

**LEGAL
ASSISTANCE
OF WESTERN
NEW YORK
(LawNY)**

2023 – 2024

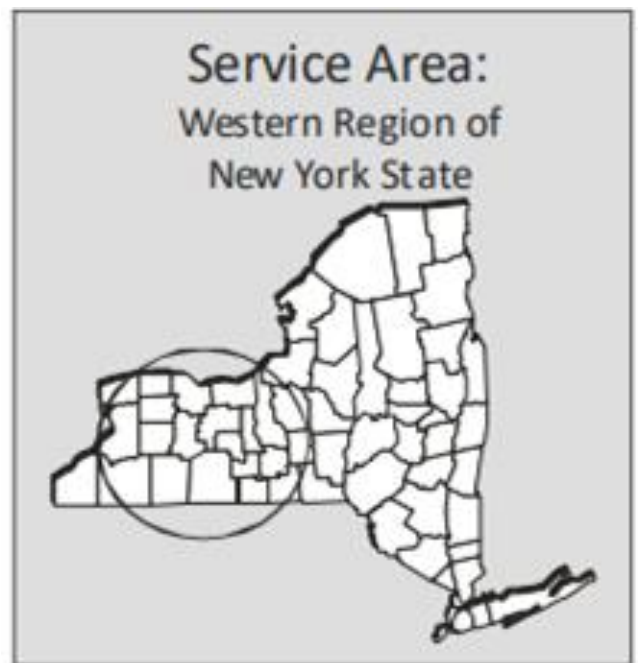
Report

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

We closed a total of 6,922 cases during the period from 4/1/23 – 3/31/24, benefitting a total of 16,100 people. Our clients obtained at least \$272,935.58 in ongoing monthly benefits and other payments and \$2,633,689.03 in one-time payments. Our target population is low-income people living across all of the IOLA CLS Unit 6 area, comprising 14 counties and nearly 10,000 square miles. In addition to payments made directly to our clients, we also achieved dollar savings to clients in the avoidance of ongoing monthly payments in the sum of \$63,106.71, in fee waivers totaling \$44,312 and in lump sum avoidances of \$7,755,496.63. We achieved taxpayer savings in the sum of at least \$974,811.85.

Improvements specific to our service delivery system include:

- the expanded collaborative eviction defense services in conjunction with the Telesca Center Partners in Monroe County, Cornell Law School in the Ithaca service area and Western New York Law Center in the Southern Tier;
- collaborative training efforts with other legal services agencies to provide relevant CLE education to our staff;
- collaborative effort to build a statewide portal for referral and triage of case matters;
- the continuation of a pro bono reentry project in conjunction with Cornell Law School to reduce barriers to employment for community members with past criminal records;
- the development of a program with Cornell Law School that will allow law students to work on eviction matters over the summer term and the school year in order to expand our services and develop a pipeline of potential future legal services practitioners.



Service Area: Western Region of New York State

Population Served: General Low-Income Population

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 166.87 Lawyers: 78.2

Paralegals: 57.17 Others: 31.5

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

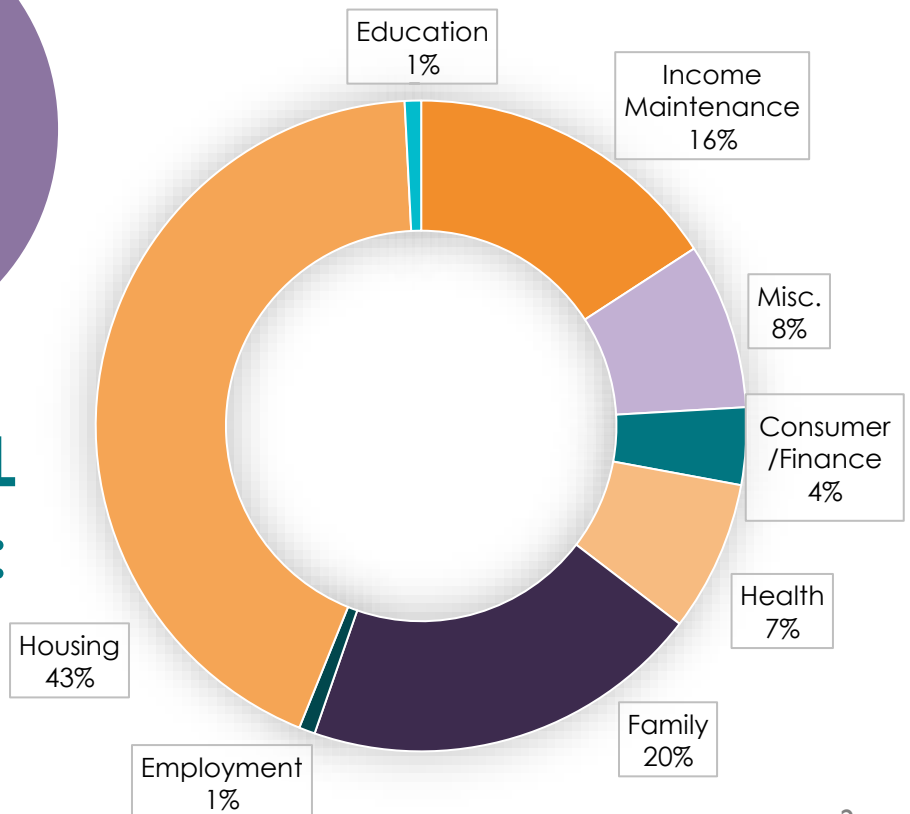
Case Example #1, Family Law - The client came to us having recently separated from her abusive boyfriend and the father of her child. He was growing increasingly unstable and violent with her after the birth of the child. We filed petitions on the client's behalf and negotiated a settlement giving the client an order of custody to her, granting supervised visitation until the ex-boyfriend took steps to address his mental health and limiting contact between them.

