

**Capital District Women's  
Bar Association**

# **The Legal Project**

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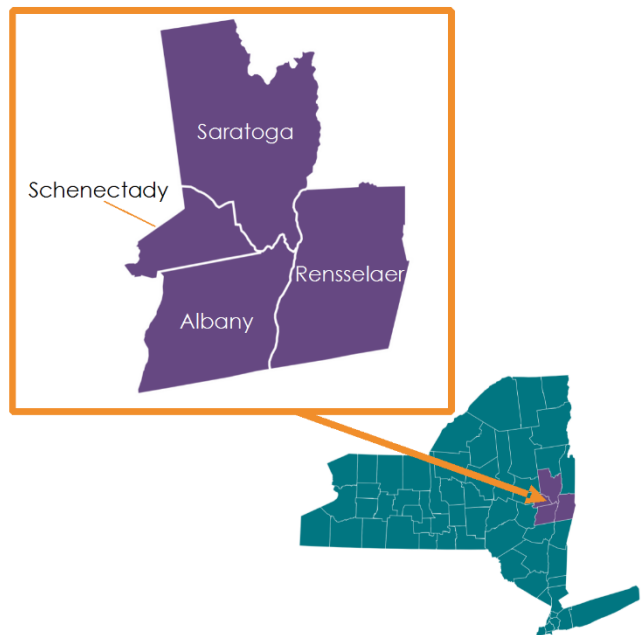
**2023 – 2024**

**Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Legal Project has always prided itself on serving low- and moderate-income residents of the Capital Region using cost-effective and innovative strategies in the provision of legal services. After several years of maintaining our services and our staff and moving forward from the pandemic, last year The Legal Project experienced growth both within our programs and staffing. In November 2023, The Legal Project launched Veterans Law Project which provides compassionate, expert legal assistance, free of charge to veterans, active military, and their spouses. We provide free legal advice through our monthly legal clinics, pro bono assistance for uncontested divorce, and provide pro bono representation services through our victim assistance, bankruptcy and credit, elder law assistance, homeowner protection, human trafficking, immigration, and wills programs. Through our monthly Veterans Law Clinic, we provide free confidential, virtual one-on-one consultation with pro bono attorneys to veterans and active military personnel regarding civil legal issues that impact their reintegration into the community. These pro bono consultation services are offered to any residing NYS veteran, active service member, and their spouses which makes The Legal Project unique from other NYS agencies. We hired an Albany Law School student to intern for the 2023-2024 academic year to assist in developing and outreach for the Veterans Law Project. As a result, The Legal Project has increased our pro bono legal services to this community by 29%.

The past year also saw a growth with our Immigration Program resulting in a subcontract with the New York Office of New Americans whose purpose is to increase the availability of pro bono assistance for immigrants by recruiting, training, and supervising volunteer Attorneys to provide pro se assistance and pro bono representation to immigrants throughout the Capital District.



**Service Area:** Capital Region  
**Population Served:** Low Income Women and Families  
**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 34.9 Lawyers: 17.4  
 Paralegals: 6 Others: 11.5

The Upstate Immigration Pro Bono Project began this year and currently consists of one experience Immigration Attorney and one Bi- Lingual Program Coordinator with plans to hire a Paralegal as well.

This year with the influx of Asylum seekers in the Capital District this program has increased our capacity to assist individuals by providing not only a new source of volunteer Attorneys but also the dedicated staff member to assist, train, and supervise the volunteers. This also provides new volunteer opportunities to local Attorneys who may not have prior immigration experience but who still wish to volunteer in this area. The Staff Attorney and volunteer attorneys were able to meet the high demand for Asylums and Temporary Protected Status applications and we provided one Pro-Se Asylum Clinic and three Pro-Se Temporary Protected Status Clinics, helping 54 attendants to complete their applications.

Our services to the aging population have increased as well with the expansion of our Elder Law Assistance Program (ELAP), which provides assistance to the seniors over the age of 55 with a wide range of legal assistance needs. Seniors, and caretakers trying to help them, are a vulnerable population who often have complicated legal questions, especially around Medicare and Medicaid eligibility, wills, living wills, and guardianship issues. These issues can cause the senior considerable stress and anxiety, contributing to a deterioration of their mental and physical well-being. The Staff Attorney in this program has made tremendous relationships with community partners, increased the number of clients she has worked with, and has also increased the number of Legally Speaking Workshops she has done in the community. We are the only legal service provider with a program specifically for the aging population and our Staff Attorney has increased our visibility in the Capital Region with her sites on expanding services into the adjoining counties.

