



JOY

HOPE  
DEFIANCE

IMM

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The  
National Women's  
Law Center  
Impact Report



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# LETTER

*from the*

# CEO



**DEAR FRIEND,**

It is only human to feel worried, and even scared, about the state of our country right now. I know that I am. But I also know that, amid the crises, there is mobilization across movements. There is joy, defiance, and yes, even hope.

**With this report, I introduce you to some of the people who have given me hope over this past year. This includes two of our lawyers who have dedicated their lives to gender justice and a group of fearless women with whom the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) has partnered.**

As we move forward and keep fighting, I know these stories will serve as guiding stars for building a brighter future for all women and girls.

*In solidarity,*

**Fatima Goss Graves**

**President and CEO, NWLC**

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*Our*  
**LAWYERS**

**A Dream Job Litigating for  
Reproductive Rights**

*Told in her own words, the story of Michelle Banker,  
Director of Litigation for Reproductive Rights and Health*



▶ Michelle Banker

I've been fighting for reproductive rights and access to health care for years. **But when I went to law school, I wasn't sure what my path would be.**

I had a background in health-related public policy, a desire to use the law to create social change, and a passion for reproductive rights, but I didn't have a clear idea of how to marry those interests into a legal career. But I knew I had to start somewhere.

There was just one problem: the world of reproductive rights advocacy—at the time—was incredibly small. With so much to change but few openings for new lawyers trying to enter the field, my journey of trying to wedge my

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## Landing this job was an *absolute* dream come true.

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foot in a door—that felt like it was perpetually closed—began.

So instead, I worked for and volunteered with multiple organizations to gain vital experience that I knew would enable me to best serve those seeking abortion care. **And then, finally, the door gave in.**

I landed a short-but-life-changing legal research and advocacy position at an organization that had been fiercely fighting for reproductive rights for decades: NWLC. I dove in, learning everything I could about the landscape of laws governing access to reproductive health care in this country.

Beyond the work, I found my advocate's voice, developing my ability to communicate the law to the public as well as to the courts.

**This experience changed the trajectory of my career.** Now, I knew not just what I wanted to do, but exactly where I wanted to be.

And in 2018, I was hired full time as a reproductive rights litigator at NWLC.

**Landing this job was an absolute dream come true. But I'll be honest: Working in the gender justice space can too often feel demoralizing and frustrating. But when I look back at my time here, there are so many wins that remind me why I (and we) can't give up.**

In 2019, the Trump-Pence administration issued a regulation that would have allowed health care workers with objections to abortion and other health care to put their personal beliefs ahead of patients' health. This rule threatened patients' access to potentially lifesaving health care—we knew we had to take action. Alongside our partners, NWLC brought a lawsuit challenging this discriminatory refusal of care rule.

**On November 6, 2019, we won. The court struck down the rule, and in 2024, the Biden administration formally rescinded it.**

I've also had the privilege to work on another crucial case in the fight for abortion access. Less than a month after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, our client's water broke at 18 weeks. Despite doctors determining that her pregnancy was no longer viable—and that she was at risk of severe blood loss, sepsis, and death—she was denied emergency abortion care by two hospitals in Missouri and Kansas. She was then forced to drive to Illinois, hours away, while in labor, to reach a health care provider that would treat her.

**This never should have happened.**

Through a complaint filed with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), we pushed the Biden administration to hold the two hospitals that denied our client lifesaving care accountable under the Emergency Medical Treatment

& Labor Act (EMTALA)—a federal protection that ensures no person is turned away from receiving the emergency care they need, regardless of state laws.

In May 2023, they did. It was the first federal enforcement action against a hospital for denying emergency abortion care following *Dobbs*.

HHS issued notices to the hospitals that they violated EMTALA by turning our client away and said there would be consequences for denying patients the care they need in violation of federal law.

**Securing this major win—protecting access to life-saving abortion care for our client and others around the country—**

was one of the most meaningful experiences of my career.

But our work is not done. In January 2024, the Supreme Court decided to hear a case about whether states can carve out emergency abortion care from EMTALA's protections.

