

Building a Just Society

Legal Aid Society
of Hawai'i

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022



Our Mission

The mission of the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i is to address critical legal needs through high quality legal advocacy, outreach, and education in pursuit of fairness and justice.

Our Vision

"Building a Just Society"

Our Commitments

Justice, Equality, Integrity, Respect,
Compassion and Excellence.

Message

FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

M. NALANI FUJIMORI KAINA



"They will fight for you. I had a long and hard road to travel, but I made it. I pretty much had everything stacked against me. My lawyer never gave up. She was my angel that I needed."

- Ku'uipo

For over 70 years, Legal Aid has provided critical legal services to those in need across the Hawaiian Islands. Our dedicated and committed legal staff advocate for justice with empathy, focusing on the needs of clients as they navigate through complex rules or situations impacting their daily lives.

Over the last year, we fought when we needed to, like when our advocates brought attention to injustice when a district court ordered a tenant to pay almost a full year's rent in order to appeal a ruling, or when we filed claims for laid off workers who were hung up on when they called unemployment speaking Chuukese.

Legal Aid staff worked tirelessly to unravel decades of missing documents to help seniors prove their identity to get a REAL ID, guided houseless clients to get their vital documents when they had no identification to prove their identity, and helped navigate the "scariness" of court for unrepresented litigants.

For those who have had the system ignore and reject them and tell them "no" so many times, we gave voice to their concerns when things just didn't seem right.

In the last year, our case numbers continued to grow, especially in the areas of housing, elder law, and vital documents requests. And, as inflation rises, our clients will continue to face challenges to make ends meet and to stay in these islands that have been home for so many years.

It is through your support and belief in us that we can serve our noble cause to "Build a Just Society," and to continue the fight against injustice.

Mahalo nui loa.

Message

FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

As the only statewide provider of civil legal services to Hawai'i's low-income populations, the Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i fills a critical gap in our State's social services safety net by offering much-needed assistance to Hawai'i's families, homeowners, seniors, and those with special vulnerabilities. In particular, Hawai'i's over-60 population is booming, increasing over 78% since 2012 and now comprising over a quarter of the State's total population. Hawai'i remains in the top six places in the United States for the unsheltered.

Legal Aid attorneys and staff defend the interests of Native Hawaiians, assist culturally and linguistically isolated populations, and help the homeless with vital document work and other supportive legal services. With ten locations, including one on each of the major Hawaiian Islands, Legal Aid is uniquely positioned to ensure legal services continue to be accessible to Hawai'i's vulnerable communities. As but one measure of its value to the community, Legal Aid obtained over \$5.2 million in financial benefits on behalf of its clients in fiscal year 2022. Its training and community outreach reached an estimated 23,000 individuals.

Last year's message anticipated that, as the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic began to recede, Legal Aid would see an increased demand for its services. That prediction has proven true.

In FY2022, Legal Aid saw a nearly 10% increase from the prior fiscal year in the number of cases it handled. Since 2020, Legal Aid's case load has increased nearly 23%. And it remains likely that the full economic and social impacts of the pandemic - which disproportionately impacted minorities, the poor, and other vulnerable populations - have yet to be fully realized. While some in Hawai'i

have managed to return to a degree of "normalcy," with that will come a different array of repercussions and challenges for Hawai'i's disadvantaged and vulnerable populations.

Of course, increased needs and case volume require resources and funding. While Legal Aid is fortunate to have many stable funding sources in its priority service areas, recent years have seen increased volatility tied to funding availability and economic needs. For example, COVID-related eviction defense funding increases are anticipated to decrease significantly in the coming years.

In short, your support is more important than ever. Legal Aid thanks you for helping it fulfill its mission to provide critically-needed services to those who need it the most. We could not do it without your generous and unwavering support.

Mahalo and best wishes.



J. BLAINE ROGERS
DAVIS LEVIN LIVINGSTON

Justice

"THEY WERE ESPECIALLY KIND."



I am a 91-year-old widow living on a fixed income. I had virtually no savings and was living month-to-month on my social security check. I was also taking care of my 52-year-old son who had stage 4 colorectal cancer.

