

LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF ROCHESTER

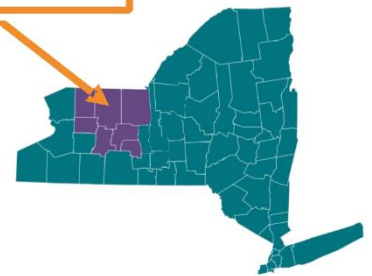
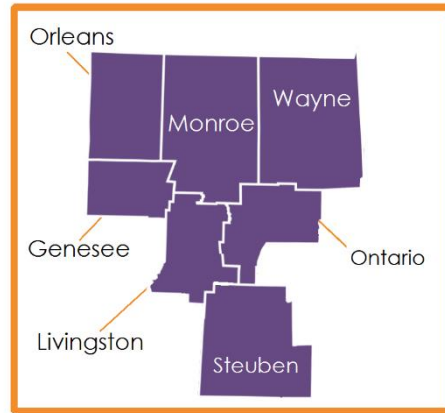
2023 – 2024

Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Legal Benefits Obtained: The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, NY (LASROC) provided direct legal representation in 9,405 cases benefiting 31,011 people, and community legal education was provided to 1,250 people. IOLA’s benefit areas were met through LASROC’s five units: Family Law, Housing and Consumer Law, Immigration Law, Education Law, and the Attorney for the Child Program.

The majority of cases handled by LASROC fall into the Family, Housing, Consumer/Finance, Education, Immigration, and Juvenile benefit areas. In the Family benefit area, LASROC provided representation in 5,965 cases benefiting 21,573 people. The majority of these cases were related to custody, protection from domestic violence, family reunification, foster care services, and divorce. In the Housing benefit area, we provided legal assistance in 2,307 cases, benefiting 5,759 people. The majority of these cases were related to eviction prevention and eviction delay, with outcomes benefiting 5,062 people. In the area of Education benefits, we provided legal assistance in 424 cases, benefiting 1,843 people. Many of these cases were related to special education and access to appropriate services. In the Immigration benefit area, we provided legal assistance in 455 cases, benefiting 1,394 people. Immigration benefits included employment authorization, obtaining Temporary Protected Status, and citizenship. There were 150 cases benefiting 204 people in the Juvenile benefit area and in the Consumer/Finance benefit area, we provided legal assistance in 26 cases benefiting 43 people.



Service Area: Monroe County and Surrounding Area

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:
Total Staff: 96.8 Lawyers: 44.6
Paralegals: 24.7 Others: 27.5

Target Population: Our target population was low to moderate-income adults and children in Monroe, Genesee, Livingston, Ontario, Orleans, Steuben, and Wayne Counties. Our Immigration Law Unit serves all Central and Western NY

counties, although their work, particularly in this program year, was focused primarily in Monroe County. LASROC clients reported an average income of \$7,454 per year, and 38% identified as Black or African American, 37% as Caucasian/White, 18% as Hispanic or Latino, 5% as Multi-Race, and 2% as Asian or Pacific Islander. Sixty-four (64) percent were under the age of 18, 32% were between the ages of 18-59, and 4% were 60 years and older. Of the clients served this program year, 947 were victims of domestic violence, 103 were veterans, and 293 were non-citizens.

Financial Benefits Obtained: LASROC obtained \$768,629.55 in direct dollar benefits to our clients. This includes back awards and settlements of \$37,759.22 in child support, \$9,141 in spousal support, \$720,129.33 in equitable distribution, and \$1,600 in affirmative landlord/tenant judgments. We obtained \$2,601,930.05 in back awards and settlements to clients in the form of judgments and payments avoided. These savings included avoiding payments in landlord/tenant matters, \$2,410,515.98; bankruptcy, \$112,417; foreclosure, \$51,315.04; and garnishment or levy, \$27,000.

