

THE SAFE CENTER LI

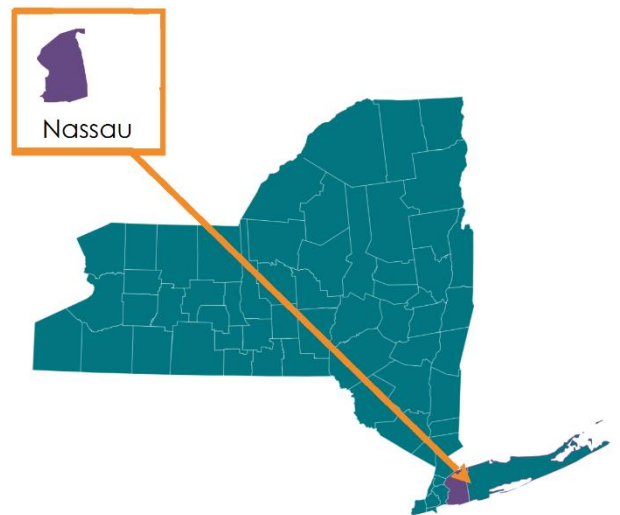
**2023 – 2024
Report**

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

The Safe Center Legal Department consists of the Director, the Assistant Legal Director / Pro Bono Coordinator, three litigating attorneys, and two bi-lingual Spanish/English paralegals. We are a small but mighty group of individuals who always go the extra mile for our clients. Highlights within this annual reporting cycle are as follows: we were able to close out 212 cases (which includes 79 family/matrimonial, 46 immigration, 1 miscellaneous case and 86 legal consultations/intakes). The total number of people who benefited from our legal services in this reporting cycle was 478 (which includes adults and children for open, pending, and closed cases). With respect to our matrimonial practices, we were able to obtain \$403,020.21 dollars for the equitable distribution of marital assets including pension benefits for 9 clients in which we concluded a divorce action either through settlement or trial.

For family law clients, we were able to obtain the child/spousal support arrears amount of \$277,043 for two clients and obtained child support orders for six other clients. We closed 79 family/matrimonial and 46 matrimonial cases. If we add the 86 brief legal consultations conducted to the 79 above, we provided 165 family/matrimonial services in total.

In our immigration practice we were able to successfully prevent the removal (deportation) for 7 clients, 6 through motion practice thereby terminating their EOIR proceedings and one (1) client by litigating and requesting relief under withholding of removal. The result was keeping these families together and stabilizing their immigration status. In total we closed 46 Immigration cases. Throughout this reporting cycle we had 80 open and pending family / matrimonial cases and 126 immigration cases, and 2 miscellaneous cases, for a total of 208.



Service Area: Nassau County

Population Served: Victims of Family Violence and Sexual Assault

Staffing Full Time Equivalents:

Total Staff: 10	Lawyers: 5
Paralegals: 2	Others: 3

Major Achievements: Within the legal department, we hired two new attorneys. One of the attorneys was previously employed by us but resigned to work in the private sector, but she came back to us because her heart was in public service, and she is now our senior staff attorney. As the senior staff attorney, she can serve as a mentor to our new hires. Our second hire for this reporting cycle had to be trained in family, matrimonial and immigration law. We have invested considerable time, energy, and money into this employee through coaching, mentoring, and training. She is supervised by the Legal Director, our senior attorney and all staff attorneys and members of the legal team. She just completed her first year with us and she is thriving. During this reporting period we lost a dear colleague of the legal department; her unexpected death had a big impact on all of us. Learning how to become a cohesive team again after her passing and integrating two new hires into the legal team was an accomplishment.

Another accomplishment for this reporting cycle was the attorneys' attendance in a five-day trial skills training conducted by the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA). This is a highly coveted training for new as well as experienced attorneys because it focusses on the practice of litigation and trial skills, which is a crucial aspect of our practice. Our attorneys are constantly going up against experienced long-standing attorneys and it is essential that the attorneys are properly trained to conduct trials. We are also engaging in activities within our department to promote mindfulness and diversity and inclusion.

In addition, we are proud to say that for the third year in a row, Rivkin Radler Law Firm has graciously offered to provide our clients with Holiday Happiness. In December 2023, the firm purchased gifts for 30 families, totaling 56 children. This was possible through the Legal Departments' networking efforts and most importantly the generosity and good will of Rivkin Radler Law Firm. We consider this an accomplishment because it lifts our clients' and their children's spirit and brings them joy and happiness, thereby increasing their ability to be resilient.

One Agency achievement in this reporting cycle was obtaining the Article 31 official operating license from the New York State Office of Mental Health. This license will allow our counseling departments to provide clinical diagnosis and offer our services to more individuals. The second agency incentive is our Capital Campaign for a new domestic violence shelter; currently our domestic violence shelter is a 17-bed facility, but now the Department of Social Services has approved our agency for a 44-bed facility. Our agency is in the process of finding a location for the new DV shelter, and once that is complete, our legal department expects to receive more legal referrals. The same will occur once the Article 31 program begins accepting more clients.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES

Our legal department practices family, matrimonial and immigration law. Our typical cases in Family court are family offense petitions to obtain orders of protection, custody / visitation and guardianship petitions, child / spousal support, and paternity petitions. We also file violation and modification petitions for any existing family court order as well as file Writ of Habeas Corpus and Orders to Show Cause for emergency situations. In the Supreme Court, our attorneys represent victims in their Matrimonial actions, and we actively pursue all equitable distribution of the marital assets.

