



FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES
ANNUAL REPORT 2017



CLS FIGHTS POVERTY AT EVERY LEVEL.

Each year, CLS provides **direct representation** to more than 9,000 clients with urgent legal problems. Advocates simultaneously carry out powerful **multi-faceted litigation, policy advocacy**, and **strategic use of the media**, solving systemic problems at the root.



Representing clients every day allows CLS to **identify and respond to the changing and emerging needs of low-income people and communities**, crafting creative advocacy strategies, and targeting community education efforts.

CLS finds innovative ways to meet our clients where they are. Recognizing that clients may face challenges in getting legal help during intake hours, CLS conducts legal clinics in the neighborhoods where some of CLS's most vulnerable clients live and work. This method of "community lawyering" ensures CLS's services are accessible to all.

CLS's approach and many of its programs have become models for local and national organizations. **CLS blazes a trail for the larger legal community to follow.**

WHAT WE DO

- Stabilize neighborhoods
- Prevent homelessness
- Fight unlawful evictions and illegal lockouts
- Improve welfare systems
- Clear criminal records
- Challenge language barriers to government services
- Obtain home health care services for older adults and people with disabilities
- Save homes from foreclosure
- Help immigrants achieve stability
- Advocate for energy affordability
- Reunite families whose kids have been in foster care
- Support vulnerable youth
- Improve substandard housing conditions
- Get cash assistance for pregnant women and families
- Ensure nursing home safety and oversight
- Fight predatory lending
- Prevent hunger by increasing access to SNAP
- Break down employment barriers
- Address abusive mortgage practices
- Save homes from foreclosure
- Access Medicaid and Medicare benefits
- Obtain safe housing for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault
- Recover stolen wages
- Stabilize families through public benefits access
- Restore water, heat, and electricity services
- Challenge denials of SSI benefits
- Keep children safely at home with their families

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



CLS Executive Director Debby Freedman (center), with CLS Deputy Directors Kathy Gomez (left) and Brenda Marrero (right).

This year marked my 25th anniversary at Community Legal Services (CLS) and I continue to feel extremely lucky to be part of this incredible organization. Throughout my time here, I have been privileged to work in a place whose mission has profound meaning for me, and where my colleagues are dedicated to carrying out our mission with excellence. I am proud that CLS continues to serve as a leader in public interest law at the local, state and national levels.

This has been a challenging year for the clients and communities we serve, but our remarkable staff have matched the challenges with hard work, dedication and creativity. This year CLS represented clients in every neighborhood in Philadelphia and clients who speak 41 different languages. We helped more than 9,100 clients with problems ranging from eviction and foreclosure, to employment barriers, and trouble accessing disability and health benefits. We also helped tens of thousands more through our highly successful policy advocacy and litigation.

In the pages of this annual report, you will read about some of that work. Our cutting edge legal advocacy gets at the root causes of our clients' legal issues. Our victories have ranged from reforming the City's property tax collection system, to creating community-based projects to help under-served immigrant populations, and holding nursing homes accountable for resident safety.

CLS remains committed to standing with Philadelphia's most vulnerable residents when they need us the most. As we continue in the fight for justice, we thank you for your support. Because of you, CLS will continue its proud tradition of being tireless, dedicated advocates for our clients.

