

**LEGAL AID
SOCIETY OF
MID-NEW YORK**

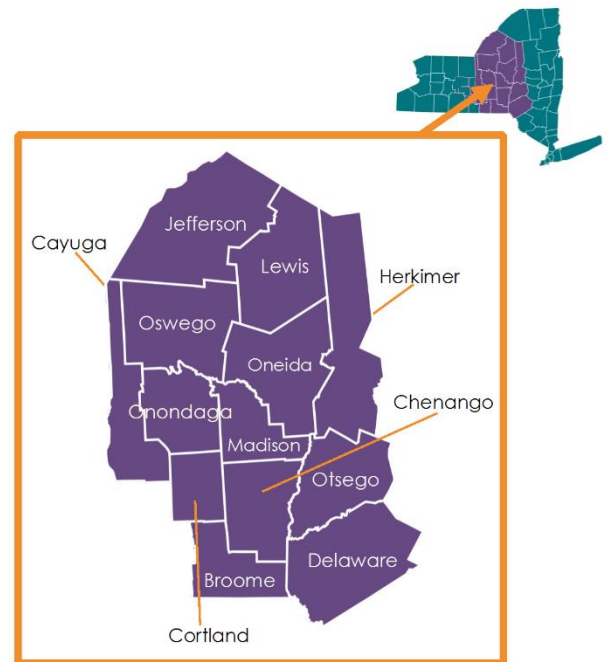
**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

From 4/1/23 to 3/31/24, LASMNY closed 6,415 cases benefiting 13,946 people. LASMNY won \$2,186,804 in back awards/settlements for clients, including: \$1,482,965 in retroactive Social Security Disability (SSD) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits; \$382,129 from family law matters; \$226,622 in housing allowances; and \$85,377 in back wages and tax benefits. LASMNY helped clients avoid \$3,047,292 in consumer debt, mortgage arrears, illegal rental charges, rental arrears, taxes, and filing fees. These financial benefits are actual direct benefits, not estimates, recorded by the casehandler in our case management database at the time of case closing. During this reporting period, LASMNY began a large-scale eviction defense effort to address increasing homelessness in our service area. LASMNY prevented 709 households from becoming homeless as a result of eviction or foreclosure.

LASMNY’s Central New York Legal HelpLine provided advice and brief service to low-income callers on a wide of civil legal matters, closing 2,159 cases. LASMNY’s Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) program closed 293 cases, with 247 volunteer attorney hours. Attorney Emeritus volunteers were among the most productive recruits, handling 37% of the cases closed.

LASMNY presented community legal education events to 1,395 participants, and distributed 7,757 hard copy community legal education materials. A total of 2,268 self-help materials were viewed on LASMNY’s website. LASMNY staff also referred 2,285 people to other sources of assistance in the community. LASMNY’s Agricultural Worker Project (AWP), formerly the Farmworker Law Project, continued statewide outreach visits and legal representation for farmworkers, as well. AWP visited most regions of the state in 2023-2024, providing 116 presentations to 580 attendees, including 520 farmworkers. AWP distributed 6,786 legal education materials to farmworkers and social service agencies throughout the state.



Service Area: Central Region of New York

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
 Total Staff: 81.2 Lawyers: 38
 Paralegals: 26.9 Others: 16.3

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Family: LASMNY assisted a victim of domestic violence who was on the verge of eviction due to the breakup of her long-term marriage. Over the last several years, she had become completely unable to work due to the effects of trauma from the abuse. She had no income, and her husband had left their apartment, refusing to pay any rent. She also had very little food left. LASMNY addressed the situation holistically, first assisting the client to apply for public benefits to stabilize her situation. LASMNY then represented the client in a divorce, obtaining temporary spousal support while the case was pending. In addition to obtaining a divorce and long-term spousal support, LASMNY ensured that the client received her marital share of the husband's pension. In the meantime, the client was denied SSD benefits. LASMNY helped her appeal, winning ongoing and retroactive benefits. The client was able to avoid eviction, and eventually relocate to a more affordable apartment.

