

# **FRANK H. HISCOCK LEGAL AID SOCIETY**

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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Thanks in large part to the help of 2023-2024 IOLA funding Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLA) was again able to resolve a large number of civil cases and address the critical legal issues affecting low-income residents of our Central New York community. Our casework focuses on the essentials of life and includes representing clients in custody, domestic violence, divorce, child support, immigration, housing, and unemployment insurance benefit matters. There continues to be a high need for civil legal services, and our staff has continued to work hard to meet this need while dealing with high caseloads. During this funding year we closed 3,120 civil cases, benefitting 7,621 individuals. The practice area breakdown of the 3,120 closed cases is as follows: 593 family law; 1,314 immigration; 1,115 housing; and 98 unemployment insurance benefit.

Housing cases continue to make up a significant portion of our cases, which is not surprising given the housing crisis in New York State. We have handled over 1,000 housing cases in both the 2023-2024 and 2022-2023 reporting years, which is over a 60% increase from the housing cases handled 2021-2022, which demonstrates the importance of civil legal services funding generally, and more specifically the importance of the flexible funding provided by IOLA which allows us to devote resources and staffing to areas of community need.

We are also proud to have another year of having handled a record number of immigration cases, closing 1,314 in the past year. Thanks in large part to increased funding from the New York State Office for New Americans, as well as increased IOLA funding, we are able to help address the dire need for immigration legal services, including the hundreds of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees who have been resettled in our community.



**Service Area:** Central New York

**Population Served:** General Low-Income Population

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**  
 Total Staff: 55    Lawyers: 32.25  
 Paralegals: 5    Others: 17.75

Also, providing legal services to domestic violence survivors has been a long-standing priority of ours, and we have represented well over 7,500 survivors since 1999, including 354 in the last year alone. IOLA funding plays a critical role in our legal assistance to domestic violence survivors.

There continues to be a large need for domestic violence prevention legal services in the region. Over 10% of the nearly 1,200 people who took the Central New York Community Foundation's Life Needs Assessment in 2023 said they have family members who make them feel unsafe. HLA's long history of providing legal services to survivors of domestic violence leaves us well suited to meet this need.

**Primary Target Population:** HLA's Civil Legal Assistance Program provides free legal services to low-income residents of Central New York, focusing primarily on residents of Onondaga County. Our Office for New Americans funded Immigration Program serves an 18 county region of Upstate New York (Central New York, Mohawk Valley North, Mohawk Valley South, and North Country regions) and our Homeowner Protection Program funded Foreclosure Prevention Project serves Onondaga, Oswego, Cortland, and Cayuga counties.

**Dollar Benefits Realized by Low Income People:** This year HLA secured \$1,118,269.71 in back awards and settlements and another \$36,335.58 in monthly benefits, and also helped clients avoid owing \$468,405.83 in back awards and settlements and \$5,524.88 in monthly benefits. Thus, HLA clients saw a total benefit of \$1,586,675.54 in back awards and settlements and a total monthly monetary benefit of \$41,860.46 in the last year.

**Increased Access to Justice or Improvements in the Administration of Justice:** HLA's on-going focus over the last year has been on providing essential legal services to clients in as accommodating and efficient a manner as possible. We conducted outreach efforts to ensure that Afghan and Ukrainian refugees, along with other non-citizens, were aware of the legal assistance available to them. We continued to concentrate our efforts on those most in need of legal representation in Onondaga County, including those facing housing, family, domestic violence, immigration, or unemployment issues.

**Significant Improvements:** We continue to strive to improve our capacity to deliver services. We have increased our staffing to meet the demand for services, and have also focused efforts on improving our retention and recruitment of staff. We also continue to leverage technology to provide services as efficiently as we can.