Debby Freedman
Executive Director

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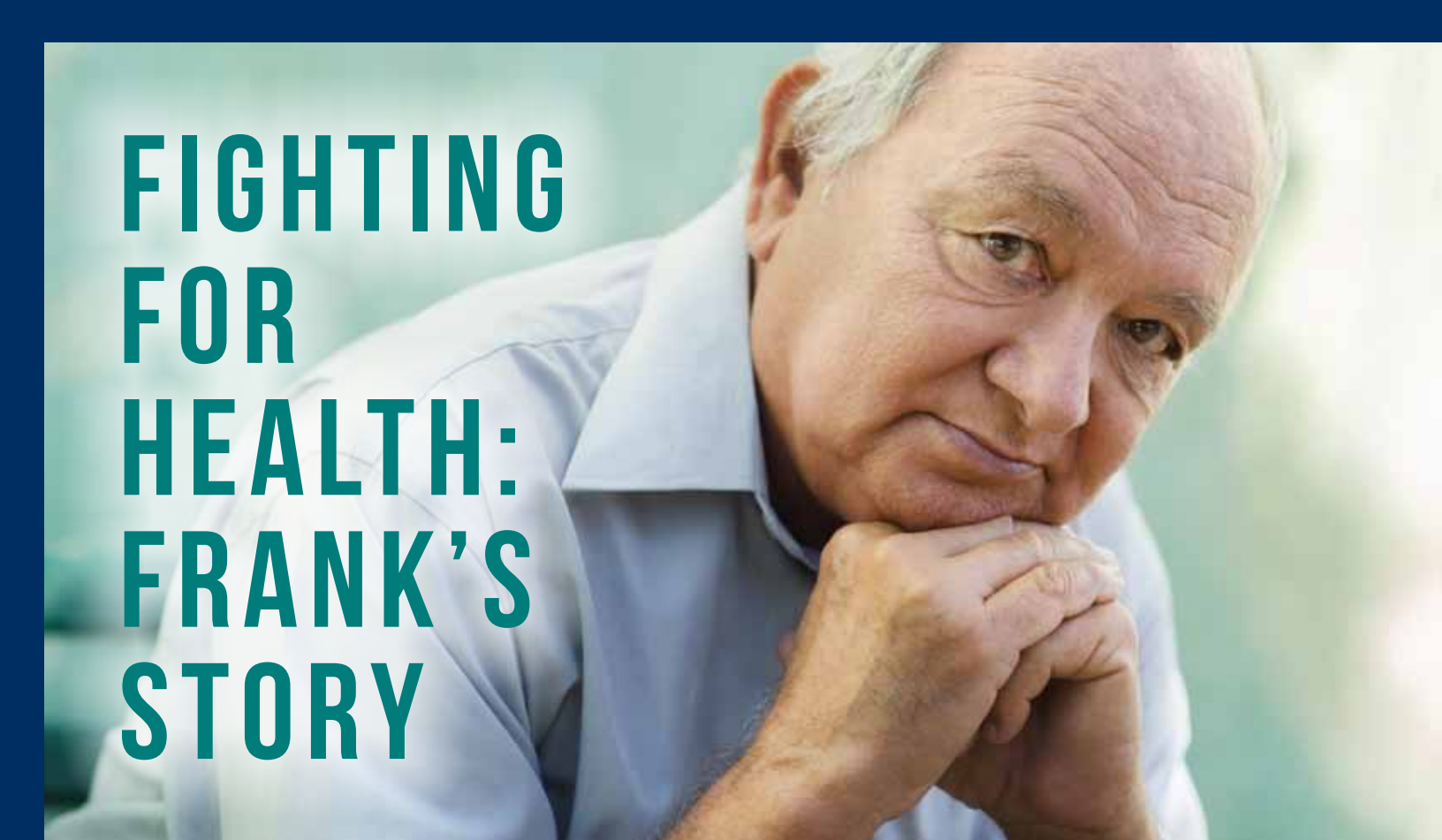
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FIGHTING FOR HEALTH: FRANK'S STORY

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Frank is a 70-year-old Vietnam veteran who was suffering a host of serious health problems. He was living in an apartment with no heat, a kitchen that did not work, and awful conditions that were impacting his health. Under stress and dealing with illnesses due to his living conditions, Frank began to have seizures.

Frank tried to get the landlord to fix the heat, but the landlord refused. Frank exercised his legal right to withhold rent until the landlord made repairs. In retaliation, Frank's landlord moved to evict him, putting him at severe risk of homelessness.