Case Example #2, Employment: LASMNY has seen an increase in employers misusing the H-2A program to request agricultural workers—who are not covered by a variety of state and federal employment laws—and then siphon them off to non-agricultural tasks, using the agricultural loophole to avoid paying them benefits such as higher wages or overtime at 40 hours.

In two separate cases, LASMNY received calls from H-2A workers at different workplaces whose employers were having them do non-agricultural tasks; in at least one case, the employer also was not paying for transportation to and from home and was illegally charging for housing. LASMNY was able to obtain almost \$40,000 for one client in unpaid wages and damages via federal court litigation. In the other case, LASMNY was able to obtain \$50,000 in unpaid wages and damages for the client through a demand letter and negotiation. In both cases, LASMNY successfully used a prevailing wage theory for misclassified H-2A workers.

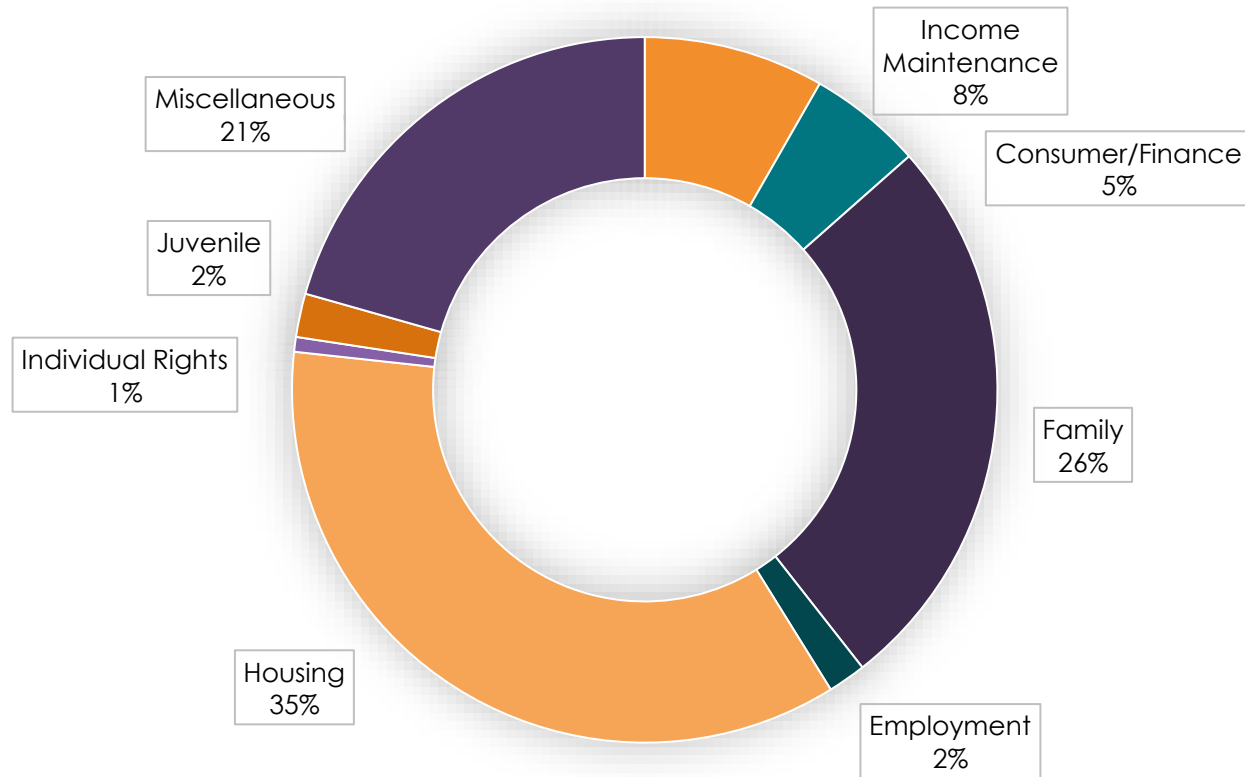
13,946

people
benefited
from

6,415

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

LASMNY provides a wide array of services to clients and the community in addition to direct legal representation, including community legal education events, distributing brochures on important legal topics, outreach to underserved populations, and referrals to other sources of assistance. From 4/1/23 to 3/31/24, LASMNY assisted 12,215 individuals with these services.

