



Annual Report 2020



Executive Director Statement

2020 was a year that showed the importance of disability rights and disability advocacy. From the first moment of the pandemic DIG stood up to help. We participated in discussions on medical rationing of ventilators, treatment, and vaccines. We filed suit against the state of Florida to ensure that people that are blind and/or print impaired could vote by mail in a private, secure, and independent way. We worked with teachers and school staff to make sure that they received the accommodations they needed, and we helped make sure that accommodation policies were created so that people with disabilities could get equal access to vaccines and testing.

As an organization, we were proud to be a resource and help people during the pandemic. We were able to pivot and help as needed.

Thank you for your support this year,

Debbie



About DIG

DIG is a nonprofit legal advocacy center for disability rights. At DIG, we look at disability from every angle and perspective.

Our litigation department ensures that the laws are being enforced and interpreted correctly so that people with disabilities have choices in all aspects of their lives. Our programs bring exciting trainings to families, professionals, and the community at large.

DIG is at the forefront of the disability movement and continues to look at cutting edge disability issues.

Our Mission

Expanding opportunities for participation, education, employment, and acceptance of persons with disabilities through advocacy, litigation, education, and training.

Our Vision

Every person is entitled to equal treatment and dignity.



Meet our Team

Executive Director
Deborah Dietz

Litigation Director
Matthew W. Dietz, Esq.

Development Director
Sharon L. Langer, Esq.

Staff Attorney
Stephanie L. Langer, Esq.

Administrative Assistant
Yarelys Mirabal

Client Concierge
Samantha Molina

Graphic Designer
Alfonso Zavaleta

Wallet Card Project
Michael Garica-Borges

Interns
Maxwell Dietz
Carrie Feltingoff
Anisah Sublett

Lucy the Dog
Murphy the Dog

Board of Directors
Matthew Dietz
Larry Forman
Adrienne Gang
Sharon Langer
Scott Leffler



Our Position Statements

Position 1: Promoting individual autonomy for Persons with Disabilities including the freedom to make one's own choices.

Position 2: Breaking down attitudinal barriers and promoting greater social awareness and acceptance towards Persons with Disabilities.

Position 3: Ensuring the opportunity for Persons with Disabilities to choose their place of residence within the community on an equal basis with others with access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services.

Position 4: Providing equal information access for Persons with Disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities.

Position 5: Ensuring the right to work and education, on an equal basis with others that is inclusive and accessible to Persons with Disabilities.

Position 6: Advocating for justice in Domestic and International forums for the legal rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Position 7: Supporting Families and Care Givers of Persons with Disabilities.

Position 8: Committing to equality and social justice, together with all who fight against racism.

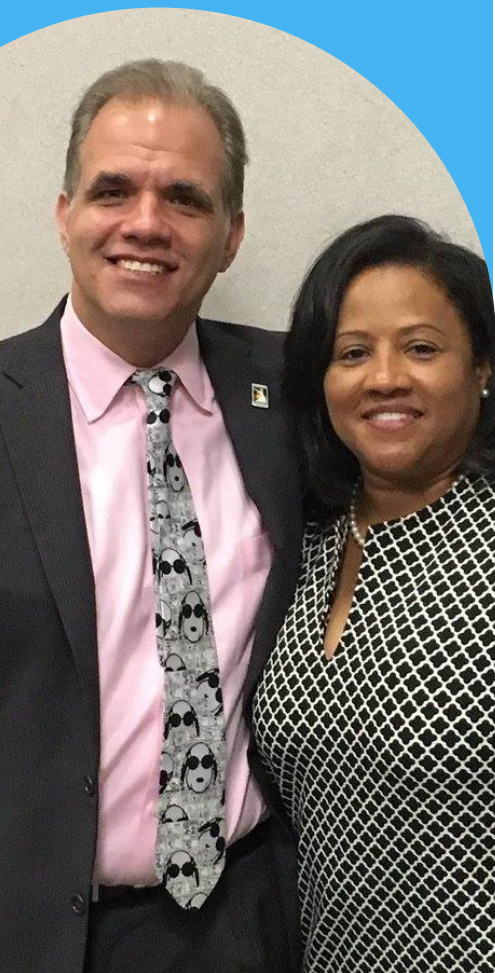


Benefits

2020 was a very successful year for Social Security Appeals. DIG successfully obtained benefits for four families who were previously denied by representing them in court, before the Social Security Administration.