Increased Access to Justice: LASROC continued projects that increased access to justice, including further expansion of the Tenant Defense Project (TDP). The project is a collaborative effort between LASROC, Legal Assistance of Western NY, Empire Justice Center, and JustCause. The TDP provides holistic legal services to tenants, including representation before, during, and after court, and ensures tenants are connected to other needed community resources. The TDP hotline, staffed by JustCause serves as a single point of access to Monroe County tenants in need of legal assistance, and project attorneys provide direct legal services to tenants who are at risk of homelessness, including renters who are facing eviction proceedings and those who are experiencing other sources of housing instability, such as poor living conditions, illegal eviction, retaliation, and other forms of landlord misconduct. The collaborative effort of the TDP partners is a unique model of legal services organizations working together to enhance services. Increased funding to LawNY from the NYS Emergency Rental Assistance Program over the last two fiscal years has helped provide resources to support full representation to most tenants in Rochester City Court and increased representation to tenants in the County's town and village Courts. LASROC, as a subgrantee of LawNY, is focused on the goal of providing universal representation to all tenants in Rochester City Court.

LASROC's Immigration Law Unit has also seen expansion this program year in response to displaced migrants bussed from New York City to Rochester and housed at a local hotel.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Case Example #1, Immigration: A Syrian refugee family came to LASROC seeking assistance after their citizenship applications, submitted through another agency, were denied due to the non-approval of the N-648 Request for Medical Exemption. The family was comprised of a 40-year-old woman, traumatized by PTSD resulting from the Syrian war, her mother, who also battled PTSD and anxiety, and her father, who was dealing with PTSD, deafness, and proficient only in Arabic sign language.

Our attorney worked closely with their primary care physicians to provide a comprehensive explanation of their diagnoses on the N-648 application. This detailed documentation highlighted how their medical conditions hindered their ability to comprehend English and American Civics. As a result of these efforts, two of the three family members have successfully obtained citizenship, and the third is currently awaiting an interview.

Case Example #2, Housing: LASROC assisted a recently unemployed single mother of three facing an eviction proceeding in Rochester City Court. LASROC advocates identified irregularities with the petition and the service of statutorily required notices. Based on this, LASROC was able to obtain a favorable settlement for the client that included providing her and her children additional time to move, no back rent owed, and the denial of a judgment with prejudice.

Without LASROC's help, the client could have faced an immediate warrant of eviction with a judgment for up to four months' rent entered against her. Our assistance allowed our client and her children time to make a planned move, preventing them from potentially becoming homeless and avoiding the trauma and negative impact on children that often results from an immediate eviction.

