

BD Voices of Excellence










This edition of Voices of Excellence focuses on homelessness and poverty. These challenges affect millions of individuals and families, undermining their access to basic necessities like shelter, food, and health care. Earlier this year, several members of Barclay Damon's Buffalo office Diversity Leadership Team volunteered at Friends of Night People, a charitable organization that provides basic needs—from food to medical care and counseling—to those experiencing hunger, poverty, and homelessness. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of social justice but also vital for building stronger, more equitable communities. By raising awareness and taking action, we can work together to create solutions that provide dignity, stability, and opportunity for all.



QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life.”
 — Nelson Mandela, South African anti-apartheid activist, politician, and statesman

2024 DIVERSITY PARTNER COMMITTEE MEMBERS

-  **Sharon Brown**, Chair
New York City
-  **Danielle Mettler-LaFeir**, at Large
Rochester
-  **Jen Leonardi**, Pro Bono at Large
Buffalo
-  **Zach Forward**
Syracuse
-  **Bob Heary**
Buffalo
-  **Naresh Kannan**
Albany
-  **Penny Mason**
Major Markets
-  **Paul Sanders**
Rochester
-  **Jerry Mackey**, Emeritus Member
Rochester

An Overview of Poverty and Homelessness in the United States



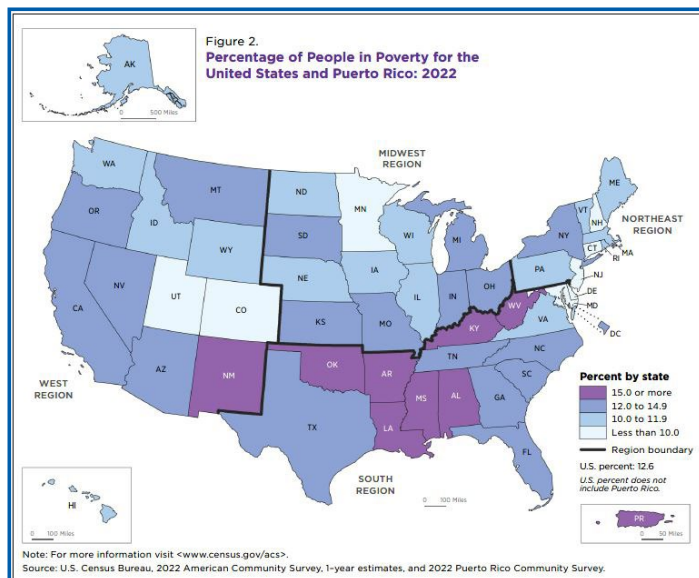
Bob Heary, Buffalo Diversity Partner
Caroline Testa, Administrative Process Specialist

Poverty in the United States

Note: For the sake of brevity, this article cites information about poverty and homelessness in New York State. However, we acknowledge that people in other areas of the country face similar dire situations.

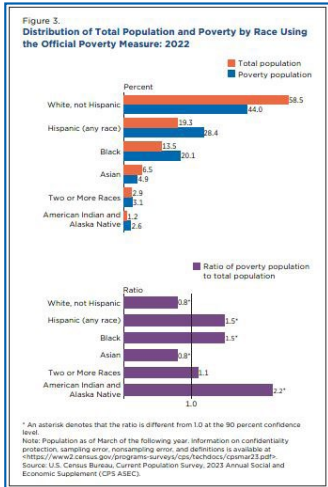


The United States Census Bureau’s [“Poverty in States and Metropolitan Areas: 2022”](#) report indicates that, in 2022, nearly 38 million people in the United States lived in poverty, with a national poverty rate of 11.5 percent. To put that in context, the poverty threshold for an individual under the 2022 federal poverty guidelines was \$13,590, and the 2022 threshold for a family of three was \$23,030.



Poverty rates vary significantly by state and region.

Continued on page 2



In 2022, more than 2.7 million people in New York lived in poverty. According to the US Census Bureau’s “Poverty in the United States: 2022” report, the majority of individuals who live in poverty are white. However, statistics show that poverty disproportionately impacts Native American, Black, and Hispanic individuals as well as women, children under the age of 18, and individuals with disabilities.

Homelessness in the United States

Every year, the US Department of Housing and Urban Renewal (HUD) conducts a “point in time” survey of homelessness—defined to mean not having a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence—in America on a single night. These one-night counts are typically conducted during late January. According to the [2023 survey](#), more than 653,000 people in the United States were experiencing homelessness. Of those experiencing homelessness, more than 103,000 were in New York State.