Our team immediately dove into action, leading the coalition defending the right to health- and life-saving emergency abortion care before the Court.

Our work is not limited to abortion access—**we fight for health equity**

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**The work is relentless**  
*—but we keep fighting.*  
**In the face of news that is often bleak, my clients' stories prove the power of resistance and the importance of hope.**

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**more broadly, including access to ALL reproductive health care—**

including contraceptive care, fertility care, and other pregnancy-related care.

Last year, we filed a nationwide class action lawsuit against

major insurance company Aetna for discrimination against LGBTQ people. The lawsuit argues that Aetna's policy on fertility treatment coverage creates significant barriers for LGBTQ people because it requires them to pay more and wait longer to access the fertility benefits covered by their health plans. **In March 2024, a U.S. District Court allowed our case to proceed.**

These are just a few of the victories our team has had over the past several years, and I am so proud of everything we have accomplished.

So, yes. The work is relentless—but we keep fighting. In the face of news that is often bleak, my clients' stories prove the power of resistance and the importance of hope. **It's their stories and their courage that remind me to keep fighting.** And I'm not stopping until everyone has access to the health care they deserve.

**Thank you for your continued support of our clients and our work. Our victories are possible because of you.**







- ▶ NWLC staff rally in front of the Supreme Court as justices hear oral arguments in the cases of Idaho v. United States and Moyle v. United States. The cases center on whether a federal law, known as the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act—or EMTALA—supersedes Idaho’s law banning most abortions. (Joy Asico-Smith/AP Images for National Women’s Law Center)



## The Lawyer Who Can't Let It Go

*Told in her own words, the story of Shiwali Patel, Director of Safe and Inclusive Schools and Senior Counsel*

I have been working as a Title IX lawyer for eight years now. But when I started college back in 2001, I had no idea what Title IX—the landmark civil rights law that protects against sex discrimination, including sexual assault and other sex-based harassment, in education—was.

What I did know was that my school was victim-blaming survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sex-based harassment. What I did know is that my school didn't adequately support student survivors, and students weren't even aware of the limited resources

that were available to assist them. The closest rape crisis center to us was across a river away from campus.

**What I will never forget is how my school sanctioned two student survivors because, before they were sexually assaulted, one of the survivors drank alcohol while underage and the other smoked marijuana.** I remember how unfair it felt to me and so many other students that our school responded to their victimization by punishing them, sending a message that student survivors risk punishment when reporting their assault.

**Watching these abuses of power, I had no choice but to act.** Through college onward, I dedicated my life to fighting for survivors, and eight years after law school, I landed what I thought was my dream job as a lawyer: Title IX policy attorney in the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Finally, I was at the helm of power, perfectly positioned to influence federal policy—including for student survivors—for the greater good.

**But then, Donald Trump took office.** In one fell swoop, he decimated Title IX protections. Suddenly, in the halls of my “civil rights” workplace, I heard Trump officials refer to students accused of sexual assault as the real “victims.” I heard the head of OCR tell *The New York Times* that 90 percent of student sexual assault complaints “fall into the category of ‘we were both drunk,’ ‘we broke up,’ or ‘she just decided that our last sleeping together was not quite right.’” Suddenly, it felt like I was back in college again.

**In 2018, I’d had enough.** I left OCR for an organization that’s always managed to force institutions toward progress, even (and especially) in impossible circumstances: NWLC. I was now able to advocate against Trump’s attacks on students’ civil rights from the outside, and I later led the Law Center’s lawsuit suing the Trump administration for its weakening of Title IX protections against sexual assault and harassment in 2020.

**Watching these abuses of power, I had *no choice* but to act.**



But my work has never been more vital than it is today.

In his 2020 campaign, President Biden promised to “immediately” put an end to Trump’s undermining of Title IX, and while it turned out it wasn’t as simple as that, now, four years later, we finally have restored Title IX protections

▼ NWLC staff rally in front of the White House to press the Biden Administration to release the long-awaited final Title IX Rule on December 05, 2023 in Washington, DC. (Photo by Leigh Vogel/Getty Images for National Women's Law Center)



in the form of a new Title IX rule. But unfortunately, the fight isn't over. Almost immediately after the release of the Biden Title IX rule, extremists, including many conservative states, began filing lawsuits to stop the protections promised by the rule.