Case Example #2, Landlord/Tenant - The client was in a precarious situation facing non-payment eviction proceedings, with outstanding rent exceeding \$5,000.00 and significant habitability concerns within the unit. Through diligent negotiations, we were able to secure a favorable payment plan for the client, ensuring they could settle the debt in manageable installments.

Additionally, upon receipt of our motion to dismiss on habitability issues, prompt action was taken, resulting in the landlord rectifying the habitability issues within the unit, significantly improving the client's living conditions. To further alleviate the financial burden on the client, all late fees were waived.



CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA:



OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

We provide community legal education to client groups to: 1) provide information about legal issues to help people recognize legal problems; 2) understand their legal rights and responsibilities; 3) take steps on their own to resolve problems; and 4) know when to seek assistance. We also provide community legal education to human service providers from local agencies with the goal of giving them information that they can use to help their clients avoid problems and also know when they should contact us for assistance. We continue to provide other legal-related services that maximize the impact of our work and aim to prevent the need for further legal intervention. In order to achieve these goals, we engage in community legal education activities to particularly vulnerable populations and census tracts. For each of our programs, we offer a variety of advice and brief service assistance by telephone.

During the reporting period, we intaked 5507 households without meeting the clients in person (telephone and online). We provide legal information through 3123 hotlines. Hotlines are the provision of legal information, form assistance and general answers to procedural questions. It does not include tailored legal advice or assistance. This assistance supports an individual's ability to represent or advocate for themselves.

Our website currently has over 100 Self-Help articles in English and 63 self-help articles translated into Spanish. Annually, our website receives 780,010-page views with 633,585 sessions from 517,332 users. Our online presence has assisted 687,968 in receiving web-based assistance during this past program year. Our social media presence has continued to grow,

4,105

people
benefited
from

**Pro Se
Assistance**

158,608

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

687,968

people
benefited
from

**Web-Based
Assistance**

with 1,400 followers on Facebook, 437 followers on Instagram, 824 followers on LinkedIn, and over 1,000 followers on Twitter.

For individuals who we cannot help, we try to make referrals to other service providers in the community who can help. During the reporting period we referred a total of 3964 individuals to other legal services programs, the private bar, to non-legal human services and to other sources of assistance. We engage in substantial outreach. We reached 124,104 individuals by tabling at fairs, attending community events, distributing materials to community locations, providing education through presentations and other forms of community outreach. Over the past year we have also expanded our outreach efforts to include more print and radio usage. We have also focused efforts on places our community members frequent such as laundromats, grocery stores, etc.

Example (Trainings): Through our services to Older Adults we presented a series of trainings in the Finger Lakes. Examples of these seminars included: On May 17, 2023 we held a seminar entitled Life and Death Planning 101: What everyone should know about Wills, Powers of Attorney and Advance Medical Directives. It was presented at the Ontario County Retired Teachers Association Meeting. There were 27 participants. On September 22, 2023 we held a seminar for the Ontario Office for the Aging Community Members concerning the basics of estate and advance directive planning. The presentation was done to seniors at Gysum Mills Estates in their community outreach room. There were 10 participants. On September 29, 2023 we held a seminar for the Ontario Office for the Aging Community Members related to Medicaid 101: Basics of In-Home and Nursing Home Medicaid Coverage. There were 10 participants.

Example (Court Outreach): We also continue to offer onsite services at courts. For example, we conducted outreach at Ithaca City Court at least 35 times over the last program year. Services include information, referral and intake.

