Empowering Survivors of Sex Trafficking, Sexual Exploitation, and Those Who Have Been Harmed by the Commercial Sex Industry
OUR MISSION

The Amara Legal Center looks at its work through a racial and social justice lens to provide free, trauma-informed legal representation, access to support services, and advocacy for a more equitable legal system for individuals impacted by sex trafficking or involved in sex work in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia.

"Amara is the only legal services organization in the Washington, DC-metro area solely dedicated to providing trauma-informed legal services to survivors of sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, and sex workers."

OUR VISION

The Amara Legal Center envisions a society where our clients are free from stigma, violence, oppression, exploitation, and criminalization.
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

What an amazing year it has been serving as Amara's CEO! I am honored and humbled to be in a position where I can strive, each and every day, to make a difference in the lives of those who have been victimized and exploited through sex trafficking and the commercial sex industry. With a dedicated staff and committed Board, generous donors and funders, and wonderful community partners, Amara has made great progress in 2021!

But, we need your continued support to meet the growing demand for our services. We already have managed double the number of legal cases compared to this same time last year, and we are still counting. Amara is becoming more well-known in the region for our legal services, receiving more requests from survivors and referrals from our partner organizations. We also attribute COVID for our increased caseload, as the pandemic exposed and exacerbated inequalities for vulnerable populations. This includes our clients who are predominantly Black cis - and trans-women, between the ages of 18 and 29, experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity, substance abuse, mental health issues, severe trauma, and living below the federal poverty guideline.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s February 2021 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, “The COVID-19-induced recession is likely to expose more people to the risk of trafficking.” Pandemic shutdowns have limited the ability for social service providers to deliver the comprehensive, integrated care that survivors need. Black and Brown women and transgender individuals continue to be at significantly higher risk of trafficking during the pandemic, and young people have been especially vulnerable to sex trafficking with school closures.

So, the work Amara does has become increasingly important - providing free, trauma-informed legal services to those whose rights have been violated while involved in commercial sex, whether that involvement was by force, fraud, coercion, necessity, choice, or otherwise. We must stay vigilant in our efforts to seek justice for survivors. We must dispel myths and stereotypes and educate and inform the public about the dire circumstances our clients are in and the systemic vulnerability factors contributing to their victimization and criminalization.

Your support allows Amara to help individuals navigate the legal system - to unify families, prosecute traffickers and abusers, remove criminal records that resulted from being trafficked, connect survivors to support services, and advocate for policies that benefit our client population.

In this annual report, you can learn more about Amara, our accomplishments this year, and how you can help us do even more in 2022. I hope you will stand with our clients and support our 2021-2022 "Circle of Hope" Campaign. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of survivors and help them on their journeys towards healing and justice!
2021 HIGHLIGHTS

- Completed an ambitious multi-year strategic plan that outlines programmatic goals & action steps for strengthening our work and being intentional about our objectives and the path to growth.

- Aligned staff roles with the Amara’s programmatic priorities & staff’s skill sets and professional goals.

- Evaluated our case management system, our data input protocols, intake processes & mechanisms, and approaches to client evaluation and surveys, which allowed us to revamp our intake questions, re-work our survey questions & create a Legal Procedures Manual.

- Improved our communications strategy & products to better inform individuals about Amara’s work and impact and to enhance community engagement.

- Created new partnerships with key organizations for referrals, trainings & support of our mutual client populations.

- Hosted a Vacatur Clinic for individuals seeking post-conviction relief and hosted a DC Vacatur Training for Pro Bono attorneys.

- Appointed three new board members that bring additional skills & experiences to help us expand Amara’s reach.

- Invested in a new case management platform to allow us to better understand our client population’s legal & other service needs, identify trends that support anti-trafficking efforts, and allow us to provide greater insights into Amara’s work, including inquiries, intakes, referrals, services, and outcomes.
Because of its unique geographic location on the I-95 corridor and close proximity to a number of casinos, airports and professional sports venues, the Washington, DC-metro area is a magnet for sex trafficking. Amara estimates that, annually, roughly 500 individuals seek services due to victimization and harm caused by sex trafficking and the commercial industry. However, since most individuals in our client population do not self-identify as victims and do not seek legal, social service, or mental health assistance, we can conclude that the actual number of individuals who are in need of our assistance is significantly higher.

Although many believe that sex trafficking occurs only overseas, sex trafficking can be found in communities throughout the United States, and the Washington, DC-metro area is no exception. All too often, traffickers or pimps lure individuals into the sex trade through force, fraud, and coercion, or promises of love, shelter, clothing, and food. Once the victim has been hooked, the trafficker steadily subjects the victim to severe forms of abuse, including rape, beatings, emotional and verbal abuse, and other forms of manipulation.
In 2019, Maryland had 187 trafficking cases reported with 130 calls reported from survivors and victims.

