the scenes on crucial demographic research and document creation, and helped make our fundraising events run smoothly and be successful.

To our remarkable volunteers: your support of BLC's mission not only helps each of our clients, but it also helps our King County community at large. When people receive the benefits they are entitled to, it allows them to escape the risks and realities of homelessness and take steps to achieving a better quality of life. Thanks to BLC's advocacy, our clients look forward to stable and permanent housing, gaining access to necessary medical treatment, affording nutritious food, and making their own mark on our community.

You are a part of our BLC community as you help drive us towards a more equitable world where housing, medical care, and income stability are accessible to everyone.

A heartfelt thank you to every one of our volunteers for supporting BLC's mission – especially those listed below:

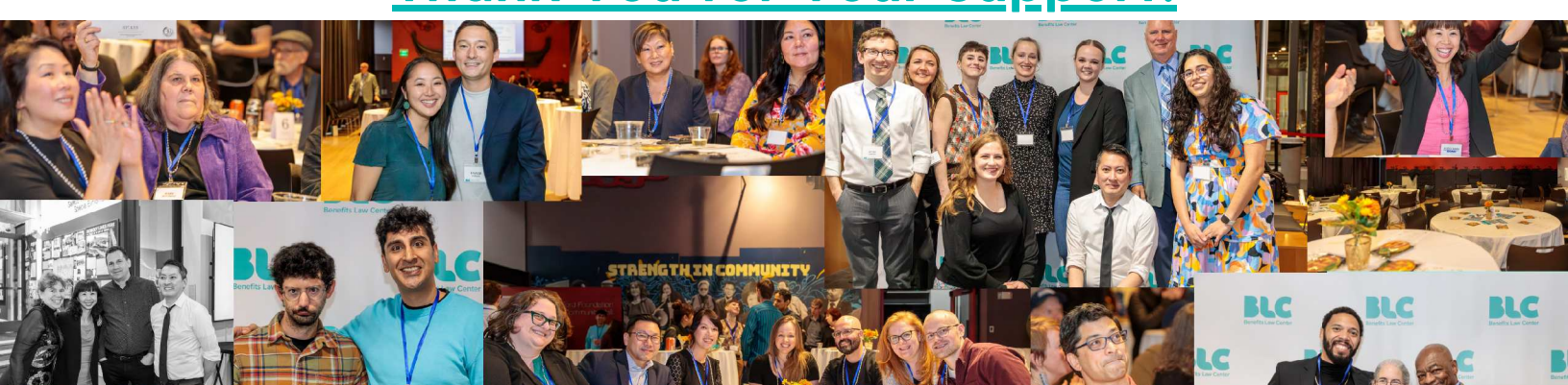
[Evita Hu](#), [Breaker Chittenden](#), [Emery Birch](#), [Ryan Centeno](#), [Audrey Cho](#), [Deirdre Kinney](#)

## Funder Spotlight: Treeline Foundation

### Treeline's Impact Grant Awarded to BLC

We are elated to announce that we received a \$25,000 grant from Treeline to advance our mission and services to help people overcome economic insecurity through legal advocacy in 2024. The Treeline Foundation has supported BLC's community-based and equitable benefit advocacy since 2015. We are honored to be funded by Treeline – one of Washington's most benevolent private foundations, which supplies nearly \$2M in support each year to more than 30 nonprofits that offer a safety net of human services and conservation help to the community at large.