Example (Medical Legal Project): We continue to offer integrated services through a medical legal project model with the University of Rochester Medical Center, Highland Hospital and Rochester Regional Health. In addition, through a Skadden Fellowship, we have been able to build new relationships with medical providers in other portions of our service area. The Medical Legal model combines direct representation with other services including information, referral and the training of medical staff to spot legal issues. During the last program year, we provided at least five training sessions to medical professionals.

IMPACT CASES

Impact Case Example: Client contacted us in 2020 regarding the landlord's shutoff of her water, which had led code enforcement to declare her apartment unsafe and order her to leave. We filed a lawsuit claiming that both the landlord and Code had acted unlawfully.

MILESTONE: Secured a settlement in which Code Enforcement agreed to change its practices regarding ordering tenants to vacate when landlords have made apartments unsafe, ensuring that tenants have hearing rights Also secured damages for tenants who were denied running water and subjected to harassment.

IMPACT: Renters in the community will benefit from the change in practices and have additional rights when faced with habitability issues. There are 2200 rental units as estimated by code enforcement.

TECHNOLOGY

During the fiscal year, we made some IT security updates from both an infrastructure and IT policy standpoint. We were awarded a \$50,000 two-year grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services to upgrade our antivirus program. Our former endpoint antivirus was basic, outdated, and did not protect our environment well against the latest cybersecurity threats. We have implemented Sentinel One Endpoint Detection Response (EDR). EDR is a crucial aspect of modern cybersecurity to keep our systems and our client data secure. As cyberattacks become more sophisticated and frequent, EDR

All Impact Cases

- *Gunsalus/Hampton v. Ontario County, NY*
- *Mt. Hope Avenue Lot 151 Project - Plymouth Exchange Neighborhood Assoc*
- *Spencer v. Bank of America*
- *Victory Village*
- *Clark vs. John Ricci and The City of Olean, New York*
- *Rowland and Blair v. Orchard Grove Village MHC NY, LLC and Ruthanne Visnauskas, as Commissioner of the NYS Division of Homes and Community Renewal*
- *Caldwell v. Fane d/b/a Ithaca Renting Company, et al*
- *Colonial Village vs. Willover*
- *Clements, et. al. v. New York Secretary of State*
- *Cayuga Nation Eviction Matters*
- *Brayer v. Wildflower Hills*

2,429

beneficiaries
affected
from

11

impact
cases

solutions collect and analyze endpoint data, network traffic, and user behavior to detect anomalous activities that could indicate a security breach. These tools allow our security teams to detect and respond to advanced threats quickly and efficiently, minimizing the risk of data breaches and other cybersecurity incidents.

We also made some additions to our technology use policy that requires all staff to always work from a work issued computer and to always connect to our VPN (Virtual Private Network) client whenever they are working remotely. These policy updates were set in response to more staff deciding to regularly work from home since the Covid-19 pandemic. With the enforcement of staff to connect to our VPN client when working from outside the office, we wanted to reduce the chance of a security data breach.

We use the KnowBe4 platform for phishing simulation and cybersecurity awareness training. It is critical to ensure our staff are trained regularly on cybersecurity and spotting phishing attacks as humans are the weakest link in any organization's security structure. We train all of our staff during onboarding and annually thereafter.

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

The 2023 IOLA Technology Grant allowed us to move forward with purchases that we were waiting on due to available funding. One item we used it for was to help purchase our annual cybersecurity insurance plan. Cybersecurity insurance premiums have gotten very costly in recent years. These funds helped make this purchase much more affordable for our program. If we do face a breach, we can use this insurance to ensure we are handling it and taking all the appropriate steps to mitigate the risk and prevent it from happening in the future.

With these funds we were also able to purchase new laptops and other workstation accessories. During the pandemic when all staff were forced to work from home, we were not equipped to give each staff member a laptop and therefore we allowed staff members to work from their own personal computer. However, during the past fiscal year, and with the help of the 2023 IOLA Technology Grant, we were able to ensure all staff who work remotely at least part of the time are assigned a work owned laptop. These laptops are managed and maintained by our technology team. They are kept up with the latest security updates and can easily be accessed remotely for troubleshooting.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

Between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024, 139 volunteers assisted with case services and 48 volunteers assisted with other services. Our pro bono efforts ensure that eligible clients have access to a wide range of legal resources, including assisted pro se models, legal education, advice, brief services and full representation. These efforts assist us in achieving the following goals: 1) increase pro bono representation for low-income people; 2) increase the number and types of volunteer legal clinics held in-person and virtually; and 3) increase the number of clients who receive extended representation through pro bono legal services.