In 2019, 75 cases were reported in DC, involving 51 adults and 11 minors.

In 2019, 189 trafficking cases were reported in Virginia with 132 of them being sex trafficking cases. Virginia was ranked sixth in the nation for active human trafficking cases, with almost 200 reported cases in 2018.
Alarmingly, the FBI identified Washington, DC as one of 14 cities in the United States with the highest incidents of commercial sexual exploitation of children and that “Black girls, compared to their racial counterparts, are more likely to be trafficked at a younger age.” According to the FBI, 57.5% of all juvenile prostitution arrests in the United States are Black children.

Amara provides representation for some of the most common legal needs for sex trafficking survivors and sex workers: criminal record sealing, criminal defense, family law, child custody, child support, divorce, civil protection orders, and victim-witness advocacy.

**FAMILY LAW**

We help clients regain custody of their children, who may be in the custody of pimps, family members, or the state, and representing clients in divorce cases from their abusers.

**VICTIM-WITNESS ADVOCACY**

Amara helps clients navigate the criminal justice system and prepare them for testifying in court; serve as a witness advocate for our clients in criminal cases against their pimps or buyers; and provide representation as a criminal defense attorney for our clients who have had charges brought against them.

**CASE MANAGEMENT & REFERRALS**

Throughout the legal process, Amara connects our clients to partner legal services organizations, mental health professionals, and social services agencies to ensure that they can be in the best position to lead their lives free of the stigma, harm, and destruction they have endured.
We assist clients in filing petitions for expungements, as many of our clients have criminal records for prostitution or related charges, even if their involvement in the commercial sex industry was against their will. These records can restrict survivors from finding legal employment, receiving publicly funded housing, and from other social services.

Amara obtains restraining orders for our clients against abusers, including traffickers and/or buyers.

CIVIL PROTECTION ORDERS

POST-CONVICTION RELIEF
Amara's clients are predominantly U.S.-born Black cis- and trans-women between the ages of 18 and 29 who are marginalized in society and face complex legal issues. Our staff address the multitude of legal barriers that our clients face by educating and empowering them to make informed choices that are often unique to their individual circumstances, histories and legal issues.
Sharon contacted Amara seeking assistance with obtaining a custody and visitation order. At that time, she had not seen her three-year-old son in over two months. Sharon's son's father rarely communicated with her, and when he did, he was both disrespectful and abusive. He would not allow Sharon to see her son.

Our attorney met with Sharon, assessed the matter and promptly filed a petition seeking custody and visitation on Sharon's behalf. Although her son's father was preventing her from seeing her son and was verbally abusive, Sharon expressed that she wanted to co-parent. She told our attorney that she had no desire to penalize her son's father because she did not believe that would be in her child's best interest. Sharon also informed our attorney that she'd been experiencing housing issues and anxiety at the time. To address these concerns, our attorney connected her to two of our housing and mental health partners for assistance.

In alignment with Sharon's desire to co-parent in her child's best interest, our attorney contacted the father, after first confirming that he was unrepresented by an attorney, to determine whether he would consent to a settlement agreement. At that time, he adamantly expressed that he had no interest in working with Sharon and said that he could raise his son without her. He said that he did not trust Sharon and stated that he believed that she made poor decisions.

During the first status hearing, our attorney successfully obtained an order granting Sharon custody and visitation rights in line with her wishes. Since that time, our attorney has represented Sharon in two subsequent hearings, and Sharon and her son's father have come to an agreement that meets Sharon's wishes. There is an upcoming fourth hearing in this matter during which our attorney will proffer a settlement agreement. Sharon has expressed that she is pleased with this result.
In 2021: Nearly Double Amara's Annual Caseload

Through mid-November, Amara has handled 203 cases, providing services to 93 clients compared to 119 cases for 97 clients in 2020.

Top Case Matters

- Expungements: 45.9%
- Victim-witness Advocacy: 21.1%
- Custody/Visitation: 13.5%
- Domestic Abuse: 12%
- Name Change: 7.5%
Jasmine came to Amara after being assaulted by an ex who was trafficking her. Before coming to us, many others had not recognized or believed that she was a trafficking survivor. However, at Amara, Jasmine was able to find a team of individuals who not only believed her but who were eager to support her.

In addition to connecting Jasmine to numerous social services, Jasmine’s attorney provided victim-witness advocacy for Jasmine when assault charges were brought against her ex. When the state’s attorney’s office offered Jasmine’s ex a plea deal, Jasmine’s attorney advocated that a stay away order and payment of Jasmine’s hospital bills be conditions of the plea, which her ex agreed to. Jasmine now has her own expanding online business and is building her brand.