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

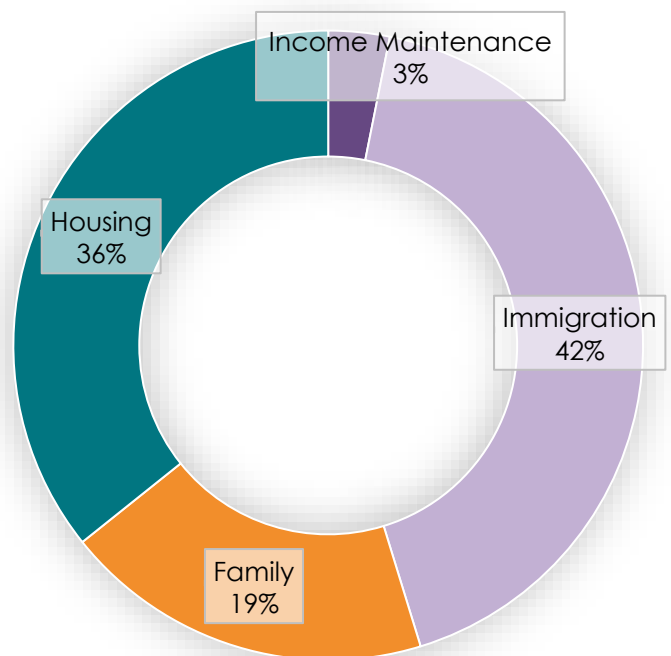
**Landlord/Tenant:** This past year we represented a client that was withholding rent due to a landlord’s failure to repair a malfunctioning bathroom, when suddenly the landlord illegally locked the tenant out of the property. The tenant, who had been living there for 11 months, was deprived of both his home and all his personal belongings. He reached out to us, and we were able to file an emergency Order to Show Cause with the Court, and obtained an order requiring the landlord to restore our client to possession of the premises. In addition, after negotiation the Landlord agreed to waive the amount of the withheld rent, make the necessary repairs, and provide our client with a new lease, preserving his housing stability.

**Immigration:** Our office represented an individual from Afghanistan who resettled in Central New York following the United States evacuation from Afghanistan and the rise of Taliban authority. He came to the United States with his two sisters and brother-in-law, and while in Afghanistan the Taliban had raided their house three separate times trying to find them.

We screened him for eligibility, gathered documents and other evidence, prepared his asylum application, and submitted it. We then prepared him for his interview until eventually he was granted asylum and allowed to remain in the United States.



## CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

HLA has provided legal assistance in Central New York for 75 years this year and is extremely well-known in the community, so many clients come to us from prior representation or from word of mouth. Other clients access our services because they found us online or were referred by a community partner, the court, bar association, or other agency. Our staff members engage in targeted outreach to specific groups (tenants, unemployed individuals, foreclosed homeowners, refugees, immigrants, domestic violence survivors, community service providers) and participate in community organizations, task forces, and inter-agency collaborations that address homelessness and housing stability, immigration issues and immigrant rights, and domestic violence.

In recent years more of this outreach has occurred via video conferencing or streaming, increasing our reach. However, not all our target population has access to this necessary technology so we also try and provide presentations to other community-based organizations that our target population is likely to encounter so that these organizations can refer these potential clients directly to us.

Due to the wide variety of practices areas at HLA we are also able to make in-house referrals from one of our programs to another, ensuring that clients receive holistic representation to the greatest extent possible. Our staff is also in-court nearly constantly, whether in-person or virtually, and we are often able to encounter clients in need of legal representation and provide them with our information so that they can obtain the help they need.

**Community Legal Education:** This past year HLA has conducted 194 workshops and clinics benefitting 717 people, made 104 presentations to the community that reached 906 people, and participated in 185 collaborations with a total of 1,835 other people. Some of the locations where we held workshops or clinics and where we made community presentations include, but are not limited to: Westside Learning Center; Jervis Public Library; Office for New Americans Opportunity Centers; InterFaith Works; Catholic Charities; BOCES; Toomey Residential; The Center; Workers' Center of CNY; YWCA of Mohawk Valley; and the Utica Public Library.