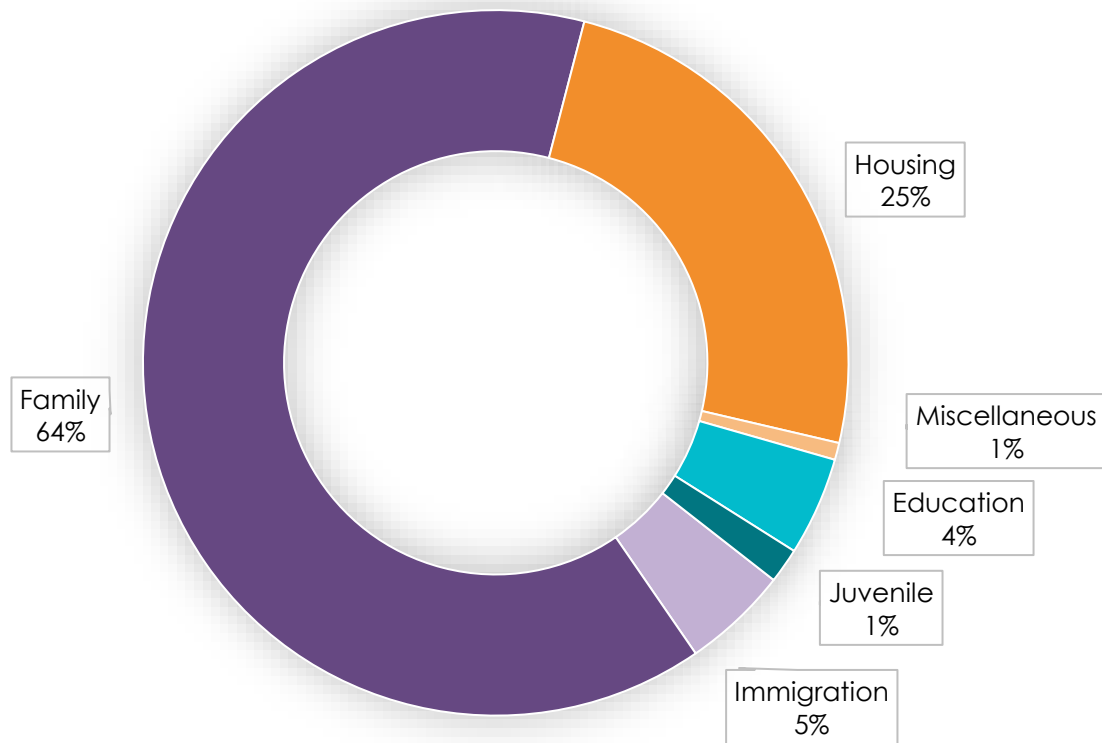
31,011

people
benefited
from

9,405

legal cases
closed

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

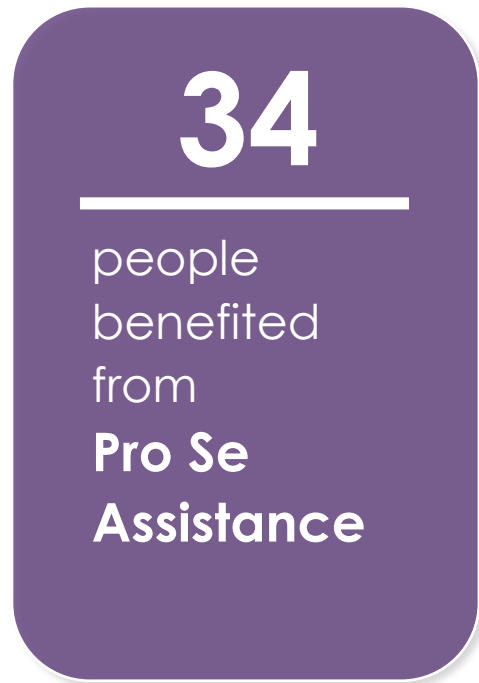
In addition to direct services, LASROC provides legal education workshops to the community and other non-profit providers. This training is conducted throughout the geographic service area, mostly in family law, immigration, education law, and housing. This program year, 250 people received community legal education presentations from LASROC staff. Presentation methods included in-person events and interactive online presentations.

As part of the domestic violence prevention training conducted in rural counties, clients receive brochures that describe our full array of services detailing how we may be able to help them in the future. An important part of preventing future violence is a coordinated support system that includes legal and supportive services that LASROC provides along with our community partners. LASROC distributed approximately 1,000 brochures at various human service agencies, and brochures were made available at all of our in-person presentations. Victims of domestic violence and the organizations that support them were specifically targeted.

A total of 34 individuals received Pro Se assistance from LASROC staff. These individuals were provided with assistance through LASROC’s Pro Se Divorce Project, which assists unrepresented litigants in properly completing and filing their divorce paperwork. The project's target population is low to moderate-income individuals in Monroe and surrounding counties seeking an uncontested divorce.

LASROC is a collaborative partner with Willow Domestic Violence Center in the development of their Family Justice Center. One of our Family Law attorneys is at Willow one day per week to provide initial assessment and representation, legal counseling, and technical assistance.

Example: The objective of LASROC’s Pro Se Divorce Project is to provide low and moderate-income individuals with assistance to properly navigate the extensive and often confusing process associated with divorce for litigants who do not want legal representation. The Project’s legal assistant helps applicants prepare and file their uncontested divorce documents and guides applicants through the entire process of self-representation. Many of the Project’s participants have previously attempted to file incorrect or incomplete paperwork on their own, which was rejected by the Court. The Court system is unable to assist litigants with correcting documents. Before the existence of this project, litigants attempted to correct errors without assistance resulting in multiple filings, frustrating the litigant and the Court. Courts can now refer litigants to our Project, knowing we can provide the necessary assistance.



