

# **LEGAL SERVICES OF LONG ISLAND**

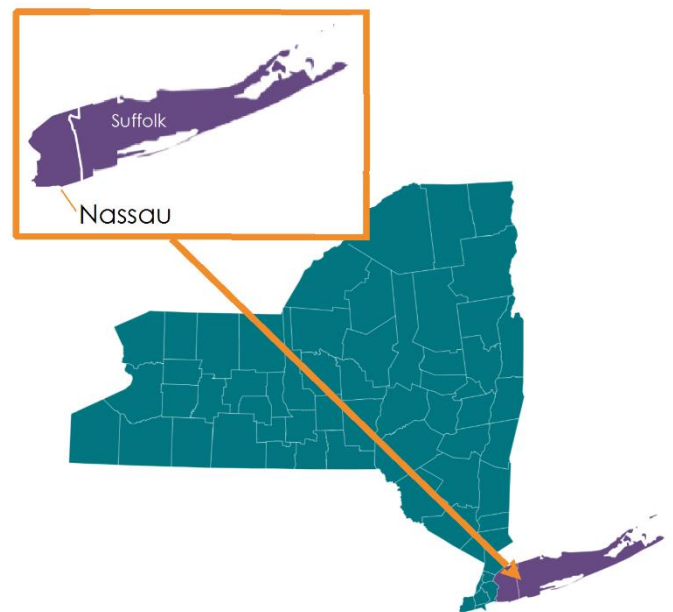
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**2023 – 2024  
Report**

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Nassau Suffolk Law Services Committee, Inc. (NSLS) closed 6,420 cases benefiting 13,818 benefitting low income, disabled and disadvantaged Long Islanders during the period from April 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024. The number of closed cases reported continues to increase over the numbers reported during those years severely affected by the pandemic. This year’s number is double the number of cases we reported for the 2020-2021 year and more than half of our reported cases were extended service. Most of our cases involved threats to the basic necessities of human life. Our staff and volunteers were able to prevent homelessness, help senior citizens and disabled individuals retain home health care and avoid nursing home placement, resolve consumer debt problems, halt domestic violence and help disabled individuals to obtain Social Security Disability and SSI benefits to which they were entitled.

We obtained \$2,401,647 in monetary awards and settlements for clients, as well as ongoing benefits amounting to \$87,238 a month. These included back awards and ongoing payments for Social Security Disability and SSI we obtained for 106 disabled individuals, among other awards and settlements. We also protected clients from the imposition of judgments, recoupments and other losses that would have cost them a total of \$12035061. Most of these savings stemmed from the prevention of judgments against clients for back rent, as a result of government payments toward arrears and our legal representation. However, \$570,000 in vacated or reduced consumer judgments are directly attributable to the increase we received in IOLA funds this year. Some of that funding was devoted to increasing the staffing of our Consumer Debt program, which for the first time includes in-court intake and representation for defendants in consumer debt cases in Nassau County. This operation runs similarly to our landlord tenant program,



**Service Area:** Long Island

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

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

Total Staff: 147	Lawyers: 92.8
Paralegals: 28.2	Others: 26

with judges and court personnel referring unrepresented defendants to our staff assigned to be present at the courthouse.

During the report year, we again added more housing attorney positions, with the result that we are now able to provide representation to tenants involved in eviction cases in any court in either Nassau or Suffolk County, including courts in our rural and less populated geographic areas and courts which have smaller eviction calendars. Over 4,000 of our reported cases involved landlord-tenant matters, amounting to 62% of our total caseload. Our legal representation in eviction cases prevented 1,056 evictions and significantly delayed eviction and/or reduced money judgments for nearly 1,300 additional tenants. We also continue to subcontract with another civil legal services provider, Empire Justice Center, which does not have the same regulatory constraints against serving undocumented immigrants that we have. This assures that all low income tenants in Nassau and Suffolk Counties will have access to legal services in eviction cases.

Through our community legal education and other legal-related services targeted to our client population and to the advocates in local organizations who serve them, we provided trainings, pro se assistance and web-based, mailed and emailed legal information to 68,532 individuals. As a result of these services, individuals and advocates gained the knowledge they needed to resolve their own or their clients' legal issues. This year, we continued to improve the accessibility, functionality and content of our website. We also continued to expand our Community Legal Help Project (CLHP), through which we, together with our partnering local law schools, legal services providers, non-profit organizations and volunteer lawyers, now regularly provide legal information and referrals at 4 libraries in Suffolk County. We also participate in a similar effort in Nassau County.