**Referrals:** In addition to providing direct representation and community outreach HLA serves as a major source of referrals for residents of Onondaga County and the surrounding region. Since we have been in existence for over 73 years many clients call us for help no matter their legal issue, and while we strive to provide direct representation to as many clients as people

there are some areas of the law we do not handle or some people who are not eligible for our services.

Each client who calls is screened for eligibility by a well-trained and knowledgeable Law Assistant, who opens a case in our case management system if the caller is eligible or, when possible, makes an appropriate referral if the caller is not eligible for our services. In the 2023-2024 year HLA made 3,439 referrals.

717

people  
benefited from  
**Pro Se  
Assistance**

906

people  
benefited from  
**Community  
Legal  
Education**

**Example #1:** In June of 2023 we participated in the celebration of World Refugee Day and were able to present an overview of our legal services and common issues experienced by immigrant communities. Being able to provide such a presentation during a significant event allowed us to expand our reach and present to more people than we would in a standalone event.

**Example #2:** We also routinely partner with local agencies to provide legal clinics to migrant communities, and one of our busiest community partners is The Center in Utica. We frequently meet with refugees and other new Americans at The Center, and in May 2023 we had a particularly busy day, meeting with 12 clients to provide consultation and advice on their legal issues. We continued on to provide direct representation to many of these clients.

# TECHNOLOGY

HLA has continued to enhance and refine our data collection and reporting capacity in our case management system LegalServer through IT development and ongoing supervision of data entry. We have made great strides in technological capacity which has increased our capacity and efficiency and which allows us to offer services in whichever medium is best for our clients.

All staff members now have laptops and docking stations with webcams to allow for virtual meetings via Microsoft Teams with coworkers, community partners, and client and our we have a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone system, allowing all staff to be reachable at their HLA office line no matter where they are located. We have made investments in laptops and docking stations and other mobile technology to ensure that staff can provide high quality services regardless of whether they are in office. Our website has been upgraded to be mobile-friendly, allowing potential clients and others to access our website to see our services and complete a brief intake form from any device.

Overall, these technological upgrades have allowed us to continue to provide our full scope of legal services safely and securely through many means.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The 2023 Technology Grant primarily enabled us to expand our remote technological capabilities, as we were able to use this funding to purchase quality hardware for our conference rooms. This hardware included ceiling microphones, webcams, speakers, television/monitors, and other related equipment necessary to utilize the hardware. This has converted our conference rooms into high-quality virtual meeting spaces that allows for hybrid group meetings. We would not have been able to make these advances without this funding, and our staff and clients are benefiting from these enhanced capabilities.

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# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

While Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York continues its role as the main source of volunteer implementation in Onondaga County we at HLA continue to recruit and develop interns, externs, pro bono scholars, and volunteers to aid in our representation and outreach.

We actively recruit interns and externs from the Syracuse University College of Law, participating in on-campus interviewing programs and speaking to externship classes. We also have a history of hosting pro bono scholars from Syracuse University College of Law. These interns, externs, and pro bono scholars provide vital support to our housing, immigration, and unemployment insurance benefit practice areas, increasing our capacity to assist those in need.

We also maintain an ongoing relationship with the Citizenship and Civic Engagement Program at Syracuse University, and have been the host for student placements for many years now. These undergraduate students assist us with outreach and community engagement, promoting our work and services to the wider community.

Our website also includes a portal through which people interested in volunteering can submit their information, and we have hosted volunteers who have reached us through this portal. In 2023-2024 HLA hosted 15 volunteers who received training and experience and who provided support and assistance to our agency and programs.



7

law students volunteered **1,524** hours



8

other volunteers volunteered **1,240** hours



# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Hiscock Legal Aid maintains close working relationships with many agencies and community organizations in Central and Upstate New York, particularly in the areas of domestic violence, immigration, and housing. We accept case referrals from all such organizations and also utilize the resources and expertise of these partner agencies to provide the best possible assistance to our clients.