So, when I was faced with eviction and attorney fees from my AOA (Association of Apartment Owners), I was afraid I would be homeless with my son. I did not have the financial resources to hire a private attorney. I did not know the first step on how to respond to the eviction notice. I had nowhere else to turn to. It seemed a hopeless case.

One day, a friend suggested that I contact Legal Aid. This phone call changed my life.

With less than a week's notice before my first court date, Legal Aid attorneys met with me to understand my situation. They put to rest my initial fears of being evicted. They explained the court process well and confirmed that they would be able to represent me in this case. They represented me in all court hearings.

At my age, too, being hard of hearing, I appreciated their compassion. They were especially kind with making the extra effort to communicate through my hearing disability, explaining the legal matters at each stage of the case.

Eventually, they were able to get the case dismissed with each party bearing their own attorney fees and costs. I was very happy! Because of Legal Aid's help, I can continue to live in my apartment. I was able to care for my son until he passed. I was also not burdened with a large debt to pay for attorney fees.

Legal Aid saved me from being evicted and saddled with a large debt. At a time when I had literally nowhere else to turn to, Legal Aid came to my rescue!

The level of compassion and understanding that the Legal Aid attorneys provided helped me through this crisis. In all stages of the court case, they helped me by representing me at the court hearings. They kept me informed at each stage and spent extra effort to make sure that I understood what was happening at each stage.

From the bottom of my heart, my sincerest gratitude to Legal Aid! - *Testimony by *Patricia as translated by her representative*

Equality

"THEY HELPED ME WITH EVERY STEP."

It was a three-year custody battle that started in May 2018 when Kaian Torres's son was only three months old.

Kaian wanted full custody of her son because the father was an absentee dad, among other things. But she had never gotten the help that she needed to win the legal fight - until she connected with Legal Aid.

Legal Aid helped her file the original motion and provided her with legal advice so she could represent herself. Through our guidance, she came out prepared for the hearing (including the 60 pages of required exhibits!) and for any questions the judge might ask.

Within a month of meeting with our lawyers and staff, in November 2021, Kaian brought her son home, celebrating the victory of full custody.

She was also granted permission to move off island. She appreciated Legal Aid for guiding and supporting her, and for giving her the confidence to represent herself in court.

"Legal Aid is a great affordable and reliable resource if you lack the financial support to hire an attorney and are acting in good faith," Kaian said. "My attorney was amazing. She helped me with every step throughout the way."

Integrity

"THEY WERE VERY COMPETENT."

*Chris had been chronically homeless on the streets of Maui for 15 years. His Parkinson's kept him from holding a job. Before coming to Legal Aid, he had been laid off from his job as a dishwasher and had no source of income.

Worried about his plight, Chris's sister reached out to us in May 2021 to help him receive Social Security benefits. They were both desperate for help. She was determined to make it happen, getting all his medical information for us to process his papers.

In December 2021, the siblings were overjoyed and relieved: Chris was approved to receive his back pay and would now start receiving monthly payments.

"This would not have been possible without Legal Aid because I could not afford legal fees," said Chris. "The lawyer that I worked with was very competent, always responsive to my phone calls and questions, friendly and easy to talk to and really good at her job. They are there to truly help people who need it most."

Chris is now on the mainland with family and loved ones.



CHRIS WITH HIS SISTER

Respect

"THEY GAVE ME HOPE."



MARINA WITH HER KIDS

Hawai'i didn't turn out to be a paradise for Marina Lambayan and her two boys when they migrated here in February 2017.

She came on a fiancée visa and got married before the 90-day period was over; she was in love and ready to build a family. But her husband wasn't. His disciplinary methods toward her kids became abusive until Marina said, "Enough!" She left twice. The second time, she called Legal Aid and asked for help.

Through Legal Aid's assistance, Marina received her divorce papers in July 2019 and her green card in July 2021. She now lives in government housing and her two children are happy to be in school.