**It enrages me that the rights I was fighting for in the early 2000s are the same rights I am fighting for today.** It enrages me that the Trump rule allowed survivors to be cross-examined by their rapists' frat brothers. It enrages me that schools have dismissed so many Title IX sexual harassment complaints because of the Trump rule—a rule that extremists are pushing to keep in place. It horrifies me that despite a student saying, **“What the school did to me was worse than what my rapist did to me,”** extremists want schools to do less to support survivors.

Just like when I was in college, this rage is compelling me to action. For the past three years, I have been leading the Law Center's efforts to restore, defend, and expand Title IX. I'm not giving up until all survivors' rights are restored.

**Thank you for staying with us in this fight.**

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# *The* **WOMEN WE SERVE**

Her entire life, **Christine Matthews** has only ever lived paycheck to paycheck. For five years, while making \$8.25 an hour at Harris Teeter, she could only afford a free cup of water from Starbucks for lunch.

Even with four kids of her own, **Merline A. Gallegos** takes money out of her paycheck every week to buy food and clothing for the children in her care whose families cannot afford it.

**Patricia Bustillo Ramirez** is the matriarch of a household in New Mexico that includes her daughter and her daughter's child, as well as her son and his wife and their child. They all struggle to work and pay the rent together.

**These are the voices that our politicians need to listen to—  
and legislate for.**



Centering the voices of people confronting the obstacles and issues that we seek to address is a critical but often overlooked piece of the policymaking process. This is why, last May, NWLC launched our Sparking Change storytelling and leadership initiative.

Our storytellers are women or nonbinary people of color who have experienced firsthand how income insecurity shapes child caregiving, and how caregiving pushes families into income insecurity. Over the past year, they have given voice to those experiences, in their own words, through press interviews, blog posts, and advocacy events on Capitol Hill, driving attention to the policy and culture shifts we need to support all families. The Sparking Change storytellers have built their own advocacy and narrative skills while mobilizing their communities to action and changing how policymakers understand the impacts of their decisions.

## ON BEING A CHILD CARE WORKER:

“After many long months of caring for my son in the hospital, I realized that I didn’t have enough support from my job or even my insurance to cover those expenses. And so, I had to spend my savings, which I had planned to use to expand my business.

At that moment, I wanted to throw in the towel.

But just like ten years ago, I drew on my strength, and now, I’m advocating stronger and harder than ever. Whether it’s higher salaries or better opportunities for all child care and disability care professionals, I want to make big changes that help my community.”

– Merline A. Gallegos, New Mexico

▼ NWLC staff with Sparking Change storytellers





## ON THE POWER OF RAISING YOUR VOICE:

“Another highlight was our lobbying training and getting to meet with legislative offices. It felt empowering to use my voice to encourage accountability and policies that serve our communities’ best interests. And to do so with my baby in my arms!”

– Raynique Syas, South Carolina

“Sparkling Change storytellers fuel inspiration, mobilizing others to demand policy changes and empowering communities to raise their voices for transformation. They’re not just leaders; they’re catalysts driving positive change, leaving an enduring legacy of empowerment through their impactful storytelling. I’m grateful for their commitment and leadership and feel lucky to work alongside them.”

— Jessica Majano-Arriaza, Manager for Community Partnerships, Income Security & Child Care



**Learn More:** Visit [nwlc.org/sparking-change](https://nwlc.org/sparking-change) to explore the stories and impact of our initiative.

**Get Involved:** Discover how you can become a member or storyteller, adding your voice to our mission.

**Support Us:** Help fund our efforts or spread awareness about the issues facing families today.

**Together, we can create a future where all women and girls can thrive.**



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*Championing*  
**GENDER  
JUSTICE**

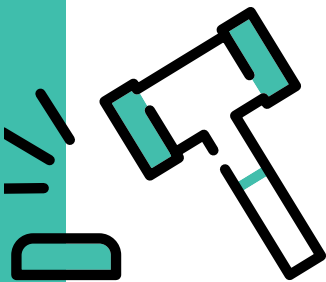
At NWLC, we fight for equality in  
**the courts**, in **public policy**, and  
in **our culture**.