When people get evicted quickly, they often end up on the streets or in a temporary shelter. CLS fought the

eviction to give Frank enough time to move, so he wouldn't become homeless. To improve Frank's health and safety, we also worked with Frank's sister and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to place him in decent, affordable housing.

Frank is now living in an apartment that he loves. He has heat, a working kitchen, and significantly improved health. Now that Frank has a working kitchen, he rediscovered his interest in cooking, which has truly helped him to thrive.

Can you imagine living without heat in the winter, or clean, running water in your home? What if you were entitled to health insurance, but couldn't access it, and had to go without medical care? Where would you turn if mold in your rental unit was causing your child to have asthma attacks? What if your cupboards were bare?

Thousands of Philadelphians don't have to imagine these scenarios. They are the daily reality for someone who lives in poverty. But we change that reality through cutting-edge legal advocacy.

We make sure that landlords provide the safe housing that their tenants are entitled to.

We advocate so that people don't have to go without the medical care or food that they desperately need. This year, we even worked with the city to begin implementing a first-in-the-nation water affordability program, so Philadelphians will not have to go without running water in their homes.

We work to keep Philadelphians healthy because it's one of the most important things we can do. Even better, when people in our city get what they need, our city is healthier.

We see injustice every day: minor criminal records, or even arrests without convictions, shut people out of jobs and opportunity; landlords evict tenants without cause, or illegally lock people out of their homes; predatory lenders target desperate, vulnerable people. The justice system is particularly unjust for people who cannot afford attorneys.

Fighting injustice is at the core of our work and our beliefs.

We make the justice system fairer by giving our clients an expert voice in the court system. We prevent eviction, fight employment discrimination, stand up to predatory lenders, reunite families, and more. We also change systems and advocate relentlessly to stop injustices from happening in the first place.

RIGHTING THE WRONGS: ERICKA'S STORY



Ericka is a youth minister in her church, had been a trusted hospital employee of seven years, and is a mother who dreamed of opening a hair salon with her daughter. To achieve her dream, Ericka took on significant student loan debt to get a degree from Empire Beauty School. She studied hard and graduated at the top of her class, excited to start her career.

Unfortunately, an incident from several years earlier derailed her plans. When an altercation over a fender bender spilled onto Ericka's lawn, Ericka called the police and ran outside to break up the fight. She was arrested when the police assumed Ericka was involved in the altercation. Assumptions lead to people being saddled with criminal records every day, and these records pose significant barriers to employment, housing, and education opportunities. In fact, when

Ericka applied for her cosmetology license, she was provisionally denied because of the arrest from seven years before. Ericka needed to fight back against this injustice, so she turned to CLS.

CLS attorney Jamie Gullen represented Ericka at a hearing before the State Board of Cosmetology in Harrisburg and argued that the conviction was a single aberrant event in Ericka's life, and that she has shown herself in every other way to be a person of strong moral character. The hearing officer and the Board of Cosmetology agreed, and granted Ericka's application to sit for her licensing exam. Ericka was thrilled to be able to embark on her new career and ultimately build a family business that will help lift her whole family out of poverty. She just opened her salon with her daughter, and is so proud of the progress she has made.

LIFELINE BENEFITS: SONYA'S STORY



8 Sonya, a single mother, was struggling to balance her job with the needs of her son Jalal, who has a learning disability and several behavioral disorders. Sonya often had to make the devastating choice between taking Jalal to therapy appointments and going to work, so she could afford basic necessities. She tried to get unpaid leave under the Family & Medical Leave Act, which would keep her job secure, but she was new to her job and needed to be employed for a year in order to even have this unpaid option. Her only hope was to get Jalal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, which are a lifeline for working parents who need to take time off of work to care for children with disabilities.

