

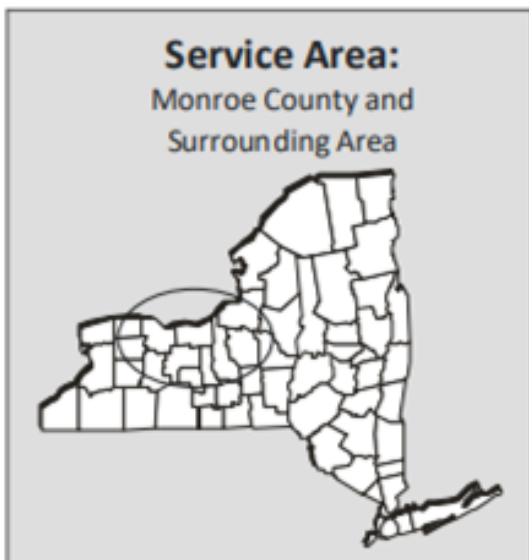
# **LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF ROCHESTER**

2022-2023

# OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

**Legal benefits obtained:** The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, NY (LASROC) provided direct legal representation in 8,613 cases. JustCause, as a subgrantee, reported 885 direct representation cases to LASROC for a total of 9,498 direct representation cases benefiting 29,516 people. Community legal education was provided by LASROC to 1,086 individuals and by JustCause to 1,716 individuals, for a total of 3,225 individuals.

The majority of cases handled fall into Family, Housing, Consumer/Finance, Education, Immigration, and Juvenile benefit areas. In the Family benefit area, LASROC and JustCause provided representation in 5,811 cases benefiting 20,427 people, mostly in custody, protection from domestic violence, foster care services, and family reunification. In the Housing benefit area, we provided legal assistance in 2,330 cases which benefited 5,650 people. Housing cases were up significantly from 894 cases in the 2021-22 program year, for a 160% increase in services. The majority of these cases were related to eviction prevention and eviction delay. In the area of Education law benefits, we provided legal assistance in 425 cases benefiting 1,542 people, with the majority of cases in special education. In the Immigration benefit area, we provided representation in 319 cases benefiting 851 people. Immigration benefits included obtaining citizenship, employment authorization, and adjustment of legal status. There were 229 cases, benefiting 286 people in the Juvenile benefit area. In the Consumer/Finance benefit area, we provided assistance in 132 cases benefiting 240 people.



**Population Served: General Low Income Population**

**Total Funding: \$8,898,898.00**

**Total IOLA Grant: \$866,418.00**

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**

- Total Staff: 99
- Paralegals: 25
- Lawyers: 44
- Other: 30

**Target population:** Our target population consisted of low to moderate-income adults and children in Monroe, Steuben, Livingston, Genesee, Ontario, Orleans, and Wayne Counties. Our Immigration Unit serves all counties in Central and Western NY. LASROC clients reported an average income of \$7,668 per year and identify as 38% Caucasian/White, 39% Black or African American, 17% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Multi-Racial, and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. Sixty-two percent (62%) were under the age of 18, 34% were between the ages of 18 to 59, and 4% were 60 years and older. Of the clients served this program year, 1,349 were victims of domestic violence or elder abuse, 122 were veterans, and 206 were undocumented immigrants.

**Financial Benefits Obtained:** LASROC and JustCause obtained a total of \$638,730.88 in direct dollar benefits to our clients. This includes \$72,978 in child support, \$53,276 in spousal support, \$510,241 in equitable distribution, and \$2,236 in affirmative landlord/tenant judgments. We obtained \$5,353,113.82 in benefits to clients in the form of judgments and payments avoided. This is up more than \$2.8 million from 2021-2022. The majority of these savings were from avoiding payments in: Landlord/tenant matters, \$4,864,205; Foreclosure, \$431,946; and Bankruptcy, \$48,554.

**Increased Access to Justice:** LASROC continued projects that increase access to justice, including the expansion of the Tenant Defense Project (TPD). The project is a collaboration of 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 community resources. The TDP hotline serves as a single point of access to Monroe County tenants in need of legal assistance. Project attorneys from each collaborating agency provide direct services to tenants referred from the hotline and directly in Court. The TPD offers comprehensive legal services to individuals 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 from ERAP 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. Our biggest challenge is the recruitment of attorneys.

# DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

## Family:

Our client was a mother of two who spoke little English and came to LASROC seeking an order of protection from her husband. There were clear violations of a previous order. After a three-day trial, our client, represented by a LASROC Family Law Attorney, was granted a two-year stay-away order of protection. Our attorney then represented this client in her divorce. Our Family Law Unit worked with Monroe and Orleans County District Attorneys on behalf of our client. LASROC helped connect the client with mental health counselors, financial assistance to purchase a security camera and a cell phone, and funds for heat.

