Overview of Achievements, 2020-2021

From April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, LASMNY closed 4,418 cases benefiting 9,887 people. LASMNY won $1,606,644 in back awards/settlements for clients, including: $892,805 in retroactive Social Security Disability (SSD) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits; $680,733 from family law matters; and $33,106 in back wages and tax benefits. LASMNY saved taxpayers an estimated $2,526,289 by obtaining federal SSD/SSI benefits for individuals who would otherwise be on local welfare, as well as preventing 57 households from becoming homeless due to eviction or foreclosure. LASMNY helped clients avoid $3,059,257 in consumer debt, mortgage arrears, illegal rental charges, rental arrears, medical bills and court filing fees.

LASMNY’s Central New York Legal HelpLine provided advice and brief service to low-income callers on a wide range of civil legal matters, closing 1,696 cases. LASMNY’s Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) program closed 305 cases, with 649.15 volunteer attorney hours. Attorney Emeritus volunteers were among the most productive recruits, handling 30% of the cases closed.

LASMNY presented community legal education events to 5,150 participants, and distributed 16,616 hard copy community legal education materials. A total of 39,677 community legal education brochures, videos and other materials were downloaded from LASMNY’s website or viewed on social media platforms. LASMNY staff also referred 2,577 people to other sources of assistance in the community. LASMNY’s Farmworker Law Project (FLP) continued statewide outreach visits and legal representation for farmworkers, as well. FLP made labor camp visits to 18 counties in 2020-2021, providing presentations to 992 farmworkers, and reaching an estimated 18,273 farmworkers at those same camps. As part of its outreach efforts, FLP distributed 15,958 bilingual legal education materials (Spanish/English and Creole/English) to farmworkers and social service agencies throughout the state. Outreach materials included a bilingual “Harvest Calendar,” H-2A Contract Worker News, and COVID-19 information flyers.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, LASMNY had to shut down its physical office locations to both staff and clients for a number of months. Because LASMNY already had a voice over-IP telephone system, HelpLine staff was able to immediately work from home, with no interruption in service for clients. Many other staff already had secure, office-issued laptops. LASMNY’s management team met every morning to plan and implement a transition to remote service delivery, including ensuring that every staff member had the IT tools to work at home. LASMNY quickly achieved 100% remote work capacity, and later received a grant from LSC to cover the expenses. LASMNY’s Director of Development began holding virtual “town halls” on COVID-related legal topics, and promoted them on social media. FLP and basic program staff distributed boxes of informational materials, along with PPE, to food banks and farmworker labor camps. Currently, LASMNY staff members are working partially from the office, partially from home, on a staggered schedule to protect fellow staff and clients. Staff and clients must complete COVID pre-screening before entering the office. Free masks and hand sanitizer are available in the entryway of each office.

Population Served: Minorities, Disabled, Elderly, Poor, Immigrants and Refugees

Area Served: 13-County Area in Mid–New York

Total Funding: $7,871,198

Total IOLA Grant: $105,679

Staffing - Full Time Equivalents:

- Total Staff: 79.71
- Lawyers: 40.77
- Paralegals: 23.00
- Others: 15.94
Examples

**Immigration:** LASMNY represented a married couple from Nepal. Their naturalization applications were delayed due to the pandemic, then had to be rescheduled again because the wife became sick with COVID-19. Previously, LASMNY had received a notice of intent to deny the wife’s medical waiver. LASMNY worked with the couple’s son to obtain alternate documentation of the wife’s medical disability, which was accepted by USCIS at her interview. Husband and wife were both approved and sworn in on that same day, allowing them to keep receiving SSI benefits.

**Employment:** A group of H-2A workers from Jamaica were forced to sign an agreement with the Jamaican government before traveling, stating that if they contracted COVID-19 while working in the U.S., they were not entitled to any medical care or benefits. FLP staff advised them that the agreement with the Jamaican government could not prevent them from getting health insurance, health care, worker’s compensation, or any other type of services or benefits available to H-2A workers in New York State. FLP staff provided the workers with information about what COVID-related resources and benefits were available to them if they got sick.
Other Services...

### Number of People Benefitted by Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation</th>
<th>Number of People</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62,435 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Legal Education</td>
<td>22,758 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Outreach</td>
<td>39,677 people</td>
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**Other Legal Related Services: Overview**

LASMNY provides a wide array of services to clients and the community in addition to direct legal representation, including community legal education events, distributing brochures on important legal topics, outreach to underserved populations, and referrals to other sources of assistance. From April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, LASMNY assisted over 62,000 individuals with these services.

