

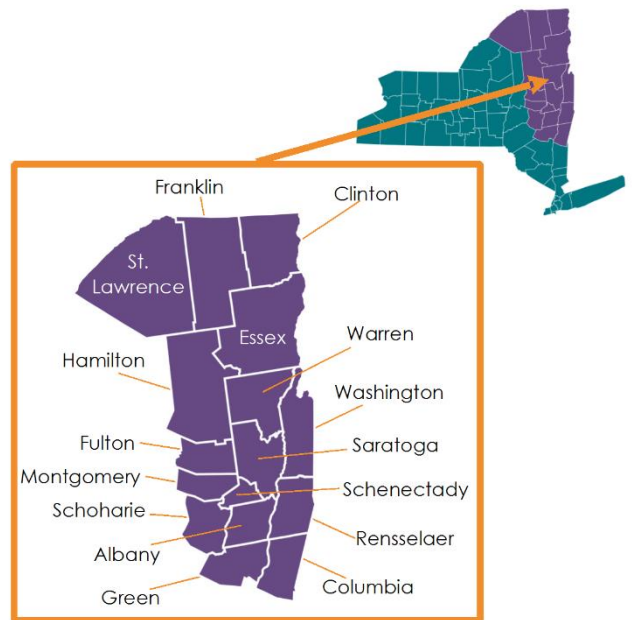
**LEGAL AID
SOCIETY OF
NORTHEASTERN
NEW YORK**

**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York (LASNNY) relied on its generous IOLA grant to respond vigorously and comprehensively to our low-income clients’ access to justice needs providing life-changing legal assistance throughout our 16-county service area. IOLA funds supported about 14% of our operating expenses. During the reporting period, our staff and volunteers closed 8,442 cases benefiting 17,896 individuals and worked on 3,778 cases benefiting 7,562 people that were pending at the end of the GAR period. We provided legal representation, referrals, community legal education, online outreach, pro se assistance, and web-based assistance that benefited 69,449 low-income individuals. Offering online intake in addition to the traditional option of calling makes our services more accessible for clients. We received 19,080 requests for intakes; 1,659 of those were through our online system. Overall, our intake increased 10% from 2022-23. Housing intakes exceeded all others making up 43% of all new cases. Family cases came in second with 20% of all new cases. We continue to support and partner with legal and social services colleagues locally, statewide, and nationally.

- We have, and continue to, expand our organizational staffing infrastructure, notably with the addition of HR positions, additional Managing Attorneys, additional staff in the Fiscal department, and additional support staff for attorneys. These changes allow quicker responses internally and externally, and provide more assistance and support to staff, which staff have noted provides better work/life balance increasing staff morale. We added a new building to our Canton service site and are considering additional satellite office locations to serve more remote communities better.
- We have expanded senior legal services into Montgomery and Schoharie Counties. Our senior legal services assist a particularly vulnerable population and is now quite robust as we now provide services for seniors either directly or through a partnership in 13 counties.



Service Area: Northeastern New York

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
 Total Staff: 115.6 Lawyers: 58
 Paralegals: 24 Others: 33.6

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Income Maintenance: Social Security case involving suspension of benefits and overpayment. We worked with a husband and wife to avoid a substantial disruption of their income under very difficult circumstances. The husband has dementia, so he moved in with their adult child who was better situated to care for him. They sold their home, used the proceeds to buy a smaller home for the wife, and put only her name on the deed. Social Security learned of the transaction and considered it a "transfer of assets", suspended the husband's SSI benefit and charged him with a \$20,000 overpayment.

We met with local Social Security District Office and drafted a new deed adding the husband effectively undoing the transfer of assets. The District Office restored the husband's benefit. We also assisted with an overpayment waiver application, which was granted in full, waiving the husband's \$20,000 overpayment.

Case Example #2, Housing: A client residing in a hotel was \$12,000 in arrears after his lifelong partner passed away as he could no longer afford to pay the rent with his Social Security check alone. The client was disabled and in a wheelchair. We negotiated a settlement whereby all of arrears were waived with a stipulated move out date. It was agreed that when the client's move out date arrived, he would report to DSS for shelter. The client was concerned about

being placed in a shelter that was not handicapped accessible or that required occupants to leave for the day as his wheelchair battery only lasted for 3-4 hours.