We also handle name changes in Supreme Court as well as miscellaneous matters such as small claims and/or landlord tenant matters in District Court. In our immigration practice our primary cases focus on domestic violence, such as the Violence Against Women's Act (VAWA petitions) as well as the U & T Nonimmigrant Visas, and the Battered Spouse Waiver.

In addition to that, we provide a wide range of immigration services to our clients by filing applications with the United States of Citizenship Immigration Service (USCIS), such as the renewals of employment authorization documents, green cards (LPR), adjustment of status pursuant to U-Nonimmigrant approvals, consular processing for U- nonimmigrant derivatives, extensions of nonimmigrant status, Temporary Protective Status (TPS), Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and naturalization applications.



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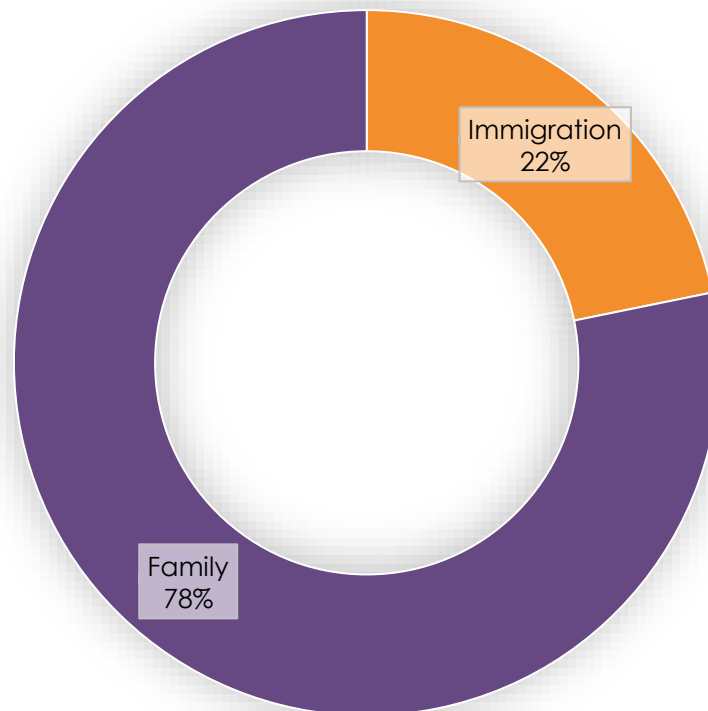
people
benefited
from

212

legal cases
closed

Moreover, on a limited basis, we also provide direct representation in removal proceedings before the Executive Office of Immigration Review, Immigration Court (EOIR) by filing political asylum, withholding of removal, and Convention Against Torture (CAT) cases, cancellation of removal and requests for administrative closure and / or the termination of removal proceedings pursuant to U-Nonimmigrant filings and or approvals.

CASES BY LEGAL PROBLEM AREA



CASE EXAMPLES

Case Example #1: One of our attorneys obtained a Temporary Ex-Parte Stay Away Order of Protection for a client in April 2023, and a final hearing was held on August 14, 2023. At the hearing, the Judge ruled that the Respondent/Abuser committed the family offense of criminal mischief and granted a 1-year Refrain-From Order of Protection, including that he must Stay Away from our client and the child if he is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This case was challenging because most of the abuse was verbal, mental, and emotional (i.e., no physical abuse). The Safe Center LI's mission is to, in part, change social systems that tolerate and perpetuate abuse, and in this case, we were able to accomplish this by proving to the court that there are many forms of abuse. We attached the Power & Control Wheel to the Family Offense Petition and spelled out exactly how it applies to the cycle of abuse. With this, the Court System, which normally looks for physical abuse when granting these petitions, was able to clearly see that any form of abuse is abuse and granted the client a 1-year Order of Protection. Our attorney had the Abuser read his own outrageously controlling text messages outload to the Court, while he insisted on denying the incident/abuse had occurred. The Judge, in her ruling, pointed out that the Respondent/Abuser lied under oath, and therefore lost all credibility.

Additionally, after this ruling in favor of our client, we were able to settle the custody matter between the Parties. Our client has final decision making of all important decisions for the child (health/medical, education, religion, general welfare) and sole residential custody. With this ruling of custody, we also obtained an Order of Child Support.