## IN THE COURTS

- ▶ Our organization is powered by more than 170 passionate advocates, including over 50 lawyers.
- ▶ Since 1972, we have litigated dozens of cases—all to further the cause of gender justice.
  - **1980s:** Supported by NWLC, the Supreme Court establishes that sexual harassment violates Title VII, prohibiting sex discrimination in employment. In its aftermath, NWLC launches a major effort in the courts, Congress, and government agencies to expand legal protection for survivors.
  - **1990s:** NWLC brings, and argues, *Davis v. Monroe County* to the Supreme Court, where the justices rule in our favor, deciding that under Title IX, a school board can be held responsible for “student-on-student” harassment.
  - **2000s:** NWLC serves on the legal team that wins the first federal court ruling that makes clear that excluding contraception from employee health insurance plans is sex-discrimination.
  - **2010s:** NWLC leads a groundbreaking class action pregnancy discrimination lawsuit against Walmart, and also launches the first-of-its-kind TIME’S UP Legal Defense Fund to support individuals facing workplace sex harassment.

- ▶ Recently, we continued our 50-plus year legacy of fighting in the courts for gender justice:
  - **In March 2022**, we filed an equal pay lawsuit against a company who was paying a man with six years' fewer experience \$100,000 more than his colleague, our client, Dr. Yvonne Schulman.
  - **In January 2023**, we filed a lawsuit on behalf of 14 clergy members from seven faith traditions against the state of Missouri—arguing that the state's abortion ban establishes one religious view about abortion as the law of the land in violation of the Missouri constitution's robust protections for separation of church and state.
  - **In 2024**, NWLC won a settlement between insurance agency Aetna and our clients, a class of LGBTQ couples who alleged discrimination while seeking fertility treatments. In the settlement, Aetna agreed to compensate class members and modify their policies to ensure equal access to fertility treatments.
  - **Almost exactly one year** after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, we launched the groundbreaking Abortion Access Legal Defense Fund, to help pay the legal fees for abortion patients and supporters being unjustly dragged through our courts.





## IN PUBLIC POLICY

- ▶ Since the very start of our country, women’s priorities have been last on the agenda for policymakers, first on the chopping block.
- ▶ Since 1972, NWLC has triumphed within this sexist system, achieving seemingly impossible victories for women and girls.
  - **1970s:** NWLC plays a leading role in Congress’ passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.
  - **1990s:** NWLC successfully advocates for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, codifying workplace protections for women.
  - **2000s:** NWLC campaigns for and ensures that the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act passes and becomes law, helping to close the pay gap.
  - **2010s:** Because of NWLC’s advocacy, the Affordable Care Act now ensures that being a woman is no longer a preexisting condition.
  - **2020s:** NWLC secures historic investments in child care through the American Rescue Plan and ensures pregnant workers have protections and accommodations on the job by successfully advocating for the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act.
- ▶ And we’ve kept up the pressure:
  - **In June 2023,** we celebrated the introduction of the Equality Act, which makes clear that discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity is sex discrimination—and it’s illegal.
  - **In October 2023,** President Joe Biden released his domestic emergency aid priorities to Congress, which includes \$16 billion for emergency child care funding—an amount NWLC has demanded to prevent a looming child care crisis.