On a positive note, of the 103,000 individuals in New York who were experiencing homelessness, 95 percent of those individuals were sheltered (that is, in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or other safe havens).

Pro Bono Corner



[Rex McKeon](#) provided pro bono representation to Get Out and About, Inc., a not-for-profit organization, in its corporate formation and recognition of tax exemption under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). The organization’s mission is to close the opportunity gap for children living in poverty by breaking down financial barriers for students from low-income households in Buffalo. A major way it does this is by fundraising for and sponsoring students’ participation in off-campus field trips. Rex also recommended that the organization’s founder, Britney Upshaw, participate in the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute’s Young Professionals leadership development program. There she’s being introduced to other not-for-profit leaders and gaining exposure to fundraising for charitable causes.

[Charles Nerko](#) is the epitome of an “ambulance chaser,” but in his case, this term is literal and entirely for a good cause. Charles volunteers as an



What Can Be Done?

People who experience poverty and homelessness have different stories. They often have received unexpected medical bills or other bills, are recovering from a natural disaster or other crisis, are victims of domestic violence or abuse, have a mental illness, or lack affordable housing or economic opportunity.

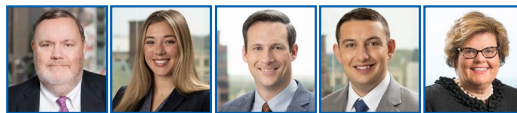
Data shows that poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, and reduced life expectancy all intersect. While there are government programs in place that attempt to address these issues, the statistics noted in this article demonstrate that these challenges persist at a level that is beyond acceptable in a country as rich as ours. Expanding government programs is one way to reduce current levels of poverty and homelessness.

The temporary child tax credit expansion under the COVID-era American Rescue Plan significantly reduced the rate of child poverty in 2021. However, following the expanded credit program’s expiration, child poverty rates spiked again in 2022.

Another example is the US Department of Veterans Affairs’ focus on ending veteran homelessness through working with large and small communities. As of May 2024, there were a total of 84 communities included in this initiative, among them are the cities of Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse in New York State.

In the meantime, the burden of addressing the challenges of poverty and homelessness often falls to underfunded not-for-profit human services agencies, like Friends of Night People and other food pantries and homeless shelters whose missions attempt to fill the gap. Barclay Damon’s Diversity Partner Committee and each of the office Diversity Leadership Teams look for opportunities to support these organizations and give back to our respective communities by helping those who are less fortunate. We encourage everyone in our offices to do what they can to participate in community outreach activities, whether volunteering at a food pantry or other not-for-profit organization, participating in food or clothing drives, or donating funds.

EMT and pro bono counsel for his community’s rescue squad. Before his involvement, the squad was unable to respond to nearly 20 percent of the 911 calls in his community. Through Charles’s negotiation of contracts and subsidies, the squad’s financial position improved significantly, enabling the hiring of paid EMTs when volunteer EMTs were unavailable. These efforts have yielded remarkable results, with the squad now achieving a perfect 100 percent response rate to 911 calls. Notably, one of the calls the paid EMTs responded to was for the birth of Charles’s son.



[Michael Lane](#), [Emma Marshall](#), [Rex McKeon](#), [David Solimeno](#), and [Cathy Wettlaufer](#) have received New York State Bar Association Empire State Counsel® designations. The program recognizes NYSBA members who, during the prior year, performed 50 hours or more of pro bono legal services.

Office Updates



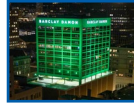
FIRM

Barclay Damon Tower Lit in Blue

On April 2, Barclay Damon Tower was lit in blue to acknowledge World Autism Awareness Day.

Going Green for Mental Health

Barclay Damon Tower was lit green for Mental Health Awareness Month from May 1 through 6. The last day of the lighting was World Mental Health Day.



June Pride and Juneteenth

In June, Barclay Damon Tower was lit up for Pride Month and to acknowledge and honor Juneteenth.



ALBANY

APALSA Networking Event at Albany Law School

[Naresh Kannan](#) attended Albany Law School's Asian Pacific American Law Students Association Networking Event, held at the school. The event was well attended by students as well as state and federal judges. During the event, Barclay Damon was recognized as a leader in diversity in the Albany area—"Dena DeFazio and [Sharon Brown](#) were specifically lauded for their work," said Naresh.