Education

2020 started out with the settlement of one of the most important education cases DIG has had. DJ was intentionally misplaced on a modified curriculum for six and half years so that his standardized test scores would not be counted. The district lost at the administrative level and appealed the matter to federal court. During that appeal, the district lost again at the administrative level. After losing several motions in federal court, the district agreed to settle the matter. DJ was awarded four years of private school education that includes private counseling and language therapy along with money damages. Schools then closed because of the global pandemic. DIG answered hundreds of calls from parents regarding concerns with distance learning, school refusal and mental health issues. DIG successfully returned several students back to school who were improperly removed because of discipline that occurred before the schools closed. DIG was able to develop several programs for students who were falling behind because of depression and other mental health issues that intensified during school closures. DIG also settled two cases wherein students were bullied by their teachers. With the start of the 2020-2021 school year, we saw a rise in students who were seeking additional services to make up for the time that was missed because of the school closures. DIG successfully defended a student who won a state complaint for additional services, but the district refused to provide those services.



Litigation Update

In 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic changed the legal landscape as to what would be considered to be a disability, what accommodations would be reasonable, and when an activity would be a direct threat. Now, work accommodations, such as telecommuting, are common. However, this has not prevented persons with disabilities from being denied the essentials during this pandemic. Through advocacy with state and national disability rights advocates, we ensured that residents of Florida who were immunocompromised or did not have access to transportation received COVID testing and vaccines, and we advocated for ensure that persons with disabilities received access to ventilators and other services during any shortage. On behalf of the Florida Counsel of the Blind, we ensured that the State of Florida would provide accessible vote by mail for persons who are blind and/or print impaired.

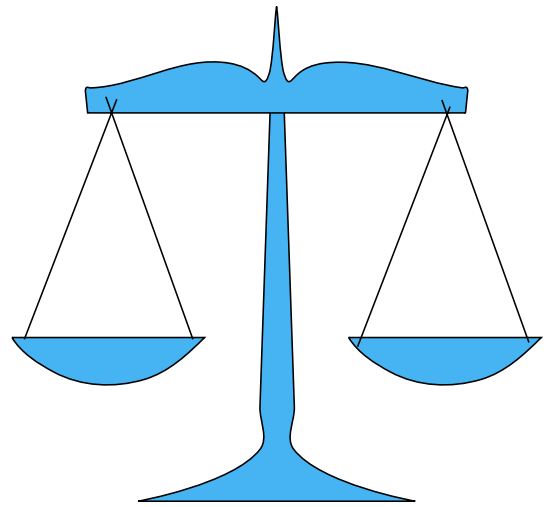
The pandemic also focused our community on mental health and wellness. DIG has worked to remove the stigma of mental illness by filing a successful petition to remove a separate class of membership for those attorneys who are admitted conditionally due to past issues with substance abuse or mental illness. In addition, DIG attempted to remove the ability to disqualify persons with mental health or past substance abuse issues from becoming an attorney without evidence of other disqualifying conduct. As a result of thousands of applicants to the Florida Bar being subject to delays and accompanying anguish because of the pandemic, DIG, along with attorney Brian Tannebaum, represented Florida Bar Applicants in their request to engage in the practice of law through supervised practice in lieu of taking the Florida Bar exam. The Florida Supreme Court implemented a supervised practice program but the persons participating in the program were required to eventually take the Bar exam. The issue would not have been raised without DIG's representation.

Pandemic issues did not predominate the time of the litigation section. It continues to be a priority for DIG to ensure that persons that are Deaf receive effective communications in employment, health care settings and throughout society. DIG represented an intervenor in the EEOC v. FedEx Ground lawsuit which led to a 3.3-million-dollar settlement for a class of over 200 Deaf package handlers giving them access to live and video remote American Sign Language interpreting, captioned videos, and scanning equipment with non-audible cues such as vibration.

Denial of Fair Housing reasonable accommodations and modifications continue to be a frequent issue, as over 50 percent of all Fair Housing Complaints across the United States are disability related. In December, DIG's client prevailed in a Florida state court appeal where a trailer park owner attempted to evict a person with autism after having a meltdown. The representation of persons with autism, developmental disabilities and mental illness, and accommodations needed to remain living independently, has become a large part of the DIG representation.