Jalal's disabilities should have made him eligible for SSI, but he was denied. A successful SSI application for a child requires months' worth of detailed reports and tests from doctors, therapists, and school staff. However, there were gaps in Jalal's mental health records because Sonya could not always afford to send him to a doctor. Compounding the problem,

Jalal's school closed unexpectedly, without passing on any of his educational records. These interconnected barriers are not uncommon for low-income working families.

Sonya sought help from the expert advocates in CLS's SSI unit. CLS Duffy Fellow Jen Burdick and paralegal Leia Gonzalez built the case for Jalal's appeal. They worked extensively with his new school, as well as the doctors and therapists he had seen in the past, to document Jalal's disabilities. They also prepared Jalal and Sonya to testify at the appeal hearing. Jen advocated fiercely for Jalal, presenting a strong case and demonstrating that he met the criteria to receive SSI. Once the judge reviewed all of the evidence, Jalal was finally approved for benefits. Although his issues are severe, Jalal has a chance to grow and thrive with the right treatment. Now that Sonya can afford to take unpaid leave to care for Jalal, he is getting the treatment he needs while SSI keeps this family afloat.

Economic stability means more than just having money to pay the bills. It means that children can grow up and break out of poverty. It means that women who have experienced domestic violence don't have to choose between returning to their abusers and being homeless. It's a parent being able to take time off of work to take care of a child with a severe disability. It's a hard worker being paid appropriately, and not being the victim of wage theft or employment discrimination.

That's why we use legal expertise to connect people to public benefits and vital disability income, advocate for affordable housing and utilities, break down employment barriers, prevent mortgage foreclosure, and fight poverty.

Severe poverty has devastated families and communities, but there are solutions. The work we do to stabilize families and provide resources to people in need is a huge game-changer for people experiencing poverty.

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WATER AFFORDABILITY: FIRST IN THE NATION

After seeing hundreds of desperate clients with no running water in their homes, CLS's Energy Unit took action, working with Philadelphia City Council to establish a first-in-the-nation income-based water affordability program for low-income Philadelphia families. CLS attorneys helped design the program, supported the passage of legislation to create it, and worked with City officials on the implementation process. Thanks to this advocacy, customers' water bills will be calculated as a percentage of household income, making water bills much more affordable for thousands of low-income Philadelphians. This will expand eligibility for the current customer assistance program and help people get their water service turned back on, so more Philadelphia families have access to safe, clean water. Other cities, including Baltimore and Detroit, are in the process of creating similar programs, and have relied on CLS expertise for guidance.

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CLS and a strong coalition of advocates stood with City Council and the City of Philadelphia as they announced an historic investment in legal aid to protect low-income tenants. CLS has represented tenants for decades, and strongly advocated for this funding. Of the approximately 24,000 eviction actions in Philadelphia Landlord-Tenant Court each year, nearly 81% of landlords have legal counsel, while only 8% of tenants do. Because of illiteracy, language barriers, disability, mental health, and other challenges, unrepresented tenants are often unable to navigate the complex legal system. People living in poverty are vulnerable to the threat of homelessness, but with legal representation they may be able to avoid unlawful eviction or obtain assistance so they can pay their rent. This funding sends a clear signal that our leaders recognize that legal aid is a highly effective and important way to prevent homelessness and stabilize neighborhoods.

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MAKING PA COURTS LANGUAGE ACCESSIBLE

This year, the PA Supreme Court announced a new statewide language access plan to improve access to the courts in all 60 judicial districts for people who are LEP (limited English proficient). The plan contains specific action steps, with deadlines, to address major issues, including informing litigants of the availability of language services and how to request them in advance, providing language services in court offices, translating documents, etc. CLS served in a leadership role and provided technical expertise as a member of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) advisory group that developed this plan, which is a major step forward.