Brandy is a sex trafficking survivor who came to Amara seeking assistance for a custody battle with an abusive ex. She is a single mother of four; several of her kids have disabilities that affect their learning and behavior. In addition, Brandy has had her own mental health struggles arising from her trafficking. While working with our attorneys, Brandy and her family were evicted from her apartment and removed from a shelter because of some of her children's behavior. Brandy was preparing to live in her car until permanent housing was available.

An Amara Legal Center attorney was able to advocate for Brandy and work with her caseworker to enroll Brandy and her family in a program which provided them with temporary housing and additional material support.
Amara provides professional trainings on trauma-informed services and "Human Trafficking 101" to the staff of its intake and referral partners, as well as targeted groups such as medical professionals and law enforcement. Covid-19 restrictions limited the number of in-person trainings Amara conducted this year. Like so many organizations, however, we were able to pivot to conduct and participate in a number of virtual trainings.

Our staff also collaborate with community members and leaders in the human trafficking field, including:
- DC VAN, DC Human Trafficking Task Force (HTTF) General Body and Direct Services & Policy Subcommittees
- DC Girls Coalition
- DC Consortium of Legal Service Providers General Body
- Fair Budget Coalition and its Community Safety Committee
- East of the River Case Handlers
- Maryland State Human Trafficking Task Force
- Prince George's County HTTF
- Montgomery County HTTF
- Sex Worker Advocates Coalition
- Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking
- Victim Assistance Network
- Victim Legal Network of DC
- Hope Court

Amara staff provided "Know Your Rights" and "Human Trafficking 101" trainings for more than 500 individuals to date for social service providers, legal providers, anti-human trafficking advocacy groups, medical professionals, and at regional conferences. Some of the groups trained include:

- Maryland Women of Color Conference
- Georgetown Medical Pediatric Nurses and Doctors
- Prince George's County Human Trafficking Task Force
- Safe Sisters Circle
- Howard University School of Law Fair Housing Clinic
- Virginia's Office of Public Defenders
- Bazelon Center
- DC Human Trafficking Task Force
Amara continues to advocate on behalf of our clients and to amplify their voices in local policy change discussions.

This year, Amara has provided written and oral testimony for the DC Council hearings related to policy that would directly impact our clients, including:

- Redefinition of Child Amendment Act of 2021
- Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) FY22 Budget Hearing
- OVSJG FY 22 Budget Hearing
- Expanding Supports for Crime Victims Amendment Act of 2021 – B24-0075
- Performance Oversight Hearing for the MPD

In Maryland, Amara submitted written testimony, including:

- Prince George's County FY 22 Budget Hearing and Police Reform
- Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking - HB138 Education
- Criminal Law - Law Enforcement Officers - Prohibition on Sexual Activity - HB411/SB43
- Criminal Law – Indecent Exposure With Lascivious or Prurient Intent - HB 1001
- Education – Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program – Human and Sex Trafficking - HB118

In Virginia, Amara has met and educated elected officials about sex trafficking, including providing recommendations to the Virginia Crime Commission regarding Writ of Vacatur for victims of commercial sex trafficking.

On July 7, 2021, the Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking advocates, of which Amara is a member, and Delegate Karrie Delaney(D) District 67 joined Virginia Governor Ralph Northam (D) at the ceremonial bill signing of HB2133. House Bill 2133 provides a Writ of Vacatur for victims of sex trafficking in Virginia, which allows survivors’ convictions related to their trafficking to be vacated and expunged from their records. This permits survivors to secure employment, education, and access to other resources on the journey to self-determination and completeness. Criminal record relief also allows survivors to free themselves of the stigmatization of being labeled a criminal for crimes they were forced to commit. Amara also drafted a press release and secured a Washington Post article in March about the bill.
MEET OUR STAFF

Carole Bernard
Chief Executive Officer

Caroline Ackerman
Managing Attorney of
Client Access & Intake

Christine Greene
Legal Program Director

Sidney McCoy
Staff Attorney & Policy Counsel

Caitlyn Burnitis
Lead Maryland Attorney

Sharde Hoff
Intake & Training Administrator

Natasha Thomas
Operations & Resource Manager

Kyla Woods
Communications Associate
MEET OUR INTERNS & VOLUNTEERS

Asritha Vinnakota - Legal Intern
2L at American University
Washington College of Law

Working at ALC provides me the opportunity to zealously and passionately advocate for survivors who deserve our legal assistance to empower their lives.

Jourdan Wells - Project Management Intern
Junior and Philosophy Major
University of Maryland

I wanted to get experience in the field of project management. Amara is giving me the opportunity to prove myself as a project manager and gain experience working in a professional environment.