LASMNY’s community legal education activities as a whole benefitted 9,947 people. Community legal education events were attended by 1,395 people. Some of the legal topics covered were advance directives, campus sexual assault, landlord/tenant issues, farmworker’s rights, and general information about our services. During outreach, LASMNY staff (including AWP staff) distributed a total of 7,757 hard copy brochures in the community. Community education activities included AWP’s 116 outreach presentations to 520 farmworkers during visits to labor camps statewide, on topics including employment law, worker’s compensation and health/safety issues, housing sanitation rules, discrimination, trafficking, immigration, income taxes, public benefits, etc. In collaboration with farmworker programs in neighboring states, AWP published a “Harvest Calendar” and H-2A Contract Worker News, both of which include important legal

information for farmworkers. In all, 6,786 brochures, calendars and other materials in English, Haitian Creole and Spanish and were distributed at labor camps and social service agencies.

As far as online outreach, 2,268 self-help materials were viewed or downloaded from LASMNY's website. LASMNY's website has been under redevelopment for the past several years, and we expect numbers to increase in future reporting periods due to these efforts.

NOTE: LASMNY also held numerous pro bono and pro se clinics in 2023-2024, including divorce clinics, consumer clinics and senior legal clinics. However, an actual case is opened for each clinic participant, so clinic statistics are reported as cases rather than "self-help."

Example #1: In an effort to increase awareness of LASMNY's services in low-income communities, and communities of color in particular, LASMNY staff members have been tabling outreach booths at local neighborhood and school events. Examples include the annual "Harvest on the Hill" Halloween event in the Cornhill neighborhood of Utica (Oneida County); the Mohawk Valley Latino festival (Oneida County); the World Refugee Day event in Binghamton (Broome County); and the annual Solway "back to school" fair (Onondaga County). LASMNY reached a total of 169 people at such events.

Example #2: LASMNY staff engaged in a number of outreach activities to increase awareness of legal rights and free civil legal services in LGBTQ communities. Some examples include: a presentation to the Q Center on name changes and the availability of LASMNY's name change clinic; outreach booths at Pride events in Rome and Utica; and providing general LASMNY brochures and name change clinic flyers to an art gallery/café which focuses on the LGBTQ community. LASMNY distributed a total of 141 brochures to the LGBTQ community through these efforts.

9,947

people
benefited from
**Community
Legal
Education**

2,268

people
benefited from
**Web-Based
Assistance**

IMPACT CASES

New York State Vegetable Growers Association, et al. v. James

AWP submitted an amicus brief in a federal case challenging H-2A workers' right to unionize. The brief was cited in an opinion denying the vast majority of growers' claims in seeking a preliminary injunction. In prior agency proceedings, LASMNY had organized a brief signed by over 20 organizations in support of farmworkers' rights to unionize.



TECHNOLOGY

Additional funding from IOLA, as well as funding through the Division of Criminal Justice Services, has helped LASMNY to make vital program-wide network and cybersecurity upgrades. It has enabled LASMNY to ensure that every staff member has an up-to-date desktop and/or laptop computer capable of running programs needed for client services. Prior to this infusion of funding, LASMNY was struggling to replace obsolete technology equipment, including high-speed copier/scanners capable of supporting our transition to a paperless program.

Other improvements in program technology this past year have included software upgrades to enhance staff productivity. For instance, LASMNY implemented Foxit software across the agency, which allows to staff to create and edit pdf documents at a much lower cost. Even more importantly, Foxit has an electronic signature function, which has been extremely helpful in getting important documents signed quickly by staff and clients.