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THE MOST COMMON LEGAL PROBLEM IN NORTH PHILLY: PROPERTY TAXES

Did you know that the most common legal problem facing people who come to our North Philadelphia office is property taxes? This year Philadelphia City Council took a big step forward in the fight to prevent homelessness by passing a bill to create a Property Tax Diversion and Deferral Program to help struggling homeowners avoid foreclosure. CLS is now working with the City to design and implement it. The new Property Tax Diversion and Deferral Program will ensure that struggling homeowners have a way to pay taxes to the best of their abilities and keep their homes, while generating much-needed revenue for schools and other City services by improving tax collection efforts. Preventing foreclosure stabilizes neighborhoods and prevents blight, making our entire City safer.

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SERVING IMMIGRANTS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

CLS has been investing in collaborative, community-based projects in an ongoing effort to reach Philadelphia's underserved immigrant communities. This year, CLS provided legal assistance to immigrants and others at Rising Sun Health Center, Congreso, SEAMAAC, Chinatown Clinic, and Asian Arts Initiative. By embedding legal services where immigrants live and work—and co-locating those services at organizations that have built up trust over many years—CLS seeks to foster meaningful relationships with immigrant communities. Meeting people in their communities helps lessen the inherent power imbalance between attorney and client, which leads to more trusting relationships and, ultimately, better results. In turn, each client served helps bridge the justice gap for marginalized sections of the city, as a greater understanding of legal rights spreads through word of mouth.

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**To Honor women and children
who need shelter**
Anew Properties LLC

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Kevin Feeney, Esq.



CLS has been advocating for stronger nursing home enforcement in Pennsylvania for years, and released a report two years ago on how the PA Department of Health (DOH) had failed to protect nursing home residents. For a long time, nursing homes have been allowed to provide inadequate care without facing any repercussion from the state. This lax enforcement resulted in widespread harm to nursing home residents. Since we have started bringing attention to this issue, penalties against nursing homes that break the rules have increased significantly. Now, nursing homes know they must follow the rules or pay the price. As we continue to strengthen protections for nursing home residents and monitor the progress that is being made, CLS will remain diligent and persistent in holding nursing homes and enforcement agencies accountable for patient safety.

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LEGAL UNITS

CLS houses a wide range of legal expertise. With ten different legal units and projects, CLS advocates often collaborate to solve clients' complex and intersecting problems.



AGING AND DISABILITIES UNIT

Specializes in representing seniors and people with disabilities in a wide range of public benefits and consumer matters, including challenges to denials of Medicaid, Medicare, or disability benefits, decisions by managed care organizations to deny care, and violations of residents' rights and quality-of-care requirements in nursing homes and personal care homes.



EMPLOYMENT UNIT

Represents clients with employment-related problems, including tackling barriers to employment, expunging criminal records, seeking unpaid wages, and preserving jobs. The unit advocates at the national and state levels on low-income workers' rights issues such as preventing overbroad disqualifications of workers with criminal records.



ENERGY UNIT

Works to keep the utilities on for families by protecting the rights of low-income utility customers on service and payment issues, representing group clients on utility rate change cases and serving as the Public Advocate in representing all Philadelphia Gas Works residential customers.



FAMILY ADVOCACY UNIT (FAU)

Represents individual parents, involved with the Department of Human Services (DHS), who are seeking to keep their children at home or to have them returned from foster care to a safe home. The FAU provides assistance and trainings to community groups, organizations and lawyers. The FAU also advocates on the national, state and local levels for improvements in child welfare practices, services to families, and the dependency court system.



HOMEOWNERSHIP AND CONSUMER RIGHTS UNIT

Represents homeowners in real estate tax cases, residential mortgage foreclosures, fraudulent consumer practices, and issues with banking or check-cashing agencies. The unit uses advocacy and litigation to address the predatory lending crisis, abusive mortgage practices, and other banking issues affecting low-income families.



HOUSING UNIT

Represents private, public, and subsidized housing tenants in matters involving eviction, illegal lockouts, and substandard housing. The unit also uses systems advocacy and litigation to address issues ranging from lead paint elimination, to federal housing policy changes, to tenant eviction laws.