Albany BLSA James Campbell Matthews Gala

[Kyra Ganswith](#) attended the Albany Law School Black Law Students Association James Campbell Matthews Gala. Barclay Damon was a sponsor. Kyra said it was a great event and well attended.



CDPHP Workforce Team Challenge

The Albany Wellness Committee supported the CDPHP Workforce Team Challenge at Albany's Empire State Plaza. Said to be the largest running event in the Capital District, it is organized by the Hudson-Mohawk Road Runners Club (HMRRC). Proceeds help underwrite many of HMRRC's activities and offerings, including college scholarships, grants, free races for members, and the Just Run® Program, which encourages grade school children to run for exercise and fun.



BOSTON

Giving Back in Boston

Anthony Esdale, [Brian Whiteley](#), [Joe Stanganelli](#), and [Dhruthi Batchu](#) volunteered at the Boston Rescue Mission, a soup kitchen and shelter. They aided the staff with cleaning the food area and kitchen and preparing and serving lunch. After the lunch prep and rush, they helped clean up. Everyone had a wonderful time representing Barclay Damon and giving back to their community.



BUFFALO

33rd Annual Students of Color Dinner at UB School of Law

[Bridget Daley Atkinson](#), [Andy Oppenheimer](#), and [Corey Auerbach](#) attended the 33rd Annual Students of Color Dinner at the University at Buffalo School of Law. The firm is a sponsor of one of the awards given each year, named for the late [Monique Emdin](#), a former associate at our firm who passed away in 2008. This year, Glenaida Mercado received the award.



Run for Fun and Community

Attorneys and staff from the Buffalo office participated in the JP Morgan Corporate Challenge and "battled the heat, but had a great time with good food and cold drinks," said Josh DeLozier. "Congratulations to all our runners and walkers, and thank you to those that cheered us on!"



NEW HAVEN

Crawford Black Bar Association 2024 Annual Dinner

[Penny Mason](#), [Sharon Brown](#), [Janice Grubin](#), [Jenna Cutler](#), Joshua Maddox, [Brian Rich](#), and [Yassine Sahbani](#) as well as their guests attended the Crawford Black Bar Association 2024 Annual Dinner at the Connecticut Convention Center in New Haven. This year's event was themed "Transforming Relationships in the Legal Environment."

All Hands Lunch

As part of its inclusion initiative, the New Haven office holds a weekly "all hands" lunch. Everyone in the office that day gathers in a conference room at lunchtime to socialize.

Doing Good in New Haven

The New Haven office held part one of a community day at the Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK), preparing and serving food to people experiencing homelessness. This is the third consecutive year at DESK for a New Haven community day.



NEW YORK

LeGal Gala

[Janice Grubin](#) attended the LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York (LeGal) annual gala, held at the Tribeca Rooftop in New York City. Barclay Damon was a sponsor of the event. Janice described the gala as "a great party for an even greater cause—supporting the activities of LeGal, an organization I have been a part of for the last 15 years. Among LeGal's activities are hosting a free legal clinic, spearheading and joining in on impact litigation, and assisting its LGBTQ+ members and at-large attorneys by organizing and hosting social and educational events."

Going Above and Beyond

[Janice Grubin](#) was included in *City & State's* inaugural Above & Beyond: Pride list, which honors 50 exceptional New Yorkers across various sectors, including politics, business, not-for-profit, and advocacy, for their efforts in supporting the LGBTQIA+ community. As part of the list, she was profiled online and in a special commemorative magazine.

Pride Month CLE

[Janice Grubin](#) was part of a New York City Bar Association CLE panel titled "LGBTQ+ Representation and the Federal Judiciary" along with Lena Zwarenstejn of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Harper Seldin from the ACLU, and Magistrate Judge Allison Claire from the Eastern District of California. The panel was moderated by Steve Benathen, a court attorney for a supreme court justice in the Bronx.

Continued on page 4



Lending a Helping Hand in New York City

[Gabrielle Figueroa](#), [Michael Case](#), [Scott Fleischer](#), [Greg Stoller](#), Stacy Hernandez, and [Xun Chen](#)

volunteered at St. Bartholomew's Church. They help pack up food and hand out meals to people coming to the soup kitchen and pantry.

ROCHESTER



Things That Make Us Go "Om"

Colleagues in the Rochester office enjoyed a midday yoga and om-chanting session, led by certified yoga teacher Vesna Sanders. The event included 30 minutes of light yoga to help release tension, stretch, and gain flexibility, followed by a 15-minute om-chanting circle, where participants enjoyed the meditative and healing effects of the sound. The session wrapped up with a vegan lunch.