Lastly, DIG remains committed to increasing the use of human-animal interaction as an aid for persons with disabilities and consistently represents humans to keep and maintain their animals.

2020 Case Statistics



Intake Calls 413

New Cases Opened 62

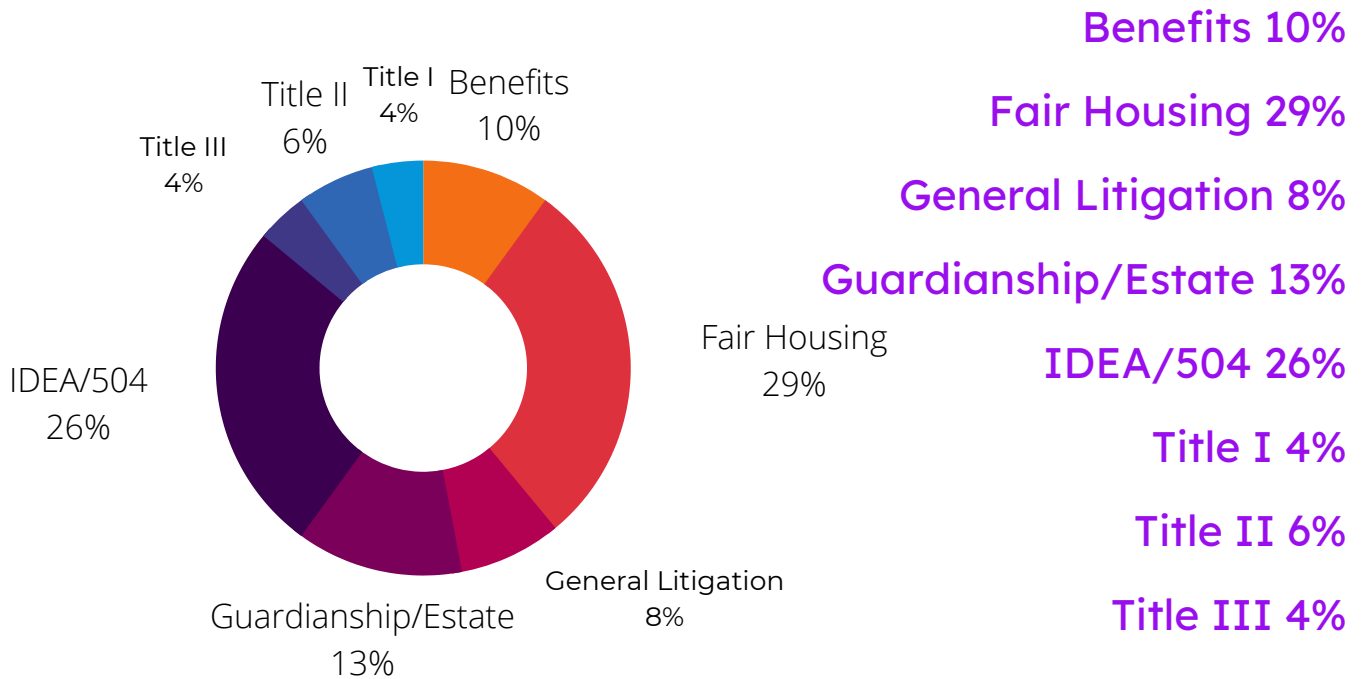
Cases Closed 72

Cases Settled 26

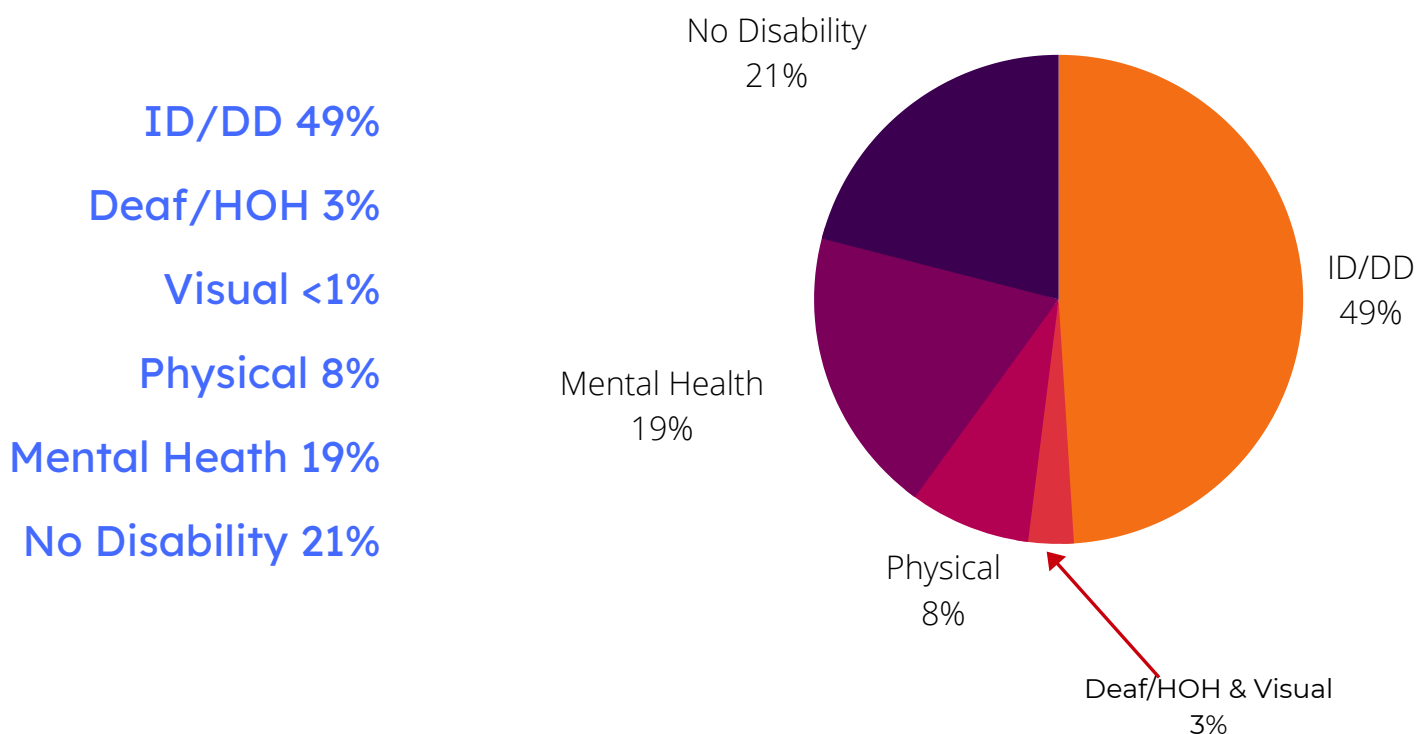


Litigation Data

By Cause of Action



By Disability



A woman in a dark green sleeveless top stands in front of a large screen displaying a presentation titled "QUIET CARD?". The screen also shows a small image of a person and some text. The room is filled with rows of computer monitors, and several students are visible in the foreground, looking towards the presentation.

Other = 3



Project Update

Supper Social Club



DIG created and facilitates the Supper Social Club, a monthly neuro-diverse dinner club that connects adults with disabilities for a meal and conversation. Participants get an opportunity to meet new people, enjoy the company of friends and have spirited conversations. We transitioned to a virtual event this summer and invited guest speakers to join us and we had Sharon create a cooking with Sharon event. We made pizza the first time and tacos the second time.

The Miami Inclusion Alliance



The Mission of the (MIA) project is to create sustainable, systemic change in the way we deliver services to victims/survivors with disabilities, allowing the individual to make informed, self-directed decisions. This year we added five MIA Liaisons to our project. Our liaisons are Camilo Mejia, Rachel Siler, Katherine Magnoli, Genesis Espaillat, and Carmen Peralta.

Voting, ATVFL



ATVFL or Access the Vote Florida is the state chapter of The REV UP campaign and is an initiative of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) that first began during the 2016 election cycle.

Project Update

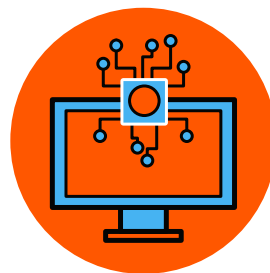


Animal
Partners

Animal Partners

The Animal Partners Project is working with agencies both local and statewide to reduce trauma, build resilience and provide normalcy for abused children who are removed from their homes and placed in foster care, child victims of abuse, and children in the delinquency systems.