LASMNY's Utica office Managing Attorney has been spearheading our involvement in an effort to create a statewide housing portal. The initiative, funded by a Technology Innovation Grant from the Legal Services Corporation, will assist clients facing eviction to connect with the eviction defense program serving their area, as well as to access self-help resources if in-court representation is not available.

Due to an increase in cybersecurity threats from phishing and other forms of social engineering, LASMNY's IT department has mandated all staff to complete interactive training through

KnowB4, a cybersecurity learning platform. The trainings have helped staff to recognize potential cyber threats from miscellaneous sources, including email, phone, text and even physical entry into an office. In one instance, the trainings even helped staff to recognize that an elderly client was a victim of phishing, as a result of which staff provided assistance to protect his identity and credit reports.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

LASMNY used 2023 IOLA Technology Grant funds primarily to assist with enhancing our existing network infrastructure and cybersecurity protection capabilities at all of our offices. Additionally, some funds enabled replacement of aged computer displays in two offices. The infrastructure and cybersecurity enhancements directly support all LASMNY clients, staff, and visitors. These enhancements have been planned since 2022, but would likely not have been possible in FY 2023-2024 without the benefit of this grant award. This grant directly made the following improvements and enhancements possible:

- Cloud-based management and control of the entire LASMNY network infrastructure.
- A cloud-based Unified Threat Management System providing robust threat and malware protection and internet filtering for all systems connected to the LASMNY network, thereby greatly increasing protection from cybersecurity incidents.
- Extremely reliable, high-speed and highly secure WiFi technology throughout each office, fully integrated into LASMNY's centrally managed network and Unified Threat Management System. This integration enhanced as well as expanded LASMNY's existing network and cybersecurity functionality by not only regulating secure WiFi access exclusively to appropriate resources, but also by detecting and defeating rogue or nefarious attempts to access LASMNY's network.
- The unique, easily deployed capability for LASMNY to wirelessly extend its internal network to a multitude of devices via a single internet connection. Using this capability, several LASMNY staff at an outreach, recruiting or other similar event can all be securely connected to our network via one internet feed and take full advantage of its resources. We believe this capability will make such events more effective, by making all LASMNY resources remotely available to staff.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

LASMNY's PAI program closed 293 cases from 4/1/23 to 3/31/24, with 247 hours donated by 32 volunteer attorneys. LASMNY's pro bono programs strive to match attorney interest with service priorities, maximizing pro bono services through a combination of clinics, "attorney of the day" programs and direct referrals. LASMNY's pro bono clinics utilize private attorneys to screen clients for divorces and bankruptcies. In addition, pro bono paralegals assist clients in filling out their own divorce paperwork through pro se clinics, under the supervision of pro bono and staff attorneys. LASMNY holds annual senior legal clinics, providing pro bono advice and referrals for wills, health care proxies and powers of attorney. "Attorney of the day" programs provide immediate representation to tenants at the courthouse in eviction proceedings.

LASMNY also co-sponsors continuing legal education programs with local bar associations to train and recruit private attorneys, with the option of attending for free in exchange for accepting a pro bono referral. LASMNY continues to refer cases for extended pro bono service in many areas, as well, including bankruptcy, divorce, housing and advance directives. Private attorneys can make "reverse referrals" to LASMNY of clients they wish to serve pro bono. Some attorneys prefer to volunteer on LASMNY's Legal HelpLine, providing phone advice/brief service at any of LASMNY's 3 main office locations.