TECHNOLOGY

LASROC offices are fully open, with staff working on a hybrid schedule, in the office a minimum of two days per week. While a hybrid workplace model has had its challenges, the integration of technology has allowed LASROC to represent clients efficiently. The ability to continue offering a remote option to clients has increased access to services for those unable to visit our

offices in person due to work, childcare, or transportation barriers. A hybrid work model also helps with staff recruitment, as many applicants seek hybrid work. Also improving client access is our online intake program, accessible through our website. Online intake continues to be a popular method of applying for services, with 436 individuals submitting an online application this program year.

As LASROC grows, so do our IT needs. We added an IT Coordinator position to work with our Systems Administrator in the previous program year. The Coordinator has proven integral this program year in successfully managing the increase in IT needs as our programs grow. The IT Coordinator and Systems Administrator continued their focus on improving cyber security and are continuing to finalize and implement formal, internal IT policies created based on recommendations from a third-party IT security audit to ensure compliance with the NYS Shield Act. To improve asset management, our IT team implemented Microsoft Intune, a cloud-based service that allows us to configure and deploy device access policies organization-wide. This gives us more robust security options for both LASROC and employee-owned devices.

We have developed and implemented an online client satisfaction survey that integrates with our case management system. Attorneys, advocates, and legal assistants can email a link to the satisfaction survey directly to clients through the case management system and responses are collected and recorded in the system for easy analysis.

We have also recently purchased an SMS text messaging module that will allow staff to communicate directly with their clients via text message within our case management system. The system will be tested and implemented in the upcoming program year.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

LASROC received \$15,000 in supplemental 2023 IOLA Technology Grant funds, which were used to purchase technology that improves systems for our staff and clients. With these funds, we upgraded the equipment in our main conference room, including the purchase of large monitors, which improved the quality and efficiency of meetings held in a hybrid format—with staff or clients both present in the room and online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom. Upgrades were made to equipment in our reception area bringing up-to-date systems to our reception staff so they can better serve applicants and clients. Efficiency for our finance staff was increased with the purchase of AP Automation for Netsuite allowing AI-enabled Optical Character Recognition technology to scan vendor invoices and auto-populate data fields. A Sonicwall

Network Router was purchased, increasing the agency's internet connection security and providing enhanced network protection. To improve the ability of attorneys, advocates, and legal assistants to communicate directly with their clients, an SMS text messaging module was purchased through LegalServer, our case management system. Our program staff has frequently requested text messaging capability directly with clients through LegalServer in recent years, and we are looking forward to implementing this in the coming months.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

During this program year, LASROC hosted six law students who volunteered 1,451 hours and 13 other volunteers, including social workers and college students, who volunteered 2,510 hours for a total of 3,961 hours of volunteer time.

Under the direct supervision of LASROC staff, non-attorney volunteers receive substantive experience in legal services. Law students who have completed one year of study at an accredited law school are eligible for a judicial practice order. This order, granted by the Fourth Department, allows law students to appear with clients in certain courts under the supervision of an attorney.



6

law students volunteered 1,452 hours



13

other volunteers volunteered 2,510 hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

The Telesca Center for Justice: LASROC and the main providers of civil legal services in Monroe County are co-located at the Telesca Center for Justice in downtown Rochester, NY. Providers share a common reception area and contract with LASROC to provide in-person and telephone reception services. LASROC collaborates with the Telesca Center partners in the

substantive provision of legal services and in developing ways to increase access for our clients. The Telesca Partners have embarked on an unprecedented joint fundraising campaign and have hired a joint Development Officer. To strengthen communication and collaboration, LASROC and the Telesca Partners restructured their individual fundraising efforts to create the Fund for Justice. The Fund for Justice will increase awareness of the impact of civil legal aid and increase unrestricted funding for the Telesca Center for Justice partners, ensuring more families in the Greater Rochester area have access to justice.