LASMNY’s community legal education activities benefitted 22,758 people, exceeding our projected annual goal of 15,000. Community legal education events (including virtual town halls) were attended by 5,150 people. Some of the legal topics covered were advance directives, domestic violence, landlord/tenant issues, foreclosure prevention, SSD/SSI, and general information about LASMNY’s services. LASMNY staff distributed a total of 16,616 hard copy brochures in the community. “Other” community education activities included FLP’s outreach presentations to 992 farmworkers during visits to labor camps in 18 counties statewide, reaching an estimated 18,273 farmworkers on issues uniquely affecting the farmworker community. Outreach topics included employment law, worker’s compensation and health/safety issues (including COVID-19 issues). In collaboration with farmworker programs in neighboring states, FLP published a “Harvest Calendar” and *H-2A Contract Worker News*, both of which include important legal information for farmworkers. In all, 15,598 Spanish/English and Creole/English brochures, calendars, COVID-19 information brochures and other materials were distributed at labor camps and social service agencies throughout New York State.

As far as online outreach, 39,677 brochures and video/audio materials were downloaded from LASMNY’s website or social media sites. The most popular publications were “Living With Student Loans,” “How to Cope With Debt,” and “Getting Your Driver’s License Back.”

LASMNY staff assisted 2,577 individuals through referrals to other sources of assistance, including referrals to other civil legal services agencies, the private bar, and social services providers.

**PLEASE NOTE:** LASMNY also held numerous pro bono and pro se clinics in 2020-2021, including divorce clinics, consumer clinics and senior legal clinics. However, an actual case is opened for each clinic participant, so clinic statistics are reported as cases rather than “self-help.”
Other Legal Related Services: Examples

Example #1: LASMNY held a “virtual town hall” on the topic of increased domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The town hall covered the reasons for the uptick in domestic violence calls, safety planning, information about legal and non-legal resources, and how to obtain an order of protection.

Example #2: LASMNY’s basic field program, as well as FLP, combined outreach efforts with distribution of PPE to low-income communities. For example, LASMNY’s Utica office partnered with Chabad House, Thea Bowman House (a child care program for low-income children) and the Carol Crooms Center, a local community center. LASMNY provided brochures about its services, along with multilingual flyers about COVID-19 safety, to include with baskets of free PPE being given out at food pantries. LASMNY provided a total of 250 legal education brochures, and 335 health department flyers in English, Spanish, Burmese, Karen and Russian.

Example #3: LASMNY held a “virtual town hall” on the topic of eviction and foreclosure protections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The town hall covered the various federal and state moratoriums protecting renters and homeowners, remedies for unlawful evictions, and sources of rental assistance.
Significant Collaborations

LASMNY has a long history of collaborating with other legal services providers, the private bar and community-based organizations. LASMNY collaborates with its non-LSC sister program in Syracuse, LSCNY. The HelpLine serves as the single-point-of-entry for both programs, and both programs cross-refer cases to one another on a regular basis. LASMNY also cross-refers cases with the Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society, Inc., the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County (VLP), and the Syracuse University College of Law clinical programs. Since 2015, all 5 programs have been housed together in the George H. Lowe Center for Justice building. This “one-roof model” has greatly enhanced collaboration and cooperation among all of the Onondaga County legal services providers.

LASMNY collaborates with the local bar associations in each county, including attending continuing legal education (CLE) trainings provided by the bar. In turn, LASMNY’s PAI program recruits, trains and refers cases to pro bono attorneys. During the 2020-2021 reporting period, pro bono attorneys closed 305 cases and contributed 649.15 hours of service. LASMNY collaborates with the Syracuse University School of Law clinical programs, which provide law students to assist LASMNY staff with legal research and other tasks. LASMNY recruits undergraduate students from Binghamton University, who volunteer at LASMNY’s Binghamton office while learning about careers in law. Colgate University’s Upstate Institute Field School program places student interns with LASMNY for the summer. While learning about poverty law, the students help clients gather documents needed for a pro bono bankruptcy referral, including drafting schedules of assets/liabilities. Some Colgate students also work on children’s SSI cases, including preparing a pre-hearing brief as part of their coursework.