Sleep in Heavenly Peace 2.0

Members of the Rochester office took part in a second bed-building event sponsored by Sleep in Heavenly Peace, a volunteer organization that builds, assembles, and delivers top-notch bunk beds to children and families in need. Over the course of this two-hour shift, 30 beds were constructed.



Rochester JP Morgan Corporate Challenge

Eighteen attorneys and staff from the Rochester office participated in the 2024 JP Morgan Corporate Challenge, a 3.5 mile running

and walking event. Our top runners were [David Fulvio](#) and Susan Naccarella; David's time was the fastest in the legal profession and was strong enough for 22nd overall in the event, which fielded 4,000 participants from 197 companies.

A Taste of Rowing

As part of his involvement with RocCrew – Naiades Rowing Over Cancer, Hanz Carrillo participated in US Rowing's National Learn to Row Day, which helps members of the public learn more about rowing and gives them an opportunity to try it out.

Cameron Community Ministries

The Rochester DLT hosted a fundraiser through Cameron Community Ministries to send children to summer camp, where they read, worked on academics, and engaged in fun activities. The summer camp also offered wraparound services to the families, including access to the food pantry, clothing, and haircuts. Thanks to the Rochester DLT's efforts, \$1,000 was donated to Cameron Community Ministries to ensure 10 children could attend a week of camp.



SYRACUSE

Willow Bay Cleanup

Attorneys and staff from the Syracuse office volunteered with the Onondaga County Parks Department to help clean up the Willow Bay section of Onondaga Lake Park. The event was organized by the Syracuse Diversity Leadership Team. Over 20 Barclay Damon volunteers picked up litter along the shoreline and picnic areas, cleared natural debris, and raked the playground. "The Syracuse group enjoyed a sunny spring day and a lot of great conversation as they worked to improve our local community," said Lauren Pistell.

Run for Recovery

Colleagues from the Syracuse office took part in Helio Health's Run for Recovery at Green Lakes State Park in Fayetteville, New York. The event raises funds to help people working toward recovery from substance use, mental health issues, and housing challenges.



Networking With ARRIBA

[Kayla Arias](#) attended a networking event for ARRIBA, an Upstate New York Latinx affinity bar group of the Puerto Rican Bar Association.

Scholarships in Syracuse

[Amie Mbye](#) received the inaugural Hon. Theodore A. McKee L'75 Endowed Law Scholarship from Syracuse Law School. The school said the award is to "provide Syracuse Law students with the education and cultural context to enable them to carry forward the legacy of Judge McKee, who has served on the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit for more than 27 years."

Broadway and Barclay Damon in Syracuse

Barclay Damon was a proud sponsor of the Broadway for United Way event at the Landmark Theatre for the Performing Arts in Syracuse. Our Women's Forum hosted clients for a live performance of SIX, the Tony Award®-winning musical, as well as a pre-show reception at the new City Center. Said [Courtney Merriman](#), "It was a fantastic opportunity to mingle with clients, community leaders, and each other while enjoying new development in a revitalized downtown Syracuse."



Syracuse WorkForce Run

Twenty-one attorneys and staff, including four summer associates, attended and participated in the Syracuse WorkForce Run. Our top runners were [Nick Constantino](#) and Jo Hicks.



Dedicated VFW Service and Leadership

At its 99th Convention, the Department of New York VFW Auxiliary elected Darlene Baker to lead the organization. Darlene's theme for her tenure is "Soaring Into the Next Century of Service With Our Veterans and Their Families." To get to this point, Darlene undertook a six-year process, representing the VFW Auxiliary in increasingly responsible positions, from guard to president. "I aspired to attain this goal in memory of my mentor, Florence Banks, past department president and a National Council member; my father and uncles who have served in the Army, Navy, and Marines; and my son-in-law who served in the Army," said Darlene.

WASHINGTON DC

DEI in DC

[Laura Fraher](#) has joined the major market offices Diversity Leadership Team as the Washington DC representative.

Recognition for Inclusion in Jewish Schools in Washington DC



[Steve Schram](#) received the Visionary Award at the Sulam annual benefit. The Rockville, Maryland-based organization is an independent not-for-profit operating as a school program integrated within the larger Jewish day school environment to fulfill its inclusion goals and mandate. The firm was a proud sponsor of the event.