Meet Pedro and Gina Santibanez. Pedro is the facility dog for Kristi House and Gina is his handler. Pedro is a fully time working dog that helps both staff and child-victims.



Trainings

DIG conducted over 70 trainings during 2020. We transitioned to a virtual platform and training on various disability issues including: COVID-19, mental health, education, disability advocacy, Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault, and voting rights.

Financial Report

Revenue

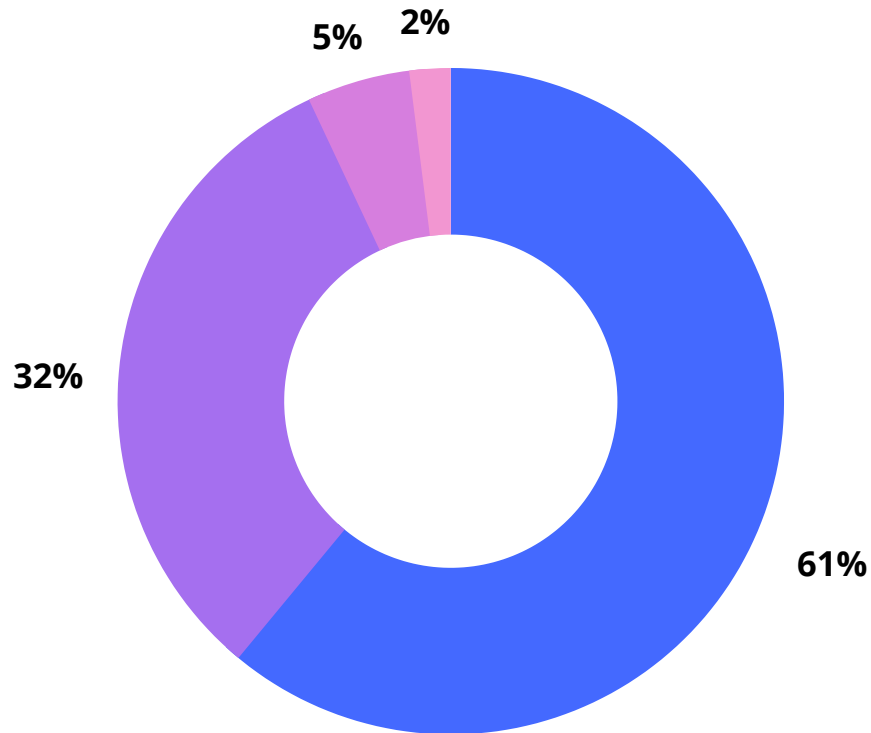
Litigation = \$669,866

Grants = \$351,142

Donations = \$59,385

Other = \$17,908

TOTAL = \$1,098,301

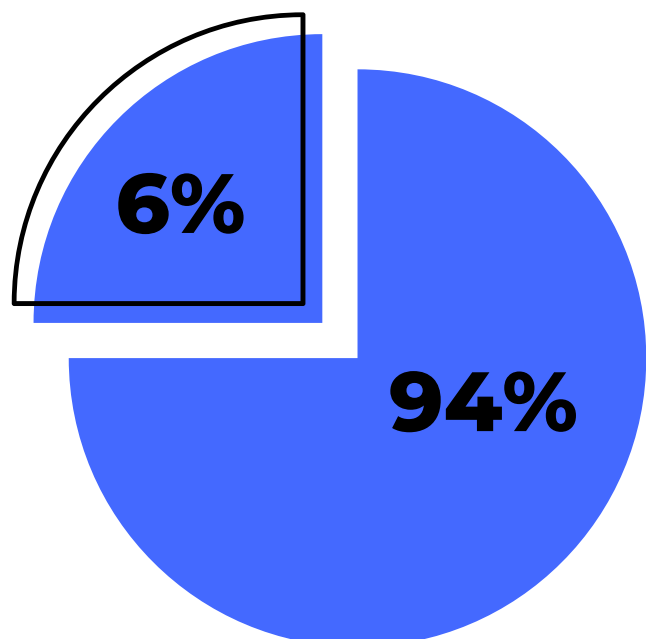


Functional Expenses

Program = \$829,058

Management = \$55,329

TOTAL = \$884,387



DONATE NOW

Thank you!