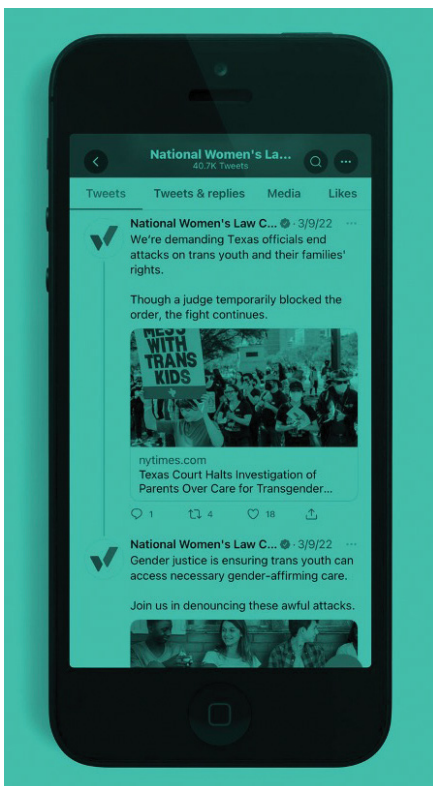
- **In November 2023**, NWLC and State Innovation Exchange (SiX) launched the State Gender Policy Collective, harnessing the power of state policymakers and leaders to advance gender justice across the country.
- **In 2024**, because of NWLC's advocacy, Maryland and Vermont joined six other states and Washington, D.C., in enacting a pay transparency law requiring employers to post pay ranges when hiring, which allows job applicants to negotiate more fairly.
- **In 2024**, NWLC successfully advocated for Title IX rules making clear that when schools discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity they violate Title IX.





## IN OUR CULTURE

- ▶ At NWLC, we know that art, music, literature, and media can be key drivers of systemic change. We meet the public where they are with compelling stories, counter narratives, and issue-education. We arm people with the knowledge and tools they need to become powerful agents of change.
- ▶ In the past five years, our campaigns have:
  - Offered a different way to talk about abortion.
  - Made visible the often invisible workforce of child care providers.
  - Highlighted the importance of the courts.
- ▶ We are moving heads and hearts because both are equally necessary.



**destigmatizing  
abortion**





# *The* **POWER** *of* **PHILANTHROPY**

**Our fight for gender justice thrives thanks to the unwavering support of our donors and philanthropic partners.**

Over the past year, your contributions have not only sustained our programmatic and legal advocacy but also empowered us to respond swiftly and effectively to the unfolding reproductive rights crisis.

**Your generosity has enabled us to:**

- ▶ **Achieve Landmark Legal Victories:** Secure crucial court rulings that advance gender equality.
- ▶ **Advocate for Policy Changes:** Push for legislative reforms that protect and enhance women's rights.
- ▶ **Support Individuals in Need:** Provide legal assistance and resources to those facing discrimination and injustice.

Together, we are making a tangible difference. **The next page highlights a brief overview of the key revenue and expense areas that highlight the incredible work we have been able to accomplish with your help:**