We conducted virtual training sessions for seven 2023 summer interns. We hosted two Pro Bono Scholars. We were a host site for alternative law school spring breaks with Roger Williams University law students. We attended in-person events at University of Buffalo, Syracuse University, Cornell University, Fordham Law School's Feerick Center, and University of Buffalo. Our Director of Pro Bono Affairs also served as convener of the statewide NYSBA's Pro Bono Coordinators Network (PBCN), and is a member of the NYSBA Committee on Legal Aid. Our attorney pro bono coordinator is a member of both the Finger Lakes Women's Bar Association and the Tompkins County Bar Association, and our paralegal pro bono coordinator is a member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Other pro bono highlights during the reporting period included: coordinating a robust pro bono hotline that received an average of 148 calls per month, an increase of about 48 calls per month. We also maintained a virtual pro bono platform for managing volunteers. In 2023, 45 Cornell

78attorneys volunteered **331** hours**93**law students volunteered **2,332** hours**16**other volunteers volunteered **182** hours

University students and 13 Cooley attorneys assisted 41 clients with criminal conviction sealing applications and other legal services to improve their employability. We also continue to collaborate with the Director of Criminal Justice and Employment Initiative at the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations and the Director of Pro Bono Services and Externships at Cornell Law School.

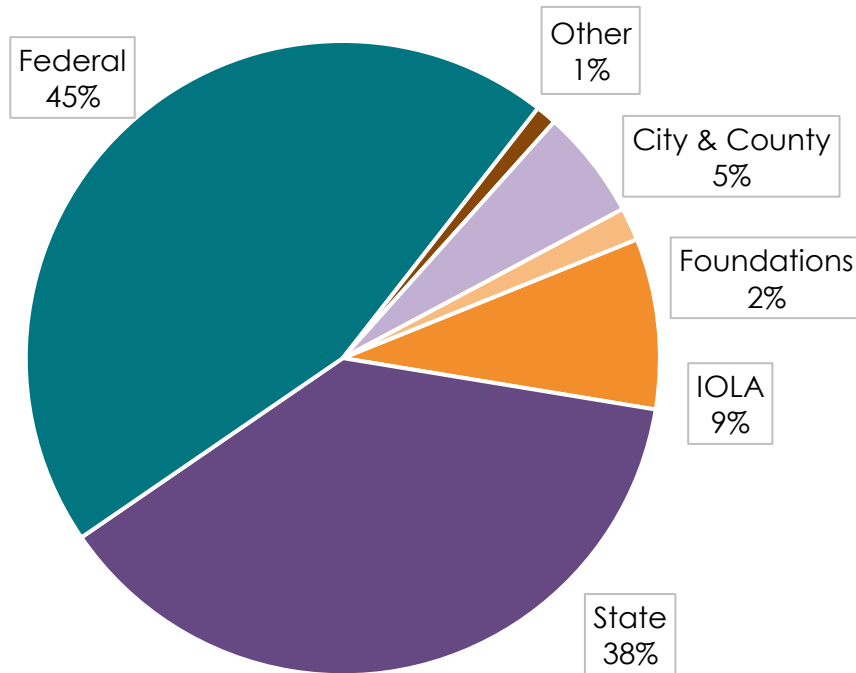
SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

A summary of our most significant collaborations during the reporting period is as follows:

- Continuing to lead both a **Legal Assistance for Victims** grant collaboration in partnership with the domestic violence and sexual assault providers in 13 counties and the Steuben County Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART);
- The **Tenant Defense Project (TDP)**, a collaborative effort between civil legal service providers in Monroe County to expand assistance to tenants facing evictions in Monroe County;
- A partnership with **Western New York Law Center** to ensure representation for low income tenants facing eviction in the southern tier;
- A partnership with the **Housing Practicum at Cornell Law School** that includes a tenant hotline and referrals;
- A collaboration with **Cornell ILR School** related to reentry and employment advocacy to support individuals in need of sealing and filing Certificates of Relief from Disabilities and Certificates of Good Conduct;
- A collaboration with **Catholic Charities Family and Community Services** and **the Department of Social Services in Steuben County** to provide financial assistance to help those at risk of homeless individuals and families and tenants receiving eviction legal services because of this risk;
- Continued collaboration with **Lifespan** and enhanced multidisciplinary teams throughout our services area to coordinate services to the most vulnerable older adults, and particularly those impacted by elder abuse and financial exploitation;
- A capacity building initiative with the civil legal service providers located in the **Telesca Center** for Justice to support and expand our fundraising efforts in Monroe County;

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 19,958,850.16



IOLA Funding	\$ 1,729,143.21
City & County Funding	\$ 1,111,672.78
State Funding	\$ 7,517,127.11
Federal Funding	\$ 8,964,024.06
Foundations	\$ 333,595.00
Fundraising	\$ 92,000.00
Other Funding	\$ 211,288.00