"I called Legal Aid to find justice. I wanted him to stop doing what he did to me," Marina said. "Legal Aid staff are good hearted people. They were there since the beginning until the end. It took a long time, but they would contact me. They gave me hope. They have so much love in their hearts to help people in need like me and especially my kids."

Compassion

"THEY HELPED ME GO FORWARD WITH MY CASE."

Pedram had been renting his place in Kapolei for five years. He had a lease agreement, and he paid his rent.

One day, he received a letter from an alleged property owner he'd never dealt with before informing him he was being ejected from his rental.

Pedram was certain he was a legal renter, with his 2021 lease proving it. He didn't think he could be ejected or evicted. There was no clear reason for it.

Pedram contacted Legal Aid and confirmed that he was right. The Legal Aid attorney investigating the matter determined that Pedram's case involved a matter of ownership confusion.

The "owner" who tried to eject him was a member of a Limited Liability Company (LLC) that owned the property. This was a new LLC, however.

It turned out that the original LLC that owned the property had been disbanded and re-formed without Pedram's original landlord as a member. The lease was still in effect. Because of this ownership confusion, the case was dropped and Pedram remains on the property.

"Thank you to the Legal Aid team who helped me go forward with my case," said Pedram. "My lawyer was professional and put all the effort to get the documents in row and dismiss the case."

Excellence

"THEY WILL GO ABOVE AND BEYOND TO HELP."

Before Bill called Legal Aid in October 2021, he was homeless for a year and living on only \$140 a month. His savings had run out and he had not received disability benefits since retiring as a pipefitter in 2019.

"I had no vital documents; I was homeless and extremely low income," Bill said. "SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance) would not communicate with me and send me the monthly benefit I was approved for."

Bill suffers from neuropathy and can barely hold a pen. A veteran, he is also physically disabled from the Army.



Legal Aid quickly went to work to get Bill his benefits, with Homeless Outreach Specialist Alex DeLeo as his main advocate.

Alex first procured Bill's birth certificate and Hawai'i State ID, then his Social Security and his Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application.

"Bill felt so defeated while we worked on his vital documents that he wanted me to help write his will," said Alex. "He did everything right. He worked, saved money, paid social security, and every benefit supposed to be given at his age was not helping him."

According to Social Security, Bill did not receive his benefits, because he changed addresses. Legal Aid filed for an appeal and a lump sum check was promised.

However, this did not happen right away.

Several more follow-up phone calls and online forms later, Bill finally received what was due him – a lump sum check and his 2022 back pay. In addition, he will be receiving future monthly payments.