We successfully completed the transition to the LegalServer case management system, which we began last year. We have also retained Just Tech to assist us with such projects as upgrading our cybersecurity policy, practices and training and assisting us in connecting with the state-wide online tenant referral system being created for grantees of the NYS Tenant Legal Assistance grant. Much headway has been made on both projects during this report year.

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# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

**Case Example #1, Housing:** JS is an elderly veteran who fell into financial hardship after his wife required nursing home care and then passed away. JS's household expenses remained the same without his wife, but his income was much lower. Things got even worse when JS was hospitalized with cancer. JS's brother came to help, but he is a disabled senior and had very low income himself.

When they sought help from us, the brothers were on the verge of eviction and living in a decrepit apartment with serious maintenance problems. While the brothers had made it through the waiting list for a Section 8 voucher that would enable them to pay the rent in their current apartment or at another place, they were not able to complete the paperwork required to use the voucher because of their infirmities and health problems. They were about to be removed from the Section 8 waiting list, making new housing virtually unobtainable for the brothers if they were evicted due to the case pending against them in court.

Our legal and social work staff intervened. Our social worker helped the brothers connect with an intensive senior case management program. Working together with the outside case manager, our legal staff helped the brothers complete the Section 8 paperwork and obtain the voucher. We negotiated an agreement with the brothers' landlord to end the eviction proceeding, make repairs of nearly every surface in the apartment, and accept the Section 8 voucher to keep the brother's rent affordable.

**13,818**

people  
benefited  
from

**6,420**

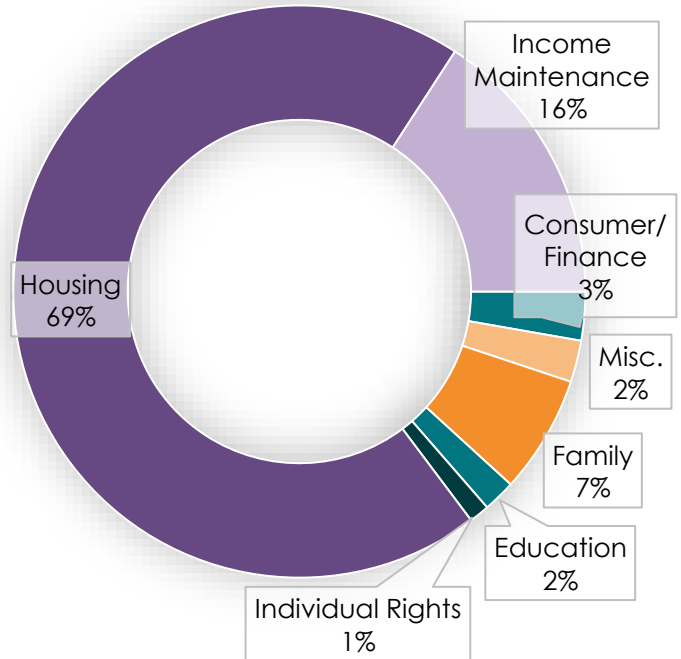
legal cases  
closed

Through our intervention and the work of the case management program, the apartment was deep-cleaned, one of the brothers accessed Medicaid and food stamps and both brothers obtained information on resources available to them if they needed additional in-home support to remain in the community and out of adult care facilities in the future.

**Case Example #2, Consumer/Finance:** J.T. attended SUNY Geneseo from September 2018- May 2019. Upon entering his freshman year, his understanding was that he was eligible for the Student Loan Tuition Assistance

Program (TAP), the Financial Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and New York’s Excelsior Grant. However, he learned later that he was eligible to get TAP and FAFSA, or Excelsior, but not all three. As a result, he was not able to pay his balance due for his first year. In the Spring of 2019, he made a payment arrangement with the school to pay \$250/month but was already struggling financially to assist his seriously ill mother while paying his own living expenses. He ultimately defaulted when he was laid off from his job due to the Covid downturn. Due to his default, J.T. was not allowed to register for the Fall semester at SUNY Geneseo. In addition, at the time, the state maintained a policy that schools in NYS were not obligated to release transcripts when a student loan is in default. Thus, J.T. could not transfer to another school, either.

## CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



Then J.T. was sued for the remainder of the debt accrued while attending SUNY Geneseo. The venue chosen by the NYS Attorney General was Albany, but J.T., a resident of Suffolk County and already struggling financially, was unable to mount a defense in Albany. Fortunately, the Attorney General’s office then changed its policy to require that cases like J.T.’s be filed in the county where the defendant lived. As a result, the case in Albany was discontinued and the action was re-filed in Suffolk. J.T. filed a pro se answer.

At this point JT consulted us. We filed a notice of Appearance and entered into negotiations with the Attorney General’s office. We were able to obtain a settlement, based upon Covid-related and other financial hardships, in which collection costs and almost all accrued interest was waived, with a manageable monthly payment of \$65 per month. The client began making payments per the agreement and the action against him was discontinued. We are pleased to report that J.T. went back to school at a local community college, earned an Associate’s degree and is now working towards his undergraduate degree at another SUNY university.

## OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

**Community Legal Education:** Community education remains a program focus. LSCA and other program units conducted or presented at 37 in-person and virtual trainings reaching over 1,350 advocate and client participants. Collaborations with agencies such as PSEG and local public libraries enrich the trainings. Our in person trainings have significantly increased since last year and we intend to provide more in-person trainings this coming year as well. However, virtual trainings will continue to feature heavily in our community legal education efforts, as they are easier for people to attend. Not included in the report data are the trainings provided to dozens of members of the bar on housing-related matters.

# 68,532

people  
benefited  
from

**Community  
Legal  
Education**

**The Legal Support Center for Advocates:** The Legal Support Center for Advocates (LSCA) provides support and technical assistance to community agencies. LSCA's services include training, educational materials, events sponsored by the private sector, courts and elected officials, and a telephone helpline for advocates. Our agency newsletter email updates, Legal Lessons (published 14 times during the report year), provide legal updates and information about services available from Law Services. This year many of our updates concerned landlord/tenant issues, and each typically went to approximately 4800 individuals, depending upon the targeted audience, for a total of 68,221 publications mailed or emailed. These are reported as "Other" Community Legal Education in D1. (Only opened emails were counted.) Our current combined mailing list for these publications includes over 4000 agencies, advocates and other interested individuals.

Additionally, we are continuing to print our "Law Services News" publication. This publication includes legal information in the form of "advocacy tips" and client stories from our different units. This newsletter was sent in February 2024 to approximately 4818 agencies, advocates, or other interested individuals. The LSCA Helpline serves advocates including social workers, guidance counselors, parish outreach workers, youth counselors, legislative staff, doctors, nurses and case managers. In 2023-2024, LSCA provided services on 333 calls from advocates seeking guidance on how to assist a client with a legal problem. These are reported as In-person

Community Legal Education in D1, as is assistance provided by the Community Legal Help Project, described below, and are not reported in our legal case statistics.

**The Community Legal Help Project:** The Suffolk CLHP is a library-based outreach initiative NSLS coordinates on behalf of the Suffolk County Access to Justice Committee. The services are housed at Suffolk libraries where a collaborative of several local legal service providers joined to provide free legal education, consultations and referrals to community members who require legal assistance and information. The Brentwood Library is the most popular site, visited by as many as 30 people on each day it operates. In 2023, Suffolk CLHP added to additional sites to provide services: the Patchogue-Medford Library once per month and the Half Hollow Hills Library in Dix Hills twice per month. This expands our geographic location making it easier for the community to access the service. Due to the popularity of our Suffolk Community Legal Help Project, we opened a Community Legal Help Project in Nassau County in September of 2023. The Nassau County CLHP offers in-person consultations one day every week at the Nassau District Court Resource Center, once per month at the Long Beach Library, once per month at the Hicksville Library, once per month at the Farmingdale Library, and once per month at the Franklin Square Library. We partner with the Nassau County Bar Association and the Safe Center to provide consultations and referrals for community members.

## TECHNOLOGY

In the Spring of 2023 NSLS transitioned to LegalServer as our primary case management system (CMS). LegalServer is a premiere CMS that most programs in New York State use to serve their client base. We transitioned to LegalServer so that we may collaborate most effectively with organizations around the state, share CMS related innovations, and utilize the knowledge of support staff that is familiar with how NY programs operate. It has greatly improved our data collection and reporting, which will allow us to serve our clients and identify gaps in our service more effectively.

As our staff continued to grow throughout 2023, a glaring need for additional inhouse technology support became apparent. It was also a recommendation made through Strategic Planning which NSLS engaged in during this time period. We hired an additional IT person who has helped our staff onboard more effectively and assists with all of our technology needs including assistance with LegalServer.