As our program grows, we always like to celebrate the success and professional development of our talented staff. During this quarter, our Legal Director was contacted by the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence to be a presenter in the Family Court 101 portion of the Statewide Forensic Custody Evaluator Certification that is now required for all forensic custody evaluators in NY. The training was a live presentation over Zoom in December of 2023, then she participated in a question and answer session also in December via zoom. The audience for that was approximately 60 people- mental health providers seeking certification as forensic custody evaluators. In February of 2024, our Legal Director did the presentation a second time, also via Zoom, again for about 50 people. That time the presentation was recorded and will be presented in the future to anyone seeking this certification in NY which is now required by law.

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Much of our outreach is conducted by doing Legally Speaking workshops and tabling events out in community where we can speak about our program, our services, distribute brochures, and connect with our clients face-to-face. For example, we have a focus on reaching the senior population therefore we have done numerous Legally Speaking presentations at various community centers, senior housing facilities, and other organizations in our community that support seniors and their needs. After each presentation, attendees are encouraged to ask questions, receive handouts, pamphlets, and other promotional materials.

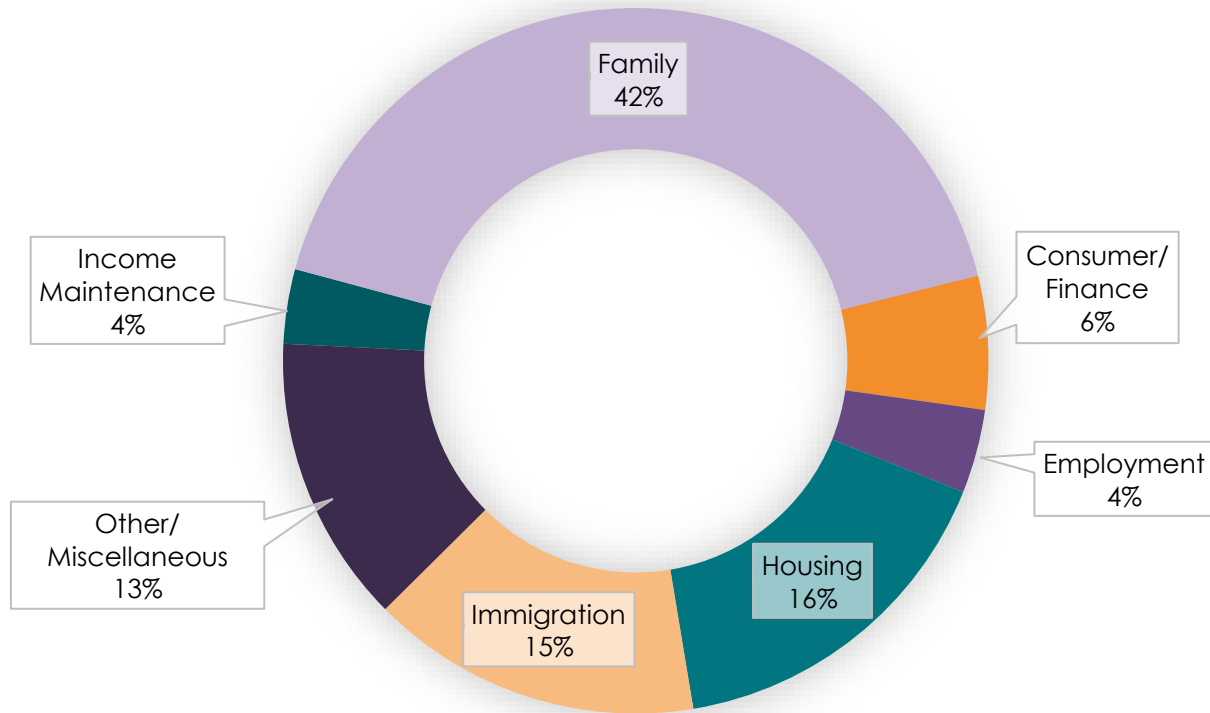
By doing outreach at these events, we not only reach new clients looking for assistance, but also continue to receive referrals from these organizations of others in need of legal assistance. Additionally, outreach efforts consist of participating in tabling events at community events and conferences, disseminating flyers and promotional materials at community agencies, posting promotional information and program announcements on community agencies and The Legal Project websites and social media outlets.