Working with DSS we were able to ensure he would be placed in a motel that was handicapped accessible. We were also able to get the client DSS relocation assistance vouchers in time for his move.

We are pleased to report after three weeks in shelter the client is now stably housed at a senior complex in Albany.

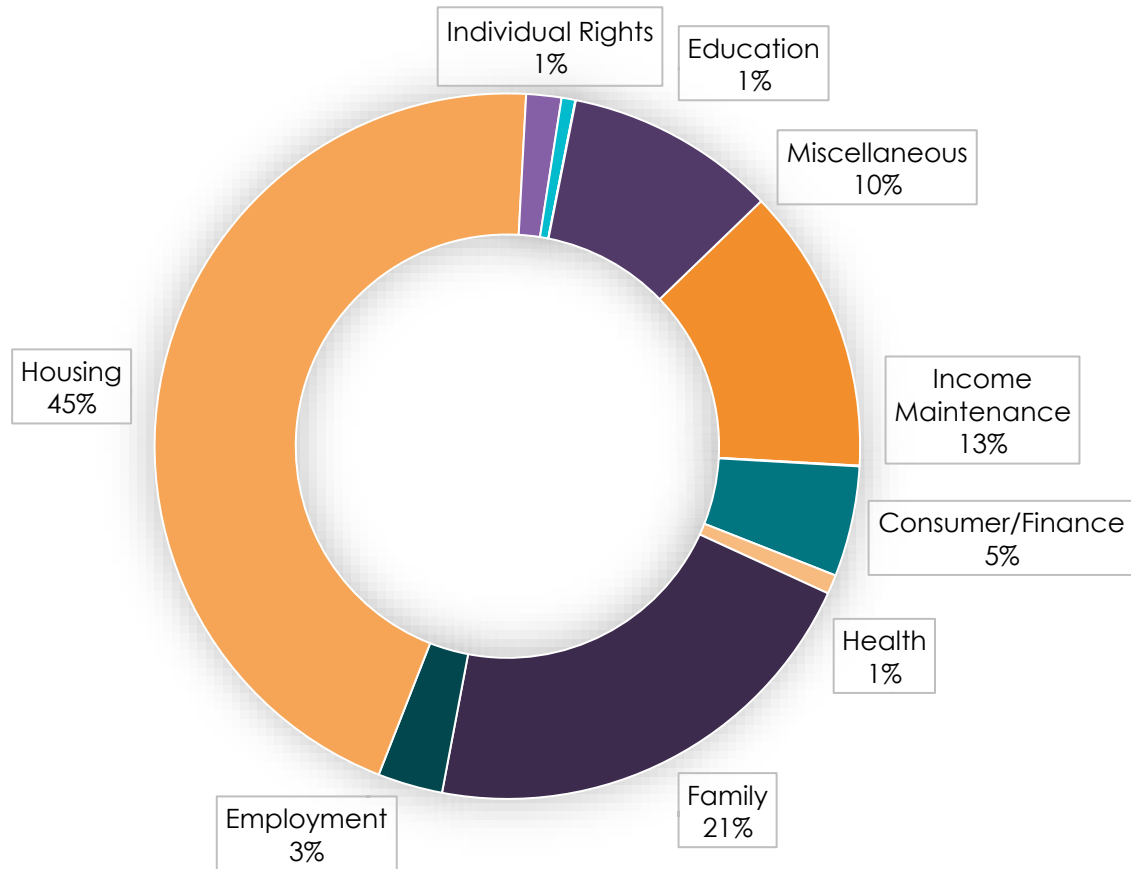
17,896

people
benefited
from

8,442

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

LASNNY also continued to provide other legal-related services to our target population of low-income people including referrals, pro se assistance, community legal education and outreach in order to supplement our program of direct legal services and to provide the client community with preventative legal education. Our goal remains to efficiently provide as much information and education as possible to our client community and to agencies which serve them. During this GAR period 4,564 referrals to non-legal providers and other legal services providers, including public defenders and local courts, were made by support staff.