With respect to community-based organizations, LASMNY’s Central New York Victim Assistance Project collaboration includes all 13 domestic violence and rape crisis programs over a 12-county area. LASMNY cross-refers clients with the partner agencies, in addition to providing training and technical assistance. LASMNY’s foreclosure defense unit works closely with housing counselors from Metro Interfaith in Binghamton, Utica NeighborWorks Homeownership Services and Delaware Opportunities. LASMNY’s Refugee Citizenship Project coordinates with the American Civic Association in Binghamton, the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees in Utica, the Syracuse City School District and nonprofit interpreting services. FLP coordinates with farmworker health programs, healthcare marketplace navigators and low-income tax clinics throughout the state.
Trainings

LASMNY staff attended a wide array of training events during the 2020-2021 reporting period, to remain current on legal developments and develop practical skills. This was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, with changes in statutes, regulations, court procedures and client resources coming down on almost a daily basis. LASMNY’s Director of Litigation curated a COVID-19 shared hard drive, organized by practice area, which included links to free on demand video trainings and materials on pandemic-related legal topics.

LASMNY’s management team attended “Suddenly Supervising and Managing Remote Staff,” sponsored by the NYS Permanent Commission on Access to Justice, IOLA and NYS Tech on 4/19/20. This training event was very helpful in setting policies and performance standards for work-at-home staff, as well as maintaining effective communication with staff and addressing common challenges of remote work. Early on in the pandemic, on 4/14/21, 13 staff members attended a webinar sponsored by the NYS Bar Association, entitled “Applying for Unemployment: Client Counseling Under the CARES Act,” in order to understand expanded eligibility for unemployment benefits for displaced workers. LASMNY’s foreclosure defense unit attended an intensive week-long training conference sponsored by the National Consumer Law Center from 6/15/20 to 6/19/20, focusing on pandemic-related relief for borrowers facing foreclosure. LASMNY’s domestic violence staff attended a 7-part training series entitled “Trauma Responsive Lawyering,” held on Fridays from 1/22/21 to 3/12/21. A total of 8 staff attended the training series, which was sponsored by the NYS Office of Victim Services. Topics included the neuroscience of trauma, revictimization, grounding and de-escalation tools, safety assessments, and vicarious trauma. LASMNY’s Citizenship Project Attorney attended a training course sponsored by the Coalition Against Slavery and Human Trafficking (CAST) from 11/9/20 to 11/13/20, and 2 FLP staff members attended the annual National Farmworker Law Conference from 11/9/20 to 11/11/20.
Pro Bono Volunteer Involvement

LASMNY has several innovative programs to encourage private attorney involvement. In combination, these methods resulted in 305 cases closed from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, and 649.15 hours donated by 74 volunteer attorneys. LASMNY’s pro bono programs strive to match attorney interest with service priorities, maximizing pro bono services through a combination of clinics, “attorney of the day” programs and direct referrals. LASMNY’s pro bono clinics utilize private attorneys to screen clients for divorces and bankruptcies. In addition, private attorneys instruct clients in filling out their own divorce paperwork through pro se clinics. LASMNY also holds annual senior legal clinics providing pro bono advice to senior citizens and referrals for documents such as wills, health care proxies and powers of attorney. “Attorney of the day” programs provide immediate representation to tenants at the courthouse who are facing eviction proceedings. Since the pandemic, all of LASMNY’s clinics and attorney of the day programs have been virtual.

LASMNY is currently working on a pilot project with housing courts to enable volunteer attorneys to represent tenants through virtual appearances via Microsoft Teams meetings. In October 2020, LASMNY received funding to expand its pro bono bankruptcy services, including developing pro se bankruptcy clinics and an online screening tool for student loan discharge. LASMNY continues to refer cases for extended pro bono service in many areas, as well, including bankruptcy, divorce, housing and advance directives. Private attorneys also make “reverse referrals” to LASMNY of clients they wish to serve pro bono. Some attorneys prefer to volunteer on LASMNY’s Legal HelpLine, providing phone advice/brief service at any of LASMNY’s 3 main office locations.

Likewise, LASMNY works with retired attorneys, law students, law graduates and undergraduates to enhance its pro bono programs. LASMNY recruits student interns from Cornell Law School and Syracuse University Law School, Colgate University, and Binghamton University to assist LASMNY staff and pro bono attorneys with bankruptcies, divorces and other family law cases. LASMNY works with retired “Attorney Emeritus” volunteers, who accept case referrals and provide mentoring for LASMNY staff attorneys and other pro bono attorneys. LASMNY utilizes “50-Hour” law students, who need to fulfill their 50-hour pro bono requirement for admission to the New York bar, to provide legal research assistance to LASMNY staff attorneys. During the past reporting period, 6 law students provided a total of 373.11 hours of volunteer service.

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<tr>
<td>State Funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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