GRAPH 1 AND 2. EXPENSES

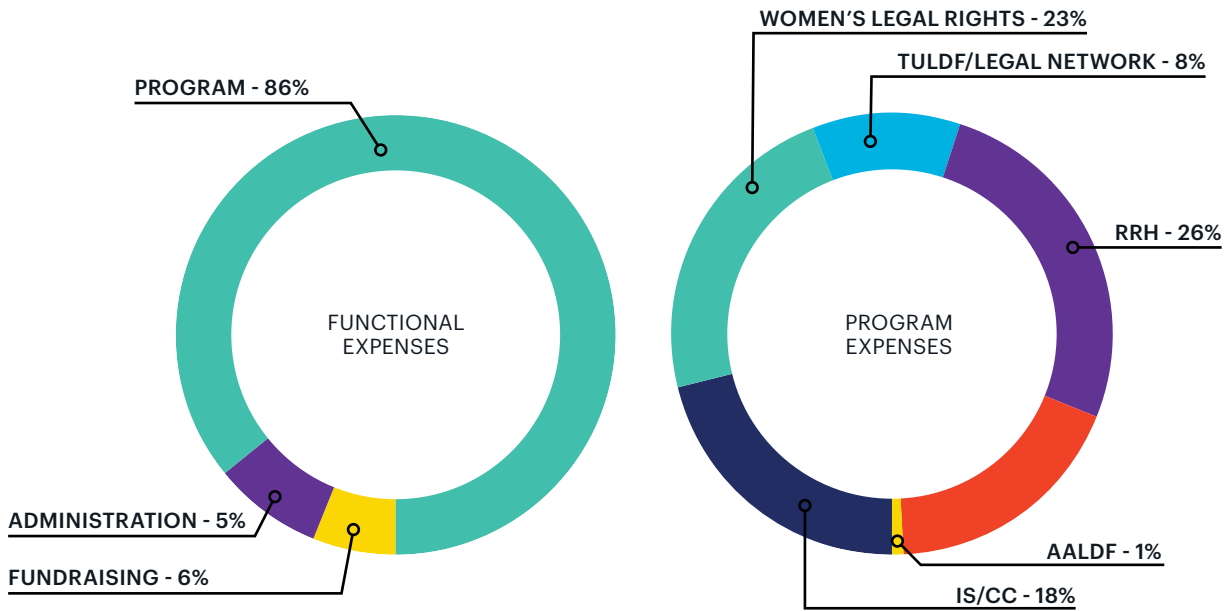
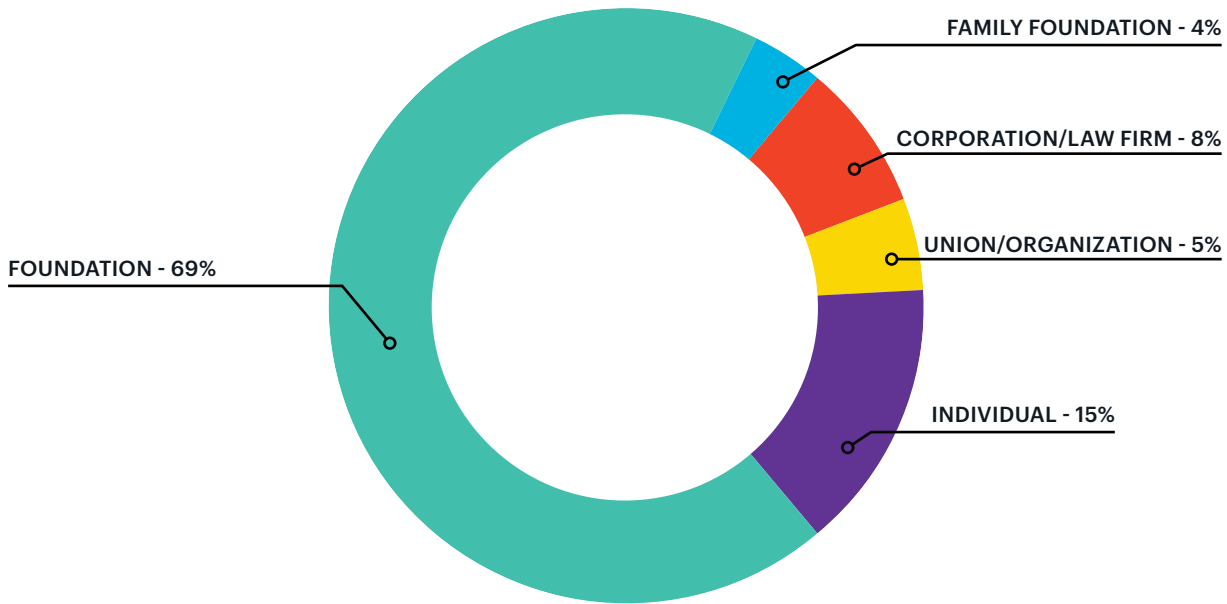


CHART 3. REVENUE






**THANK  
YOU**



**The fear and worry that hangs heavy in these times is a coordinated strategy.**

Our opponents want us to feel like we have no agency. Because really, they are the ones who are afraid—of Michelle and Shiwali. Of Merline and Laura. Of what would happen if, like these women, we all realized our full power and fought for our full democracy. Together.



I am immensely proud of the concrete impact the Law Center has made in the lives of women, girls, and LGBTQ+ communities this year. But of course, the fact we were even able to make a difference is because of you.

**Thank you so much to our partners and donors who have stuck by us this year.** I have no doubt that, with your continued support, we can build a better future.

Where there is justice for her, and justice for all.

—Fatima



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