In the Fall of 2023, we began working with JustTech and engaged the services of Michael Hernandez as our Virtual Chief Information Officer. Michael helped our organization transition managed service providers for the first time in almost 15 years and recently recommended a full technology assessment which we will undertake in 2024. The goal of this assessment will be to help us understand all our technology/information related assets and make recommendations to plan effectively for the future.

During this period, we began collaborating with agencies outside of NYC to build a coordinated intake portal in eviction matters. We are working with the Legal Aid Society of Mid-New York, which is project lead on the effort along with many IOLA grantees that do eviction defense work outside of NYC.

## IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

We engaged JustTech, a managed service provider specializing in legal services programs, to completely overhaul our approach to technology, taking into account our increased size, our somewhat increased use of remote work, our cybersecurity and all related matters.

Pursuant to this, JustTech guided our transition from a very small direct managed service provider comprised of two persons, to a new but larger program that would meet our needs, while supervising the transition; reviewed our cybersecurity plan and wrote an entirely new one; and recommended and led the purchase of more efficient and cost-effective technology, such as a laptop/docking station for new employees instead of a desktop computer for each attorney, which will increase flexibility while spending less per capita. This guidance has been essential in starting to implement our strategic plan for technology improvement, which seeks to enhance client services by improving the user experience, safeguarding client confidentiality, and improving efficiency and inter-agency communication.

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# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

We operate two pro bono projects, the Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) in Nassau and the Pro Bono Project (PBP) in Suffolk, each working closely with the Bar Association of the respective county. Each project has a special family law panel made up of pro bono matrimonial attorneys, with a combined total in the hundreds. These cases involve full representation by a pro bono attorney in a divorce. Our Self-Help Child Support Project provides legal advice, brief service, and referrals to unrepresented litigants in Suffolk County Family Court. We also utilize pro bono attorneys to screen prospective clients by phone and to interview clients in order to evaluate potential pro bono divorce cases. Another panel of pro bono attorneys has agreed to provide mentorship to less experienced volunteer attorneys. Pro bono attorneys have also been enlisted to support the efforts of the CLHP, as described in C.1.

NSLS participates in the Pro Bono Scholar Program and regularly involves law student volunteers in its various Projects. Other volunteers, paralegal students, social work students and community volunteers, assisted staff attorneys with cases and performed administrative duties, or conducted phone screenings.

Our Community Legal Help Project hosts many law students who are either looking for a semester internship or their 50-hour pro bono requirement. The students are essential to the program and assist with intake, setting up appointments, doing legal research, and assisting the volunteer attorneys with note taking during the client consultation. We have received great feedback from the students and many of the students stay longer than their required 50 hours.

**135**attorneys volunteered **2,272** hours**18**law students volunteered **1,126** hours**7**other volunteers volunteered **704** hours

In Nassau County, NSLS works with the private bar in part through the Nassau County Bar Association. We also have a longstanding relationship with attorneys that have provided pro bono services through our organization for many years on their own. We recruit pro bono attorneys through a variety of methods. We engage with attorneys in the NCBA by attending sections that are about specific areas of law or that relate to specific affinity groups. In these settings we describe the work we do and let people know how they can help if they are interested. We also recruit via advertisements, social media, and email communications. Additionally, we go directly to law schools to advertise internship opportunities and chances to complete the “50 hour” requirement needed to be admitted. We are also involved in the Attorney Emeritus Program and have referred active volunteers to register as an attorney emeritus to take advantage of the benefits of that program.

## SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

**Suffolk County Pro Bono Foundation:** After a long hiatus, the Suffolk County Pro Bono Foundation of the Suffolk County Bar Association began meeting regularly again in Fall of 2023. We are working with the Foundation to plan legal clinics, CLEs, and additional outreach to potential volunteer attorneys for our Suffolk County Pro Bono Project.

**Touro Law Center:** In May 2023, Touro Law Center had the grand opening of its Public Advocacy Center (PAC) of which NSLS has a space along with other legal services and community based organizations. We have meetings every quarter discussing our projects and exchanging ideas. Additionally, as a PAC agency we are invited to the law school to speak about our organization to students interested in public interest. After approximately nine months of planning, we hosted its first Immigration Resource Fair at the Uniondale Library in October 2023.