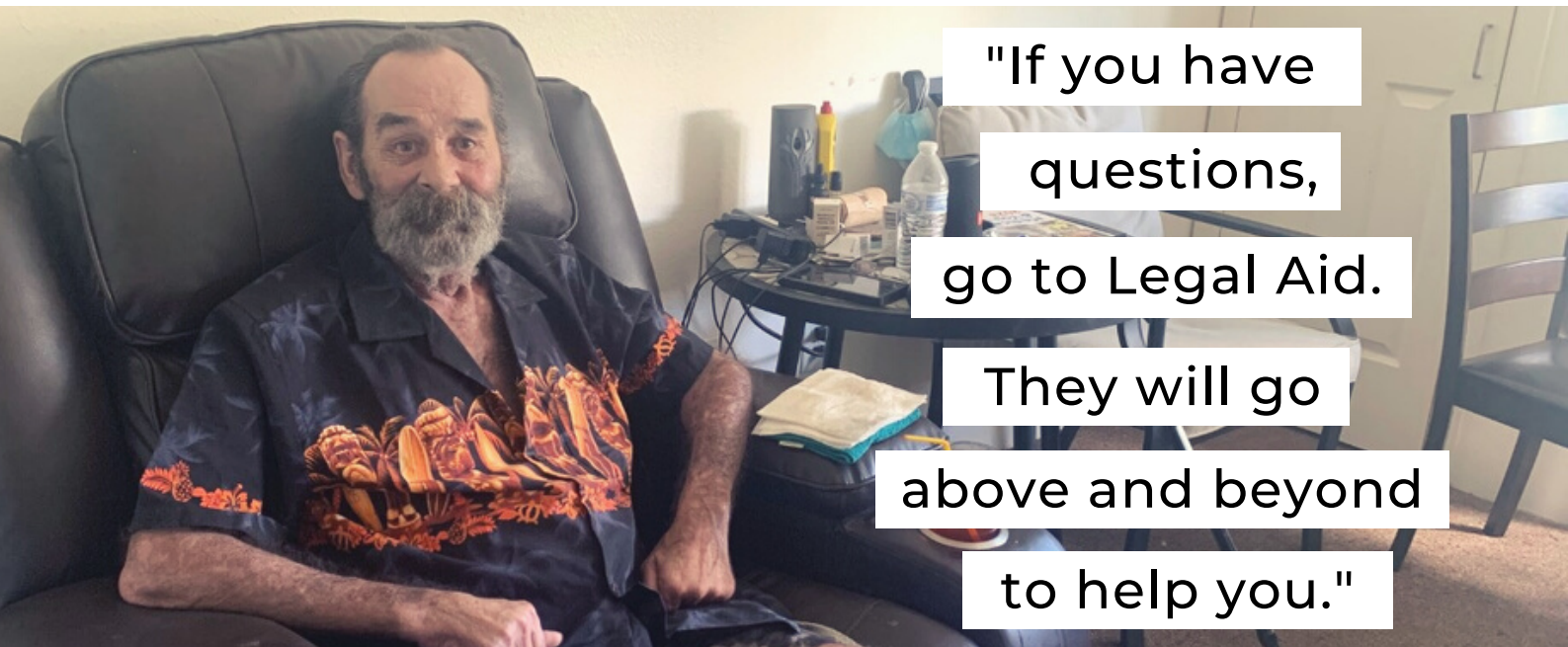


“This victory is very redeeming,” said Alex. “It makes it all the more satisfying to go to work knowing that you can change someone’s life drastically and have a dollar value assigned to the amount of work you put in. It’s a real outcome. I know that he’s housed. I know that he has dependable income. It’s tangible.”

Bill is now enjoying his new place – an affordable studio apartment at a senior home on Beretania.

He doesn’t have to worry about food and shelter, and has enough to share with friends, which he does.

“I know there are more SSI (Supplemental Security Income) cases out there and they don’t know how to navigate the system,” said Alex. “It’s nice when there is someone advocating for them.”



"If you have questions, go to Legal Aid. They will go above and beyond to help you."



I was so amazed and really thankful and grateful that Elder Law Services Senior Staff Attorney Joni Domingues helped me out all the way, I really admire Joni. You can tell how sincere she is in helping me out because even during the pandemic, she came over to my house to help with the paperwork because I told her I was not good at communicating using the computer. She is very helpful and resourceful." - **Esther*

Highlights

Every day, in all the work that we do, we strive to meet the needs of our clients without discrimination. In FY22 for all cases regardless of income, Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i closed 8,122 cases and assisted over 15,880 household members. This assistance included free counsel and advice, brief services/limited action, legal representation, and negotiating settlements. As we emerged from the pandemic, we conducted 300 more outreaches this year (1,650 in FY21) and impacted 3,000 more lives (20,000 in FY21).

MORE THAN
23,000
LIVES IMPACTED

\$5.2
MILLION

Financial Benefits
for Clients

1,731
OUTREACHES

1,913
CASES

Stabilizing Families

1,568
CASES

Preserving the Home

1,297
CASES

Protecting Seniors



I can't thank Legal Aid staff enough for all their hard work. I am shocked how quickly they made my divorce happen especially in the middle of a pandemic. They were absolutely amazing. They were helpful, knowledgeable, quick, and always kept me informed. I finally feel free to be happy and to look toward a bright future. – **Mary*

Who We Serve

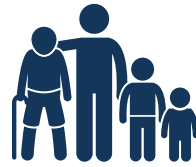
Legal Aid has been consciously focused on work relating to race equity with a priority on defending the interests of Native Hawaiians for decades. We have a passion to reach the most vulnerable populations and to fight for justice on their behalf. Thus, Native Hawaiians and populations with special vulnerabilities have made up over a quarter of all cases in FY22. The number of homeless served increased as well.