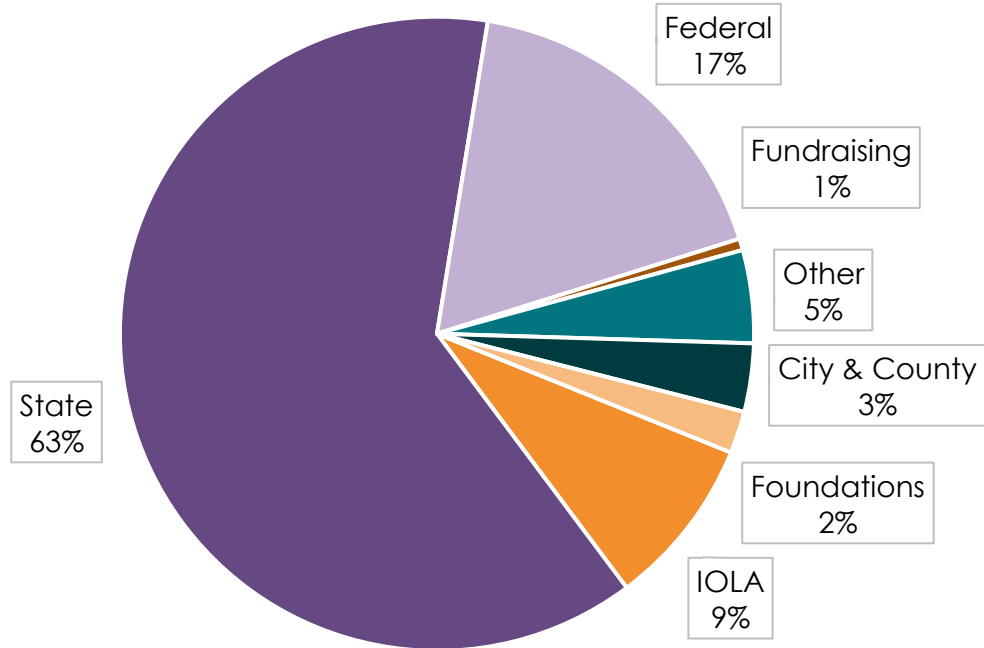
The Telesca Center legal service providers meet weekly to facilitate service delivery and coordinate services. The Tenant Defense Program, a collaboration between LASROC, JustCause, Legal Assistance of Western New York, and Empire Justice Center, continues to be a unique model of legal services organizations working together to enhance client services.

Community-Based Organizations and Other Legal Providers: LASROC also collaborates with community-based organizations, including Willow Domestic Violence Center, the YWCA in Monroe and Genesee Counties, and PathStone, which works with the Family Law Unit on seamless service delivery to victims of domestic violence. LASROC's Housing & Consumer Law Unit has a decade-long collaboration with Empire Justice Center, JustCause, and the Housing Council to represent clients in foreclosure. Additionally, we collaborate with LawNY, Empire Justice, and JustCause on the Tenant Defense Project. LASROC works directly with the Housing Council at PathStone, a local not-for-profit development corporation that provides first-time homebuyer education and housing assistance through presentations to first-time home buyers and at landlord/tenant information sessions. LASROC's Immigration Program has maintained a long-established collaboration with both Hiscock Legal Aid Society in Syracuse and The Legal Aid Society of Northeastern NY to provide immigration legal services across New York State. LASROC's Immigration Law Unit also collaborates with JustCause, Catholic Charities Family and Community Services, Volunteer Lawyers Project, and Journey's End, both out of Buffalo, NY. Our Education Law Unit collaborates with several initiatives, including the Mental Health Education Advocacy Committee, the Runaway and Homeless Providers Coalition in Monroe County, and the Single Point of Access for mental health and other services in Livingston County.

360 Collaborative Network: LASROC is a member of the 360 Collaborative Network, an online referral system. We are involved in the Systems Integration Project in Monroe County, which seeks to create an online client portal/referral system to connect those in need of services to service providers. LASROC is also a member of the Justice for All Strategic Leadership Committee.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 10,446,408.61



IOLA Funding	\$ 906,151.48
City & County Funding	\$ 363,421.69
State Funding	\$ 6,554,843.55
Federal Funding	\$ 1,835,877.48
Foundations	\$ 224,114.35
Fundraising	\$ 61,708.42
Other Funding	\$ 494,772.16