32attorneys volunteered **247** hours**2**law students volunteered **237** hours**5**other volunteers volunteered **338** hours

LASMNY works with retired attorneys, law students, law graduates and undergraduates to enhance its pro bono programs. LASMNY recruits student interns to assist LASMNY staff and pro bono attorneys with bankruptcies, divorces and other family law cases. LASMNY works with retired “Attorney Emeritus” volunteers, who accept case referrals and provide mentoring for LASMNY staff attorneys and other pro bono attorneys. LASMNY utilizes “50-Hour” law students, who need to fulfill their 50-hour pro bono requirement for admission to the New York bar, to provide legal research assistance to LASMNY staff attorneys. During the past reporting period, 2 law students provided a total of 237 hours of volunteer service.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

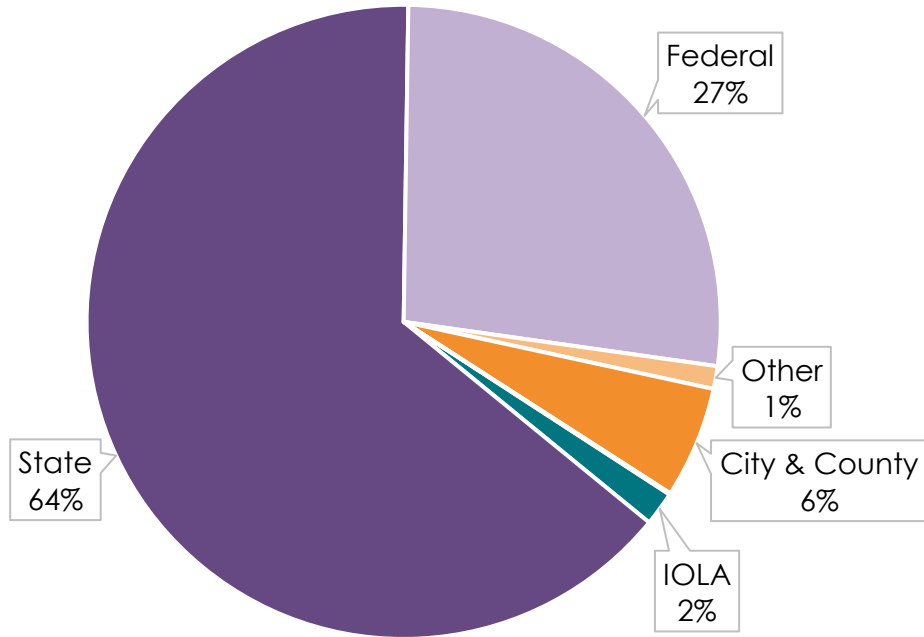
Legal Service Providers: LASMNY has a long history of collaborating with other legal services providers, the private bar and community-based organizations. LASMNY collaborates with its non-LSC sister program in Syracuse, LSCNY. The HelpLine serves as the single-point-of-entry for both programs, and both programs cross-refer cases to one another on a regular basis. LASMNY also cross-refers cases with the Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society, Inc., the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County (VLP), and the Syracuse University College of Law clinical programs. Since 2015, these legal services providers have been housed together in one building.

Bar Associations: LASMNY collaborates with the local bar associations in each county, including attending continuing legal education (CLE) trainings provided by the bar. In turn, LASMNY’s PAI program recruits, trains and refers cases to pro bono attorneys. LASMNY collaborates with the Syracuse University School of Law clinical programs, which provide law students to assist LASMNY staff with legal research and other tasks. LASMNY recruits undergraduate students from Binghamton University, who volunteer at LASMNY’s Binghamton office while learning about careers in law.

Community Based Organizations: With respect to community-based organizations, LASMNY’s Central New York Victim Assistance Project collaboration includes all 13 domestic violence and rape crisis programs over a 12-county area. LASMNY cross-refers clients with the partner agencies, in addition to providing training and technical assistance. LASMNY’s foreclosure defense unit works closely with housing counselors from Metro Interfaith in Binghamton, Utica NeighborWorks Homeownership Services and Delaware Opportunities. LASMNY’s Refugee Citizenship Project coordinates with the American Civic Association in Binghamton, the Center in Utica, and nonprofit interpreting services.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 10,185,067



IOLA Funding	\$176,640
City & County Funding	\$579,326
State Funding	\$6,537,915
Federal Funding	\$2,744,438
Foundations	\$7,039
Fundraising	\$21,803
Other Funding	\$117,906