Lastly, our program also attends different community meetings and coalitions with other service providers. The purpose of this is to collaborate with other organizations and provide a holistic level of service to our clients, connect with community partners, and exchange information.

Once a client reaches out to The Legal Project, either in person or by phone, we conduct a formal intake to ensure the client meets all qualifying requirements, such as age, county of residence and income. Intake questions and forms are available through LegalServer so that the information is entered as the staff member is speaking with the perspective consult/client. After the intake is completed next steps for the client are determined including making a referral if necessary and scheduling the client for a consultation where we can further evaluate what the client may need.



# CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



## CASE EXAMPLES

**Wills Trusts and Estates:** A young single mother, Mary, reached out inquiring about our Wills Program. Being the sole caretaker of her daughter, she was only able to work part time to ensure her daughter was taken care of before and after school. Unfortunately, any income Mary receives from working or through government assistance, needs to go toward food, clothing, and rent. Mary wanted to ensure that if anything happened to her, that her daughter would be taken care of, and go to someone she trusted. Mary was able to come to The Legal Project and attend our Wills Clinic, meet with an attorney to discuss her concerns, and leave that day with a Will, Power of Attorney, and Health Care Proxy.

**Immigration:** Our staff attorneys filed Asylum applications for two Afghan brothers who fled the Taliban. Each brother went through a grueling 7+ hour long interview at the Asylum office in Newark, where our staff attorneys provided representation. Finally, one was approved in December and the other in January 2024. The next step is to work with them to bring their families to the United States.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

10,806

people benefitted  
from

Community  
Legal  
Education

**Legally Speaking Workshops** offer free, custom designed education programs to community groups and organizations on a wide variety of legal topics. Each workshop is tailored to the requesting group's needs and is provided by either a staff or pro bono attorney. Three free webinars were offered during the month of February 2024 that identified wills, powers of attorney, living wills, health care proxies, and disposition of remain directives; identified the differences between a will and a trust and which document is best for asset protection and planning; and long-term care planning to age with independence while preserving assets. Each of the three webinars included on-line registration, electronic distribution of materials, and were delivered and recorded by Zoom.

**Uncontested Divorce Workshops** offer assistance with the preparation and filing of necessary documents to low-income individuals who are representing themselves (pro se) in a divorce matter. During the first part of the uncontested divorce process, qualified applicants are scheduled to attend our Uncontested Divorce Clinic, where a Legal Project volunteer attorney and volunteer law clerk or paralegal will help in completing the uncontested divorce documents, will give instructions on how to file the first set of these documents with the Court, and how to serve their spouse or have their spouse served. The Legal Project does provide NYS uncontested divorce court documents needed for the divorce process. We provide assistance throughout the entire uncontested divorce process (Parts I, II, III). Our volunteers received letters of verification of pro bono hours, for law students this includes verification towards their 50-hour NYS Bar requirement.

170

people benefitted  
from

Pro Se  
Assistance

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

We have a new program titled the Upstate Pro Bono Immigration Program whose purpose is to increase the availability of pro bono assistance for immigrants by recruiting, training, and supervising volunteer Attorneys to provide pro se assistance and pro bono representation to immigrants throughout the Capital District. We are still actively seeking pro-bono attorneys interested in taking T-Visa cases, and plan to connect with our Pro Bono Initiative attorney to help strengthen this effort collaboratively.

Recruitment of pro bono volunteers also occurs through existing relationships with NYS attorneys, law firms, agencies, associations, Capital District Women's Bar Association, Albany County Bar Association, and through New York Bar Association Paladin platform. New recruitment strategies included as a Host Organization for the NYS Attorney Emeritus Program and utilizing their new on-line Galaxy platform. The Legal Project also presented virtually through AEP's monthly volunteer workshops.

Additionally, The Legal Project partnered with Albany Law School Career Center to recruit law students for various internship positions and provides training through Zoom and You-Tube platforms and utilizes recording and streaming options which has provided convenience and ease. Uncontested Divorce Training for Albany Law School students to prepare student volunteers to assist clients with NYS Uncontested Divorce process. Online Training for Albany Law School students to prepare student volunteers to assist Wills Project clients in completing end-of-life documents. As previously mentioned, Legal Clinic Program was redesigned to allow student interns from Albany Law School, Union College, and University at Albany to coordinate and oversee the logistics of the 8 monthly legal clinics (1 in-person) that includes Hosting our 7 virtual legal clinics via Zoom.