**Community Based Organizations and Other Legal Service Providers:** We collaborated with CARECEN, Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, Family Service League, the Safe Center, and Long Island Cares to provide the community with three know your rights trainings in English and Spanish on immigration, public benefits, and tenant rights. In addition, there were at least ten other community-based organizations tabling at the event to provide information to attendees. Lastly, Long Island Cares offered over 100 bags of food to anyone who attended the event. We are planning on hosting a similar legal resource fair in Suffolk County this Fall.

**Nassau County Bar Association:** In Nassau County, we work closely with the Nassau County Bar Association to serve the public through the Access to Justice Committee, District Court Committee and Community Relations Committee. From 2023-2024 we held an Open House where clients were set up with pro bono attorneys to do 30 minute consultations, a Legislative Breakfast where we brought together providers from across the county to update government officials on how our organizations can serve their constituents, and a pro bono recognition dinner where the bar association honored volunteers from NSLS, the Nassau County Bar, and the Safe Center LI. Our staff also work closely with the district court committee to communicate how services in that venue can be improved. It has been vitally important as NSLS expanded services in housing court and consumer debt parts to conduct more staffed intake in the courthouse. We work closely with all of the stakeholders involved to ensure the smooth delivery of our services to our client base.

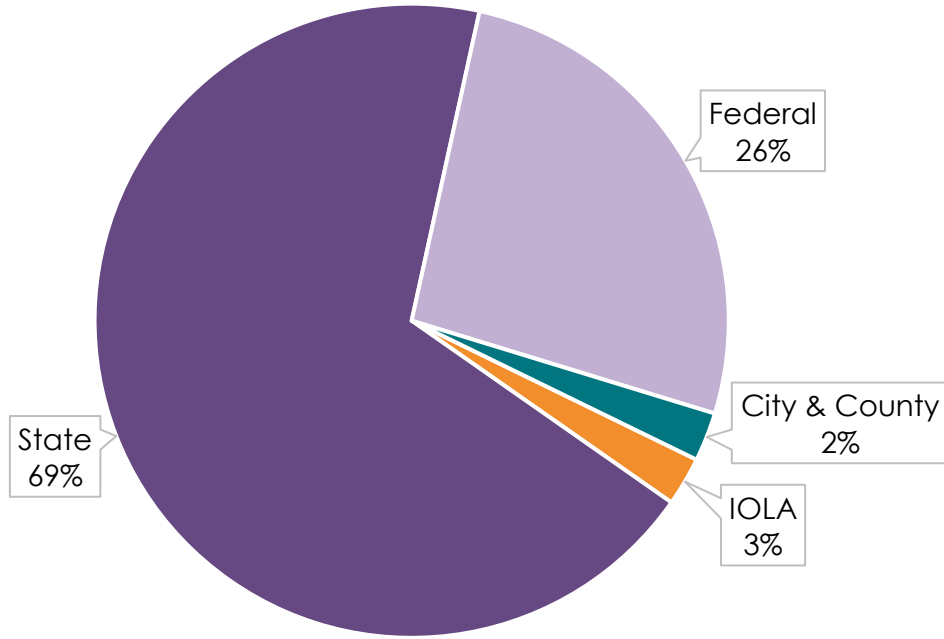
**Empire Justice Center:** NSLS subcontracts with the Empire Justice Center (EJC) to serve ineligible clients in landlord/tenant matters across Long Island. In October, we held a statewide virtual training together and provided an overview of landlord/tenant law to over 175 participants. We work closely to ensure this community is fully served. Through the Disability Advocacy Project, our staff meet with EJC 1-3 per quarter to discuss how services are being delivered on Long Island, issues we are facing, and to receive training.

**Legal Services Access Alliance:** We are collaborating statewide with 6 IOLA grantees outside of NYC in the Legal Services Access Alliance. We are using statewide eviction defense funding to conduct trainings virtually and working together to leverage federal funding dollars to create a statewide coordinated intake portal which is working with many IOLA grantees outside of NYC.

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# CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

**\$ 18,103,304**



<b>IOLA Funding</b>	<b>\$1,750,711</b>
<b>City &amp; County Funding</b>	<b>\$390,999</b>
<b>State Funding</b>	<b>\$10,777,054</b>
<b>Federal Funding</b>	<b>\$4,122,866</b>
<b>Foundations</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>
<b>Fundraising</b>	<b>\$58,914</b>
<b>Other Funding</b>	<b>\$27,105</b>