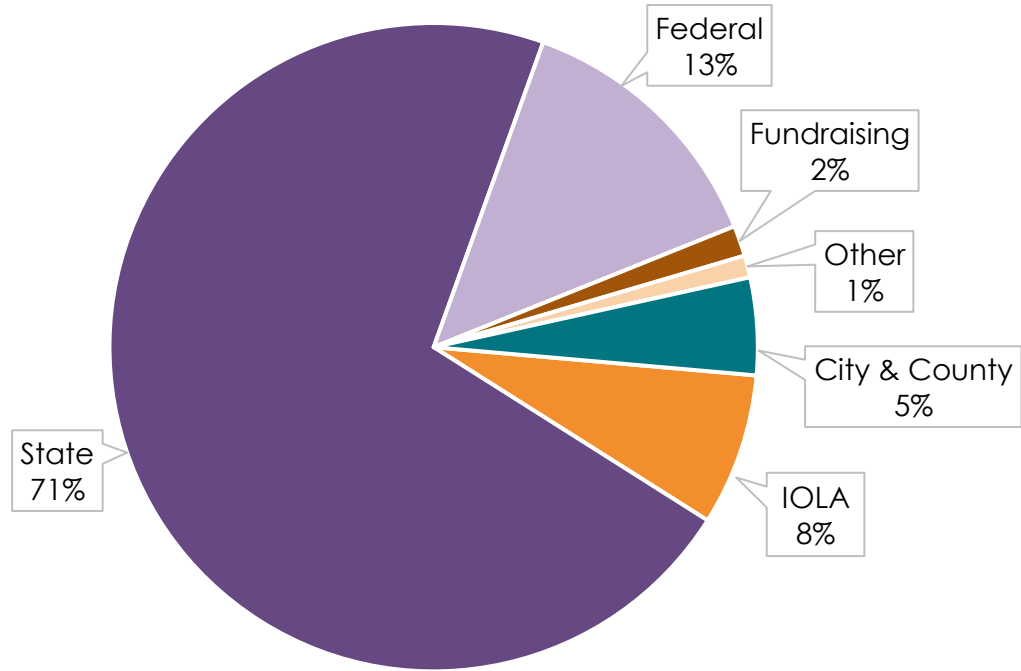
We are also members of the Housing and Homelessness Coalition of Central New York, which includes agencies from Onondaga, Oswego, and Cayuga Counties working to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, homelessness. In our role as a primary provider of representation to tenants we coordinate closely with the City of Syracuse, Legal Services of Central New York, Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, and Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York to ensure that we are representing as many tenants as possible, with the goal being that every tenant in need of legal assistance can obtain it. Our Foreclosure Prevention Project also works closely with Home Headquarters, Inc. to provide housing counseling and legal services to homeowners facing foreclosure.

Our Immigration Program serves an 18 county region of Upstate New York, and works closely with community organizations throughout this large geographic region. Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York is a subcontractor of ours on a portion of our funding from the Office for New Americans, and we collaborate closely with them to provide high quality immigration legal services throughout the region. We received additional funding from Catholic Charities, InterFaith Works, and the Office for New Americans specifically to serve Afghan evacuees resettled in Central New York. Serving such a large geographic also requires maintaining strong relationships with other agencies, including The Center, Joint Council for Economic Opportunity of Clinton and Franklin Counties, Catholic Charities Northside CYO, InterFaith Works, Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency, and many others.

We also continue to collaborate with the Syracuse University College of Law, speaking to classes about our work and hosting interns, externs, pro bono scholars, volunteers, and newly admitted attorneys. We also have a relationship with the Falk School of Social Work at Syracuse University and the ability to host a social work student who can assist clients with accessing needed services.

# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 5,848,598.75**



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$ 442,326.82</b>
<b>City &amp; County Funding</b>	<b>\$ 283,000.00</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$ 4,170,916.62</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$ 782,999.62</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$ 16,550.00</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$ 89,146.53</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$ 63,659.16</b>