56

attorneys  
volunteered **1,586** hours

9

law students  
volunteered **1,133** hours

4

other volunteers  
volunteered **45** hours

# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

We collaborate with our Supreme Courts and Legal Aid to provide our information and services to homeowners who are yet to be represented. Courts in various counties send both of our organizations 1st appearance calendars and TEAMS links weekly, and our attorneys appear when needed. We have strengthened our working relationship with New York Immigration Coalition, RISSE, Ibero-American Action League, Inc., Albany County Police Department, DocGo and Platinum who are helping migrants with relocation services in the Capital Region and Safe Inc. of Schenectady. We continue to collaborate and work very closely with our local domestic violence programs including the YWCA Northeastern New York, Equinox Domestic Violence Services, Unity House in Troy, Wellspring and Mechanicville Area Community Services Center.

**HomeSave Coalition:** Comprised of housing counselors, pro bono legal services and Empire Justice that meet monthly to discuss upcoming HOPP trainings, funding, outreach, police/advocacy, scams and tricky cases. This coalition is the catalyst for assisting with HOPP Advocacy Days in the Capitol and brings together the 89 organizations included in the HOPP network to aid in advocating for state funding.

**AARP:** The Legal Project designed an educational program for AARP members and guests who had an interest and wanted to learn about estate planning, the differences of wills, trusts and asset protection, and long-term care planning. The purpose of this program was to provide information to help seniors make decisions with life's challenges as they age.

**McNulty Veteran Business Center:** The Legal Project provides pro bono civil legal services to veterans and active military clientele; webinars for veterans, active service members, and their spouses who own a small business, and who are looking to start a new business; and presentations and resources at annual veteran conferences and resource fairs.

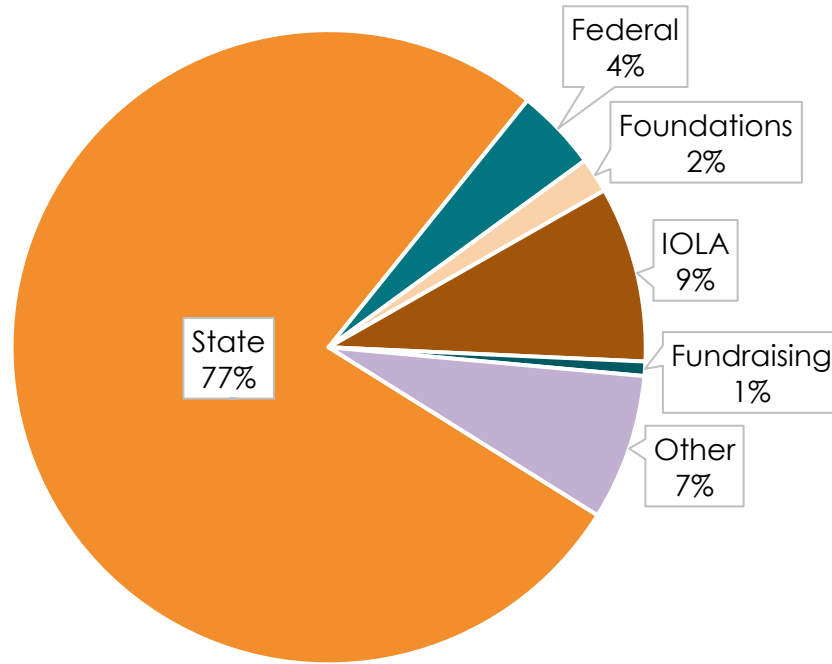
**Elder and Disability Law Pro Bono Society:** The Legal Project provides consultations for seniors and their caregivers with volunteer attorneys, and opportunity for law students to volunteer and observe consultations at annual Senior Citizens' Law Day event, and obtain information and resources during Resource Fair.

**Schenectady Zone 5 Police Academy:** Once a quarter, we provide their officers with a Human Trafficking Response 2 hour training.



# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 3,187,278**



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 285,195.00</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 2,449,564.00</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$ 133,349.00</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$ 57,000.00</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 23,316.00</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$ 236,946.00</b>