In 2021, Hawai'i's high rate of homelessness per capita decreased significantly from 45.6 per 10,000 people to 18 per 10,000. Despite this significant drop, Hawai'i remained in the top six places in the United States in terms of those who were unsheltered. In FY22, Legal Aid gave assistance to 1,333 households who were homeless.



**Native
Hawaiians**

26.26%



**Population with
Special Vulnerabilities**

27.09%



**Victims of Domestic
Violence or Crime**

17.24%



**Living with
Family or Friends**

14.26%



**Culturally and
Linguistically Isolated
Populations**

6.87%



**Homeless, living in
a homeless shelter,
or in transitional housing**

16.41%

Where We Serve

From July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022, we closed a total of 8,122 cases throughout our 10 statewide offices.

504
KAUA'I

20
LĀNA'I

351
LEEWARD

141
MOLOKA'I

839
MAUI

163
WINDWARD

4,533
HONOLULU

418
KONA

335
HAWAII IMMIGRANT
JUSTICE CENTER (HIJC)
AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

818
HILO

Legal Aid is the only statewide provider of civil legal services to low-income residents with ten offices across the state, including at least one on each of the major Hawaiian Islands. These locations place Legal Aid in a unique position, especially on the neighbor islands where access to other legal services is extremely limited, to ensure that legal services continue to be accessible in these communities.

LEGAL AID *in the news*

The Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i successfully assisted five individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) in filing discrimination claims against the Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR), Unemployment Insurance Division (UID). The LEP individuals did not have full access to the UI program due to the lack of interpretation services.

"The language a person speaks should not determine whether or not they can participate in public programs," said Rebecca Leibowitz, Legal Aid's Managing Attorney, Immigration and Public Benefits. "For some Hawai'i residents who were laid off from their jobs due to the pandemic, getting unemployment assistance was hard, sometimes impossible."

With the help of Legal Aid attorneys, the complaints were filed with the US Department of Labor's Civil Rights Center (CRC). On September 20, 2021, CRC entered into a voluntary conciliation agreement with DLIR.

The CRC determined that Hawai'i's unemployment program failed to satisfy the DLIR language access obligations and the applicable implementing regulations. It created an agreement with DLIR promising a rehauling of DLIR's system which should benefit all applicants and participants, including individuals with LEP and eligible non-U.S. citizens.

In FY 2022, Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i helped Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals win a discrimination case.

Individuals with limited English proficiency and eligible non-U.S. citizens now have better access to services due to settlement agreement.

Read more: ["US Department of Labor reaches voluntary conciliation agreement with Hawaii to improve language access to unemployment insurance"](#)

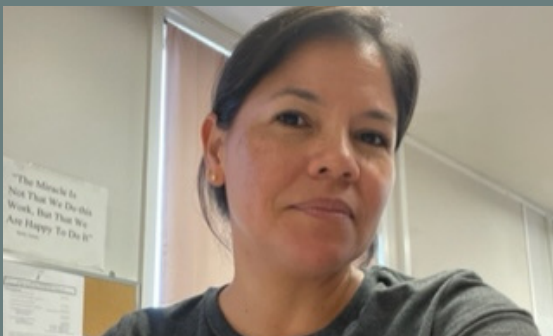
"It will be really helpful to have more interpreters, and have people to help with the online process or help with the unemployment process in person. Thank you to Legal Aid for helping people like us who don't speak English." –
Complainant

Our Staff

We have over 100 staff – all dedicated and hard working – in 10 offices statewide. We believe that justice is the foundation of humanity and transcends status, race, gender, income, or beliefs. For the past 70 years of Legal Aid's existence, we have not wavered in this belief. We are passionate to bring justice, especially to the vulnerable groups that need it most. Today, we are proud to be one of the largest law firms in Hawai'i that fights for fairness and equity, one person at a time.

We support.