## Thank You for Your Support!

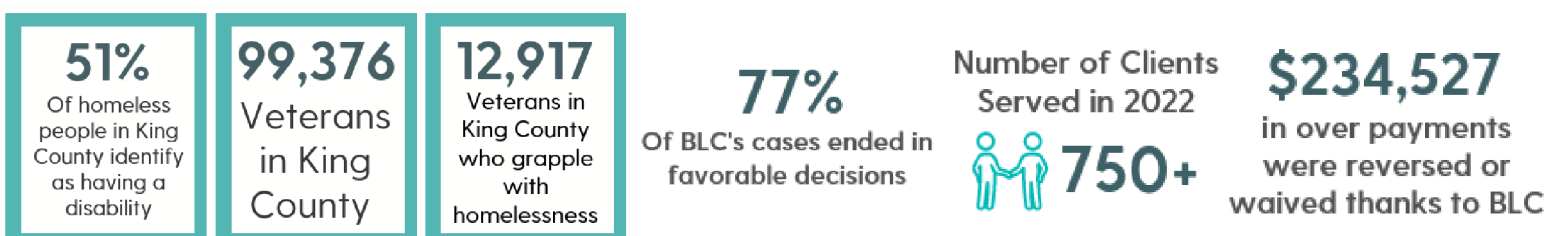


As we stretch into the New Year, our BLC team wants to thank our caring supporters again for coming out and donating to our October LOL fundraiser. Together, we were able to raise more than \$45,000 in donations, revel in the comedy of Dan Hurwitz and Gibran Saleem, and deepen the commitment to our equitable legal services through impactful speeches from Huy Nguyen and Rep. Pramila Jayapal (D.). Your generosity fueled the work of our devoted legal team to close out the last quarter of 2023 on a strong note – providing individualized legal services to many clients, and closing 122 cases. These cases resulted in \$251,400 in backpay awarded to our clients, \$70,500 in overpayments waived, and \$10,800 in new benefits awarded to clients who did not previously receive them. Thank you!

## Funding Highlight: King County Veterans, Seniors, & Human Services Levy (VSHSL)

Since 2006, the King County Veterans & Human Services Levy has funded a wide range of programs that connect veterans, military service members and their families, as well as individuals and families in need with affordable housing, employment, behavioral health treatment, and other services. In 2017, voters approved the Veterans, Seniors and Human Services Levy, adding funding for services to King County seniors and their families. Under the King County Strategy FS1C: Leverage Government Benefits to Gain Employment and Increase Household Income, BLC received \$704,668 over a 5-year period. This funding allowed our skilled attorneys to advocate for those who encounter obstacles to engaging with and navigating high-barrier human and social service agencies and government entities.

With this funding, BLC was able to better support our community's veterans in many ways. We increased our outreach through the King County Veterans Program, educated veterans on benefits available through Social Security, advocated for hundreds of veterans to gain or maintain Social Security benefits, and ultimately helped veterans overcome barriers to financial and medical stability. Here are some statistics from our 2022 Annual Report:



## The Arduous Journey of Our Clients to Obtain Social Security Income

The Social Security Administration (SSA) made national news on the November 5, 2023, during a segment of 60 Minutes with Anderson Cooper. Four households were featured who, much like our BLC clients, received payouts that were later considered overpayments (even 20 years later!). In their retirement years and disabled, these people were informed out of the blue that their benefits would be halted, and they were required to pay back alleged overpayments immediately. These people had already spent the money on meeting their basic needs and housing. SSA told them they were obligated to repay it EVEN if it wasn't their fault, and if it was an error by SSA.

How does this happen? One way benefits can be overpaid is when SSA doesn't accurately calculate a person's benefit amount because SSA erroneously recorded information, or the information is incomplete. By the time SSA catches mistakes, years can pass, and the amounts SSA says people owe can balloon to staggering levels. However, SSA is rarely held accountable, and it will attempt to recoup the alleged overpayment amounts out of the pockets of the recipients. An overwhelming majority of recipients who are erroneously assessed with overpayments do not have access to a lawyer nor are they able to secure legal representation.

In Washington State, 18% of our population receives Social Security benefits, this accounts for 90% of our residents ages 65 and older. Yet very few private attorneys take on these cases, and even fewer nonprofits have the legal expertise to help. The singular goal of BLC's benefits attorneys is to help people living with disabilities to affordably navigate the obstacles of the complex federal system – including challenging applications, long wait times, and appeals to denials, which are more common than not – to finally gain and then maintain their rightful Social Security income. Our advocacy requires hundreds of hours of documentation, paperwork, appeals, and administrative hearings to rectify. BLC's legal services have been a lifeline for thousands of community members over the past 26 years, and we look forward to helping more populations living with disabilities throughout Western Washington's marginalized communities in 2024.

To learn more about this issue and the complexities of the Social Security system, check out the 60 Minutes episode by [clicking here](#).