Olivia Haskell - Legal Intern
2L at American University
Washington College of Law

Working at ALC allows me to learn from skilled attorneys who approach their work with a client-centered, trauma-informed perspective, and to be a part of an amazing effort to empower sex workers and sex trafficking survivors to overcome legal obstacles in their lives.

Valerie Cook - Legal Intern
2L at American University
Washington College of Law

At ALC, I will gain experience across a variety of civil and criminal issues at both the trial and appellate levels. Most importantly, compassion and dignity are at the center of the work. I am looking forward to learning as much as possible about being an effective advocate for survivors of sex trafficking.

Mamatha Aahlad - Legal Intern
Public Policy Master’s Program
George Washington University

Interning with Amara allows me to build on my knowledge obtained about victim rights in the justice system and the flexibility to apply my research skills.

Isabella Dixon - Policy Intern
Graduate in International Studies, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
American University

The Amara team is incredibly welcoming and supportive, and working with Amara you know you are doing meaningful work which is both client-centered and trauma-informed.

Madi Torrez - Legal Intern
Graduate in Psychology & Minor in Pre-Law
Johns Hopkins University

Working with Amara has played a significant role in reinforcing my commitment to go to law school. Interning with Amara has given me confidence that my work will not only be instrumental to securing justice for survivors, but also to introducing proactive and effective legislation.

Rosina Natter - Communications Volunteer
Communications Master’s Program
Johns Hopkins University

I am honored and thrilled to volunteer my time at Amara to help uplift the voices of both sex workers and trafficking survivors in order to create a society free from stigma, violence, oppression, exploitation, and criminalization.

Daniela Romualdo - Communications Intern
Undergraduate, Communications Bachelor’s Program
Trinity Washington University

I am so honored and delighted to intern with Amara. I am looking forward to learning more about the issues affecting trafficking survivors and how to provide appropriate and long-term support.
PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Ayuda
Bread for the City
Break the Cycle
CARECEN (Central American Resource Center)
Catherine’s Cottage
Catholic Charities USA
Christian Legal Aid of the District of Columbia
Courtney’s House
D.C. Bar Pro Bono Center
DV LEAP
Fair Chance
Fair Girls
Georgetown University Health Justice Alliance
HIPS
Howard University School of Law Fair Housing Clinic
Human Trafficking Prevention Project

Human Trafficking Justice & Freedom International
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
Legal Counsel for the Elderly
Neighborhood Legal Services Program
Network for Victim Recovery of DC
Prince George’s County Family Justice Center
Reset 180
Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc.
Smyal
The Safe Sisters Circle
Turn Around
Tzedek DC
Victim Legal Network of DC
Whitman-Walker Health
Zoe’s Doors Drop-In Center

COALITIONS

DC Coalition for Girls
DC Coalition to End Sexual Violence
DC DV Advocates
DC Human Trafficking Task Force
DC VAN
East of the River Casehandlers
Fair Budget Coalition
Family Law Casehandlers
Maryland State Human Trafficking Task Force
Montgomery County Human Trafficking Prevention Committee
Northern Virginia Human Trafficking Task Force
Prince George’s County Human Trafficking Task Force
Sex Worker Advocates Coalition
Virginia Coalition Against Human Trafficking
Amara thanks our individual donors for supporting our work. It is your generous contributions that help make the work that we do possible. Your ongoing support is needed now more than ever to meet the growing needs of survivors. Become a "Circle of Hope" donor today and support Amara's commitment to community, equity, and justice! 

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Christina Bond
J. Cabillot
Suzanne Carreiro
Dan Cheriyan
Sarah Claus
Tracey Conaty
Naomi Feldman
Robert Fluit
Tara Fortier
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Donor List as of 11/29/21
Amara is grateful to our government and private funders, and the business community, for their commitment to anti-human trafficking and for supporting our work. These funders make it possible for Amara's services to be free and accessible to individuals who might otherwise never have legal representation or counsel. We look forward to our continued partnership and to all that we will accomplish, together, in 2022!

American Endowment Foundation
Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Inc.
Brown Family Charitable Fund
Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck
DC Bar Foundation
DC Government Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
Growdutive Consulting
J.P. Morgan Charitable Giving Fund
Katten Muchin Rosenman Foundation, Inc.
McGuireWoods, LLP
Morgan Stanley Gift Fund
Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
National Organization for Victim Assistance
Nora Roberts Foundation
Northern Virginia Black Attorneys Association Board
Schwab Charitable
U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs
Venable Foundation
Women’s Bar Association Foundation
### REVENUE

- **Government Grants**: $380,120
- **Private Foundation Grants**: $179,500
- **In-Kind Donations**: $126,685
- **Individual & Business Donations**: $23,414

### EXPENSES

- **Programs**: 78.5%
- **Administration**: 13.9%
- **Fundraising**: 7.6%

Financial Information Available Upon Request