Members of our community, who have the least power and are the most overlooked by society, turn to Legal Aid for help in seeking justice and securing their rights. We work with families and their children in promoting their safety, stability, and dignity. - *Makia Minerbi, Managing Attorney, Family Law*



We listen.

To borrow a quote from Mother Teresa, 'The miracle is not that we do this work, but that we are happy to do it.' All of us at Legal Aid are passionate to help our clients. - *Lindy Helm, Paralegal, Moloka'i Office*

We are pro-active.

We are critical to the community because we are often the only conduit to legal services for many in need. We are a vehicle for those who would not be able to access the legal system otherwise. We, along with services like ours, help equality to permeate the legal landscape in a more equitable manner. We are important because we strive daily, to build a just society. - *Nāhulu Nunokawa, Staff Attorney, Elder Law Services*



We advocate.

Legal Aid is important to our community as we sometimes make the situations that seem impossible, possible. - *Leilani Anzai, Paralegal, Hilo Office*

*We are committed to fight
for justice in our lifetime.*



Board of Directors

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

Our Board Directors are stalwart believers in the mission of Legal Aid Society of Hawai'i. They know the challenge of fighting for justice at an individual level, and the joy of seeing its impact. People's lives are changed. We appreciate their insight and support in helping us continue this noble work.

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Vivian Skilling
Community Director

Our Supporters

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

One of the greatest affirmations of Legal Aid's impact in Hawai'i communities is to have the financial support of law firms, corporations, and foundations. Many of them have been partnering with us through the years in addressing Hawai'i's legal needs in the pursuit of fairness and justice. We are very honored to be a recipient of their commitment, charity and support.

LAW FIRMS AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

ADITI FUND C/O HAWAII COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
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Our Supporters

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

We are grateful for the donations and support of many individuals who recognize the importance of our work in building a just society. We appreciate their active involvement in this mission. And we applaud them for their kindness and generosity.

INDIVIDUALS

Doris Abbasi
Ashley K. L. Agcaoili
Sergio Alcubilla
Tanya and Paul Alston
Beverlyann and Lisiate Apina
Isabel and George Ascuncion
Gail Ayabe
Teresa Bill
Joseph and Jan Boivin
Justin Brackett
Clinton Brewer
Estrella Cacao
Danny Castasus
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Elisabeth Mather
Melanie May
Mark McKellar
Peggy Meneice
Gerraine Midel
Makia Minerbi
Daniel Mistak
Michelle Moorhead
Arsima Muller
William and Helen Nakagawa
Craig Nakamura

Our Supporters

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

By partnering with us, they are changing lives and proclaiming to the world that yes, justice can be served.

INDIVIDUALS *(Continued)*

Shawn Maile Nakoa
Vera O'Neill and Jack
Nishiyama
John Nitao
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Jane S Onigama
Elizabeth O'Sullivan
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Calvin G.C. Pang
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Alfred and Laureen Wong
Jodi Yamamoto
Darlene N Yamauchi
Sam Yee
Sylvianne and Curtis Yee
Francis and Janet Yokoe
Natalie Younoszai
William and Georgina Yuen

Our Volunteer Attorneys

JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

A total of 227 lawyers gave their time and spent hundreds of hours listening, investigating and learning about the legal issues of individuals who are unable to afford attorneys. Through the Self-Help Centers in Maui County, Hawai'i County and Kaua'i, and the Honolulu Access to Justice Room, Legal Aid's volunteer attorneys offered the best legal advice culled from years of practice and experience. They offered compassion and understanding, hope and empowerment. We are proud to partner with them and grateful for their willingness to serve.

MAHALO NUI LOA

Benjamin Acob
Lauren Akitake
Francis Alcain
Sergio Alcubilla
Paul Alston
Nicole Altman
Maria Altuzarra
Hayden Aluli
Kainani Collins Alvarez
Erika Amatore
Kimberly Angay
Catherine Aubuchon
Kaonohiokala J. Aukai
William Bagasol
Magdalena Bajon
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JULY 1, 2021 - JUNE 30, 2022

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