46,989 people attended community group presentations and receive legal education, access self-help materials, or receive pro se assistance. We had 60,375 unique views of our website and 13,158 unique views of our online Legal Lifeline and Coronavirus legal education brochures. We are currently remodeling our website to make it more user friendly and ADA compliant and are

also updating some of our Legal Lifelines.

Additionally, LASNNY's PAI Department recruits volunteer attorneys to provide brief advice or legal information to clients who are ineligible for our programs, need legal help we do not offer, or need help outside of our capacity. PAI does this through clinics, Know Your Rights presentations, and direct case referrals. PAI provides the volunteers with technical assistance, case oversight and management, and other support. PAI also fills in when volunteers cannot finish the case on their own.

Example #1, PAI Program: Our PAI program has a partnership with In Our Own Voices, a local organization which focuses on services to the BIPOC LGBTQ+ community. Through that partnership, we co-host "Town Hall"-style "Know Your Rights" events for various legal needs unique to the LGBTQ+ community in-person and virtually via Zoom. The goal is to provide legal information to those in need and offer legal assistance for those who are eligible for LASNNY services. Our PAI program also organizes dozens of Pro Se Divorce Clinics annually. Any eligible LASNNY client seeking a fully uncontested divorce, can participate in the divorce clinics. In this GAR period, 168 distinct clients were assisted through these clinics.

Example #2, Senior Legal Services: In addition to SNAP information, our outreach for seniors included providing presentations with information about wills, estates, trusts, tax information and tax scams, advanced planning, powers of attorney and health care proxies at various Senior Centers and events. One of our attorneys developed a one-page article/fact sheet for seniors in Fulton County entitled "Avoiding Scams." Another attorney wrote a monthly column for the Montgomery County Office for Aging that is mailed to seniors in Montgomery County. Column topics have included "Who is a Tenant and What Do I do With Unwelcome

168

people
benefited
from
**Pro Se
Assistance**

46,815

people
benefited
from
**Community
Legal
Education**

6

people
benefited
from
**Web-Based
Assistance**

Guests?” and “Introduction/Discussion of Power of Attorney vs. Joint Account Holder.”

Low Income Tax Clinic: We held an interactive LITC Tax Town Hall in December 2023 via FaceBook Live. The event was to educate taxpayers and residents about the upcoming tax season and address issues and concerns they might have about their filing. LITC also ran an outreach campaign to reach low-income taxpayers, especially those without access to the internet, to educate them about tax changes and issues, upcoming LITC events, and the LITC by placing ads in print editions of newspapers in the North Country and in the more rural sections of our service area.

TECHNOLOGY

LASNNY continues our partnerships with Just Tech, which provides Chief Information Officer services, and ABS Solutions, which offers Help Desk and Network support. Our Tech Committee has expanded to ensure representation from every office including new staff who have recently joined the organization. These new members provide fresh feedback offering valuable insights. The committee meets monthly to discuss technology usage and hosts informative Tech Talks/Rapid-Fire Talks with staff.

We are committed to maintaining strong security measures and continue to require annual cybersecurity training for all staff and non-staff who have access to LASNNY data via Knowbe4 to improve user security. We require Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) to access data and maintain secure remote access over VPN, allowing us to operate a hybrid work environment. We continue to use Advanced Email Security and have upgraded our Endpoint Detection and Response (EDR) to the newest version for all endpoints. EDR is a security solution that continuously monitors, detects, and responds to threats on endpoint devices, providing an additional layer of protection against cyber-attacks. We have implemented Third-party Risk Management to be conducted annually for security practices.

Our toll-free regional Legal Line phone number serves as the single point of contact for all of our branches. We are working on updating phone dashboards for increased reporting capacity, including call queue call backs for callers so they don't have to wait on hold. Online intake is available for our “remote” offices and we are committed to expanding the language options for this system. We utilize interactive video chats to assist rural clients. Our internal communications primarily utilize Microsoft Teams.