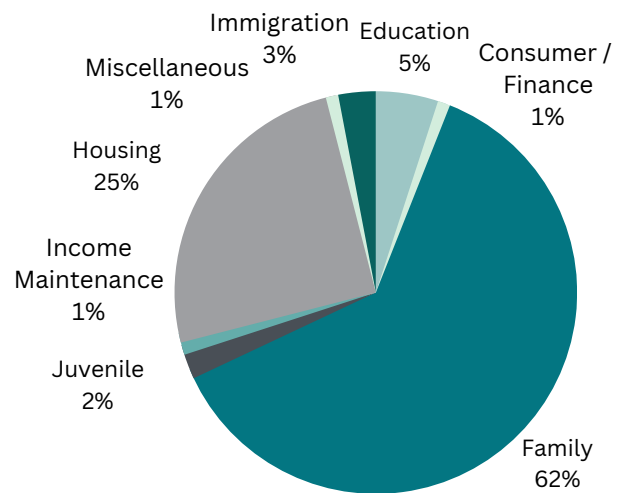
LASROC’s work with this client helped ensure her safety and the safety of her children and allowed her to embark on a path of empowerment and independence.

## Immigration:

A Somali refugee came to LASROC seeking assistance with naturalization. The client was only 20 years old but had custody of his 4 minor siblings due to an abusive father, whom the family had an order of protection against. Additionally, the client was seeking legal help to bring his mother from Somalia to the United States.

LASROC assisted the client in obtaining naturalization and even had the oath of citizenship administered immediately right after the naturalization interview so he could begin the petition process for his mother sooner.

**29,516**  
people  
benefitted  
from  
**9,498** legal  
cases closed



**Cases by Legal Problem Area**

# OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

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. A total of 1972 people received community legal education presentations from LASROC and JustCause staff in the 2022-2023 contract year. Presentation methods included in-person events and interactive online presentations.

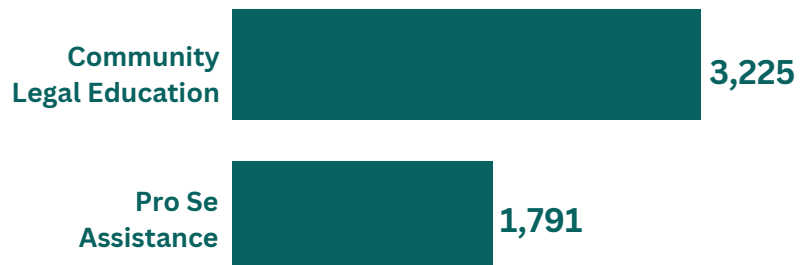
As part of the domestic violence prevention training conducted in rural counties, clients receive brochures that describe our full array of services detailing how we may be able to help them in the future. An important part of preventing future violence is a coordinated support system that includes legal and supportive services that LASROC provides along with our community partners. LASROC and JustCause distributed approximately 1,200 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 1,791 individuals received Pro Se assistance from LASROC and JustCause staff. JustCause provided assistance to 1,209 people at the Hall of Justice Help Center and distributed 501 copies of self-help printed materials. Eighty-one (81) individuals received Pro Se assistance. This includes six people assisted by JustCause through their Virtual Help Center (now operating in person at the Hall of Justice) and 75 participants in LASROC’s Pro Se Divorce Project.

The Pro Se Divorce Project assists unrepresented litigants in the proper completion and filing of their divorce paperwork. The target population for this project is low or moderate-income individuals in Monroe and surrounding counties seeking an uncontested divorce. This program year, we worked with 75 individuals to ensure their divorce paperwork was properly completed and filed.

**5,016 People Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Services**

### Number of People Benefitted from Other Services



## OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

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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. 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 570 individuals submitting an online application in the 2022-23 program year.

As LASROC grows, so do our IT needs. We have added an IT Coordinator position to work with our Systems Administrator. Together, they have successfully managed the increase in staff needs and have focused on improving cyber security. We hired an independent consultant to conduct an IT security audit to ensure compliance with the NYS Shield Act. Based on their recommendation, the IT team drafted formal internal IT policies. We have also implemented new security protocols, including the use of multi-factor authentication.

## OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

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LASROC covers the cost of all Continuing Legal Education (CLE) for attorney staff and paralegals. Our administration staff attends finance, fundraising, marketing, human resources, and technology training available through their professional organizations. In the 2022-2023 program year, we provided 172 CLE credits via 51 CLE seminars. We held in-house training in the areas of sexual harassment, technology, diversity and inclusivity, and safety and security. A staff member is becoming a certified CPR trainer, so we will be able to offer in-house CPR training, including the use of AEDs, to all staff members.

We brought in a mental health counselor to facilitate an agency-wide group discussion on the experience of collective grief in the wake of the Buffalo, NY mass shooting. Each unit also provides relevant in-house training conducted by experienced staff or brings in experts in the field for unit-wide training. Training has included motion practice, law updates, and trial skills. In response to recent feedback from staff that they were observing a greater number of clients with mental health concerns, we offered training this program year related to ethical boundaries when responding to clients in crisis. LASROC sent seven staff attorneys to NYSBA's biennial Legal Assistance Partnership Conference in October 2022 and two attorneys to NYSBA's Trial Academy in May 2022.

# PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

During the 2022-23 contract year, LASROC hosted eight law students who volunteered 1,033 hours and 13 other volunteers, including social workers and college students, who volunteered 1,812 hours. These individuals volunteered a total of 2,845 hours of time. Under the direct supervision of LASROC staff, non-attorney volunteers receive substantive experience in legal services. Law students, who have completed 1-year of law school at an accredited college or university, 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.

JustCause offers a broad range of pro bono opportunities in a variety of service delivery formats that appeal to pro bono attorneys, law students, and other volunteers who are welcomed, trained, supported, and recognized on a regular basis by JustCause staff and board members. Levels of service range from providing legal information and referrals at JustCause's Help Center at the Monroe County Hall of Justice to brief service and limited-scope engagements to extended representation in complex matters.

From April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023, 310 volunteer attorneys donated over 5,828 hours of pro bono time through JustCause's programs. Of these totals, 127 volunteers donated over 969 hours to cases and activities reported to The Legal Aid Society of Rochester. Thirty-four (34) extended representation cases were referred to pro bono attorneys, and 68 cases were closed with counsel and advice or brief service provided by pro bono attorneys at one of JustCause's clinics.



**127 Attorneys volunteered 632 hours**

**11 Law Students volunteered 1,117 hours**

**25 Other Volunteers volunteered 2,065 hours**

Each  icon is equal to 16.3 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

Law Students and Other Volunteers are represented through the Grey Figure.



# SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

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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. The reception area has a large child-specific waiting area and kiosks for clients to access information and complete online intake applications. LASROC collaborates with the Telesca Center partners in the substantive provision of legal services and in developing ways to increase access for our clients. This year, the Telesca Partners have embarked on an unprecedented joint fundraising plan that includes the hiring of an on-staff joint Development Officer. 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. The Tenant Defense Project provides a streamlined intake for all providers via a hotline and an online intake. LASROC also collaborates 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 law services across New York State.

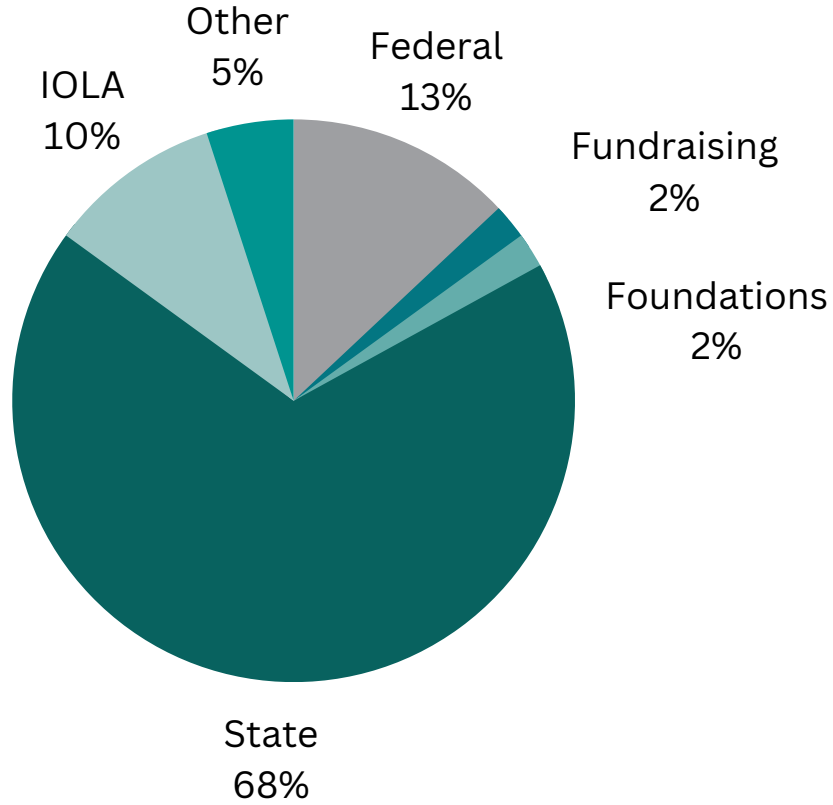
Additionally, LASROC's Immigration Law Unit formally collaborates with JustCause, Catholic Charities Family and Community Services, Volunteer Lawyers Project, and Journey's End, both out of Buffalo, NY. Our Education Law Unit collaborates with several initiatives, including the Mental Health Education 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.

LASROC is a member of the 360 Collaborative Network, an online referral system. LASROC is involved in the Systems Integration Project in Monroe County that seeks to create an online client portal/referral system to connect those in need of services to service providers and is a member of the Justice for All Strategic leadership committees.



# SOURCES OF FUNDING

The Legal Aid Society of Rochester received **\$8,898,898** in total funding this past year



State Funding	\$6,002,416
Federal Funding	\$1,133,031
IOLA Grant	\$866,418
Other Funding	\$545,644
Foundations	\$215,460
Fundraising	\$135,929