LANGUAGE ACCESS PROJECT

Works to ensure CLS services are available to Philadelphia communities with limited ability to speak, read, write, or understand English. The unit addresses legal issues specific to this population and collaborates with other units to represent individuals and families in challenging language barriers to benefits, services, and access to justice.



PUBLIC BENEFITS UNIT

Represents clients seeking or facing termination of public benefits such as cash assistance, food stamps, or health insurance. The unit provides education and outreach services and advocates for improvements to the programs that provide these benefits at the federal, state and local levels.



SSI UNIT

Represents adults and children with disabilities who have legal problems obtaining or keeping Social Security Benefits. The unit also advocates for improvements to the Social Security system.



Provides holistic representation and engages in community-based outreach to ensure that young people transitioning to adulthood are able to connect to the services they need to gain stability and access opportunity.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE



John Soumilas and Jim Francis of Francis & Mailman. The firm established the Francis & Mailman Fellowship in Consumer Law at CLS.



Board member Irv Ackelsberg of Langer, Grogan & Diver, with son Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg of PILCOP; both are former CLS staff.



Board member Carlton Johnson of Archer with immediate past Executive Director Cathy Carr.



Former Executive Director Ernie Jones with immediate past Board President Mike LiPuma.



Board members Lauren McKenna of Fox Rothschild, and Amber Racine of Raynes McCarty.



Former Executive Director Lou Rulli, Clinical Director of Toll Public Interest Center, University of Pennsylvania Law School, with Board Secretary and Development Chair John P. Lavelle Jr. of Morgan Lewis & Bockius.



Board members Tom Duffy, founder of Duffy + Partners and the Duffy Fellowship at CLS, and Joe Tate of Dechert.



Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network (PLAN) Executive Director Sam Milkes with CLS Board President Arlene Rivera Finkelstein, Toll Public Interest Center, University of Pennsylvania Law School, and Board member Joe Sullivan of Pepper Hamilton.



Board member Bill Cobb, Deputy Director, ACLU Campaign for Smart Justice, with CLS Litigation Director Sharon Dietrich.



Former CLS Board member Magistrate Judge Marilyn Heffley with former CLS Board President Barbara Sicalides of Pepper Hamilton.

On November 3, 2016, the extended family of Community Legal Services came together at Top of the Tower to celebrate five decades of excellence in fighting for the rights of low-income people. More than 350 Board members, current and former staff and interns, elected officials, volunteers, funders, family, friends, and philanthropists shared memories and made new connections based on their CLS experiences. Many generous individuals and organizations made special gifts and increases to commemorate the 50th Anniversary, swelling CLS's usual fundraising results to more than a million dollars.



CLS Housing Unit Managing Attorney Rasheedah Phillips; Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney; CLS Executive Director Debby Freedman; and Board member Bridget Henry of Numbers & Colors Learning Center.

FINANCIALS

As of June 30, 2017

	TOTAL	CAPITAL CAMPAIGN	OPERATING
Revenue & Other Support:			
Contracts & Grants	7,759,295		7,759,295
Contributions	4,151,469	34,560	4,116,909
Attorney Fees	409,310		409,310
Interest Income	66,529	58,981	7,548
Other Income	4,412		4,412
Subtotal Revenue	<u>12,391,015</u>	<u>93,541</u>	<u>12,297,474</u>
Expenses:			
Program Services	9,293,072	56,748	9,236,324
Management and General	854,986		854,986
Fundraising	459,204		459,204
Total Expenses	<u>10,607,262</u>	<u>56,748</u>	<u>10,550,514</u>
Change in Assets	1,783,753	36,793	1,746,960
Net Assets			
Beginning of Year, restated	<u>9,682,816</u>	<u>5,776,789</u>	<u>3,906,027</u>
End of Year	<u><u>11,466,569</u></u>	<u><u>5,813,582</u></u>	<u><u>5,652,987</u></u>

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