We are currently developing a new and improved website, scheduled to go live in mid-2024. Our social media platforms, including our Facebook page and Instagram account, are regularly updated to keep our community informed and engaged.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

We are pleased to have received this technology grant as, like many other agencies, we have numerous technology needs under consideration. Due to the time constraint and the amount of the discretionary award as well as the immediate needs of the agency, the 2023 technology grant was spent on (6) new laptop computers fully equipped with required software, hardware, and remote monitoring services. These laptops were either issued to new staff or replaced outdated, end-of-life equipment. The laptops and all related accessories totaled \$14,149.80. The remainder of the funds were spent on a portion of software support renewal fees for LASNNY's general ledger, Fund EZ. This fee supports on-going program and security updates as well as technical support. These items would have been purchased at some point regardless of receiving the technology grant as they were necessary for the agency; however the grant allowed us to purchase these items immediately, helping us to facilitate LASNNY's strategic technology goals of ensuring all staff have the necessary technology to be effective in their roles.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

LASNNY has a robust and very productive pro bono/PAI program. We recruit from the private bar associations, our board members, our board members' law firms, at fundraisers and other events where attorneys are expected to attend. PAI opened 232 new cases and closed 313 cases. Our volunteers continue to expand available services by taking on a broad range of civil cases: bankruptcies, wills, certain divorces, real estate matters, name changes, and tax issues. Our volunteers continued to run pro se divorce clinics virtually and in person and staff Attorney-for-the-Day programs at city courts.

We continue to support our volunteers in a variety of ways, and they provided 1,897 hours of service. They were joined by LASNNY's part-time, pro bono General Counsel who provided about 60 hours of pro bono service.

88attorneys volunteered **1,334** hours**29**law students volunteered **125** hours**6**other volunteers volunteered **438** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Under our Dept of Health AIDS Institute grant, our HALC program works in collaboration with the Health Law Clinic at Albany Law School and the Albany Damien Center to provide legal and support services to individuals and families impacted by HIV/AIDS. We have referral relationships with service providers including the Alliance for Positive Health, Whitney M. Young Health Center, the Albany Medical Center AIDS Treatment Clinic, Ellis Family Health, and Hudson Headwaters Health Network. We work closely with staff from these organizations to coordinate client services in appropriate situations.

Our Senior Legal Services programs now serve 13 counties and the St. Regis Mohawk reservation. Our Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Team (E-MDT) serves 7 counties in the Mohawk Region and 5 Capital District counties to provide coordinated legal, social, and medical services to victims of elder abuse. Partnering with local Adult Protective Services and Office for the Aging Departments has allowed E-MDT to provide services to these vulnerable, often overlooked community members.

Our Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) maintains collaborations with social services and government agencies, health care navigators, local school districts, food pantries and others serving those facing food insecurity.

Our partnership with Catholic Charities of Fulton and Montgomery Counties, Community Action of Greene County, Inc, STOP Domestic Violence/Behavioral Services North for our Domestic Violence Legal Assistance Project allows victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and/or stalking in Clinton, Columbia, Essex, Franklin, Greene, and Montgomery Counties to receive comprehensive legal and support services.

Our foreclosure, homelessness and eviction prevention projects continue to help us provide much needed legal housing assistance to clients through our collaboration with housing counselors, community action programs, Continuums of Care, SPOA and Coordinated Entry Programs, tenant advocacy agencies and other government and human services programs such as Affordable Housing Partnership, Albany Housing Authority, Albany County Dept of Social Services, Albany County Coalition on Homelessness, Albany County Rural Housing Alliance, United Tenants of Albany, Albany Community Action Partnership, Unity House, TRIP and RCHR NeighborWorks HomeOwnership Center, Schenectady Community Action Program, Better Community Neighborhoods, Inc. and others. We are also working with Legal Services Access Alliance in considering a statewide online intake portal for eviction matters.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 13,950,798.46

IOLA	\$ 1,647,622.83
City & County	\$ 199,930.36
State	\$ 7,544,858.29
Federal	\$ 3,667,840.23
Foundations	\$ 155,161.50
Fundraising	\$ 142,238.19
Other Funding	\$ 177,613.06