Case Example #2: A second example of the type of case our legal department handles is our representation in a divorce matter. Her abusive husband never appeared in the case and moved to Texas. The case proceeded on Inquest on May 17, 2023, and our attorney obtained a money judgment on behalf of our client for \$34,361.70 representing child support arrears. Further, the Court Ordered that the defendant-husband pay \$731.10 per month for child support, that the Parties shall pay for unreimbursed medical pursuant to their pro rata shares and ordered that mother shall continue to have sole custody of the two children of the marriage. Obtaining child support in this case was particularly difficult because initially we had no proof of the husband/father's income. Our attorneys worked diligently and subpoenaed all his known bank accounts, hoping for a response. We received a credit card application from TD Bank, where he listed his income and entered this certified bank record into evidence during the Inquest and requested that the Judge impute said income to the husband for child support purposes. In this case, the Judge paid a compliment to our attorney when she asked the client on the record, "Are you satisfied with the counsel, your attorneys? Because the Court is very satisfied. They are excellent attorneys. She was very well prepared."

OTHER LEGAL-RELATED SERVICES

Our legal department also provided services to pro-se litigants in Family Court through our Family Court advocate. Our court advocate, conducted walk-in brief interviews or follow up interviews from our agency hotline referrals and provided general information about family court proceedings, answered questions about procedures in all family court matters, assisted in drafting family offense petitions, accompanied pro-se litigants into the courtroom in ex-parte family offense proceedings and provided not only emotional support but was an active listener and gathered and collected information that was said and recorded events that transpired in the court proceedings by completing forms that specifically requested certain information regarding the type of case, for example in an order of protection, whether it is a refrain/ stay away from, temp/ final, any particular caveats to the order, the judge, the parties involved, names of attorneys, return date, protected parties, cross-orders, follow up actions, sentencing/directives,

how the orders were granted (on consent / trial). In addition, the court advocate would make any necessary referrals to our agency or other agencies to further assist the pro-se litigants.

Our attorneys participate in conducting legal presentations at law schools at the request of Family Law professors from Hofstra Law School and Touro Law School. Three of our attorneys are currently mentoring elementary / middle school students to prepare for a mini mock trial event through the Community Relations and Public Education Committee (CRPE) from the Bar Association. The purpose of this committee is to offer legal programs to the public. We also participated in Open House events at the NCBA which offers free legal half hour consultations to the public, this event is hosted by our agency, NCBA and Nassau Suffolk Legal Services.

Through the CRPE committee we conducted three trainings on different DV related topics (human trafficking, financial abuse, and TSCLI Agency services), because these trainings are through the CRPE, they are open to the public. In addition, during domestic violence awareness month, the legal department participated in three clinics to provide general legal information about family, matrimonial and immigration topics to different libraries located in Hicksville, Hempstead, Freeport, and Uniondale. Overall, we provided other legal assistance to the public resulting in 164 attendees through these various events offered to the public.

TECHNOLOGY

Our agency continues to advance in the process of integrating our legal database into our new agency database, EmpowerDB. Empower DB is a cloud-based database which uses zero knowledge encryption. The legal Department's attorney notes, work product and all data continue to be confidential.

70

people
benefited
from

**Pro Se
Assistance**

244

people
benefited
from

**Community
Legal
Education**

IOLA TECHNOLOGY GRANT

Our agency used the technology grant to buy a smart board and supporting equipment and installation costs to place it in our Board Room. It was an effective and beneficial use of the technology grant as most of our meetings occur in this room and every department has access and has used the smart board for presentations with their own staff and for various meetings and presentations with other agencies and collaborative partners.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

We had 15 pro bono volunteers (2 attorneys, 2 court advocates and 11 legal interns) who contributed 1,888.50 hours of pro bono work. This reporting cycle we had two pro bono attorneys that continue to work on a previously assigned divorce case and a name change matter. We had two court advocates that assisted our Supervising court advocate, but after her passing, the advocates ceased volunteering in August. We have a robust participation of legal interns throughout the year because we offer them different opportunities to learn. We have a Spring Break (1-week) program, a Summer Internship (10-week program), we accept law students looking to complete their 50 hours for admission, externships for course credit and/or a legal scholar program as well. I am happy to announce that for the next reporting cycle we will have a pro bono coordinator on staff and our primary goal will be to reestablish and revamp our prior pro bono program. We value and appreciate the work done by volunteers and law students throughout the year.

2attorneys volunteered **40** hours**11**law students volunteered **1,597** hours**2**other volunteers volunteered **252** hours

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

The legal department significantly collaborates with, and our entire staff are members of the Nassau County Bar Association (NCBA). Our attorneys are active members of the Matrimonial and Family and Procedure Law Committees. In addition, the Director of the Legal Department is also the co-chair of the Community Relations and Public Education Committee at the NCBA as well as a member of the Access to Justice Committee and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Apart from being active members this year our attorneys presented on the issues of Financial Abuse and Human Trafficking with an attendance of 30 people for each training. The Director was part of the panel at a Legislative Breakfast where multiple not-for-profit agencies inform the legislators and or their staff of our agency and the services we provide to the public. Moreover, all our attorneys participate in the access to justice “Open House” events twice a year that offer free consultations to the public on various legal topics. Our agency is one of the three host agencies that are responsible for implementing this event. Our attorneys are encouraged to be presenters for Continuing Legal Education (CLE) trainings and to become not only active members but also chairs / co-chairs of the various NCBA committees.

CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUNDING

\$ 603,181

IOLA Funding	\$ 96,204
State Funding	\$ 506,977

