Three staffed civil legal services organizations and a pro bono program serve all or part of our area, each adopting a different and defined mission and delivery strategies. Working with our three partners in the region – Legal Aid Society of Mid New York (LASMNY), Hiscock Legal Aid Society (HLAS), and the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Central New York (VLPCNY) – we created a comprehensive and integrated civil legal service delivery system responding to the compelling needs of clients and client community. LSCNY’s role in the system tracks our roots as an antipoverty law firm with the capacity – and mandate – to engage in legal strategies prohibited to or outside the mission and capabilities of our partners.

Our primary target population: Low-income families and individuals in thirteen county service area: Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, and Otsego counties. LSCNY is developing a focus on race equity matters, understanding the intersectionality of race and poverty. LSCNY has funding to represent individuals affected by HIV/AIDS, including a new grant to engage in benefit counseling. To increase our services, we entered into a contract with Vera House, a Syracuse domestic violence organization, to help people affected by violence in Onondaga County. A supervisor, one fulltime staff attorney, and a VERA House advocate work out of the Syracuse office.

Recognizing that finding additional substantial funding sources in upstate New York, Senator Sean Ryan led an effort in the NYS Senate to create a significant funding line. For LSCNY, that amounts to about $215,000 annually for the reporting period. The line has been renewed for 2022. The four legal aid providers in central New York received an equal share. Only LSCNY and LASNY, however, serve all of central New York.

The availability of ERAP Eviction Prevention funds may be the ramp to a statewide right to attorney in evictions. LSCNY is a subgrantee of LASMNY for ERAP Eviction funds created by the NYS Legislature. LASMNY and LSCNY will each receive close to $1 million annually. Additional eviction funding is pending.

**Population Served:** General Low Income Population

**Area Served:** Central Region of New York State

**Total IOLA Grant:** $1,466,129

**Staffing Full Time Equivalents:**
- Total Staff: 53
- Lawyers: 37
- Paralegals: 6
- Other: 10
Director Legal Services: Cases

Housing:
This is the case of the defiant landlord. Our client, Mr. R, was served with a nonpayment petition, but had applied for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). The pending eviction was stayed. Frustrated with this, the landlord turned off the water to force Mr. R and his seven children out of their home. Mr. R contacted the police, but they would not do anything. Mr. R then contacted Code Enforcement. Codes told the landlord to turn the water on or the house would be condemned. The landlord refused to turn it on, so Code Enforcement posted the home as unfit for human habitation. In effect, Codes helped the landlord remove our client without an eviction proceeding. Our attempts to work with the landlord continued to fail.

We contacted the Attorney General’s Office. The landlord was immediately charged with a misdemeanor under NY RPAPL 768. He still did not turn the water on. We advised the client, with a police escort, to attempt access to the water controls through the downstairs tenant’s apartment. The downstairs tenant refused access. The Binghamton City Corporation Counsel was contacted, but they would not use their emergency powers to turn the water back on.

We filed a civil action in Supreme Court and obtained an emergency order against the landlord directing him to immediately turn it back on. He did not comply. Next, we had an extensive evidentiary hearing in Supreme Court, regarding whether the order should continue in effect as a preliminary injunction. The injunction was granted and faced with possible contempt, the landlord restored service.

9,107 people benefitted from 3,845 legal cases closed
Direct Legal Services: Cases

Consumer / Finance:
A Ms. B’s sister came to us because Ms. B’s tax returns had been taken for the last two years. Ms. B has cognitive issues and difficulty reading. Her sister helps her with the daily activities of life. The sisters are both immigrants and Ms. B does not speak English well. For two years, Ms. B had taken her taxes to Ms. P for preparation. Our client believed that she was owed over $6,000.00 and was unable to find out where the money had gone. As a result of the work and investigation, consulting with a tax professor at the Syracuse University College of Law, and the United States Attorney’s Office, Ms. B recovered her tax refunds. Ms. P was arrested and found guilty of tax fraud.

Other Services: Overview
With changes in eviction law and the various state and federal eviction moratoriums, much of our work continued to include training lawyers and judges. For example, William Neibel, a staff attorney on our Binghamton office authored The Process Due When Rent is Due: Residential Nonpayment Evictions in New York After COVID-19, 49 N.Y. Real Property Law Journal 5 (2021). The article was the third most read on the NYSBA website in 2021. We continue to sponsor and provide trainers for eviction and unemployment insurance programs conducted by bar associations.

| Number of People who Benefitted from Services Other Than Direct Legal Representation |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Community Legal Education       | 724           |
Other Services: Technology and Other Innovations

Because of aging systems and the availability of newer methods, we evaluated our wide area network and phone system. We are moving to a cloud-based phone system. Staff will be able to use a standard VoIP desktop telephone, an application on their computer, and/or optionally, an application on their personal cell phone. When all three elements are in place, staff can use the desktop application to initiate a call to a client through integration with our case management system. After the call is initiated, it can be transferred from the desktop application to the user’s desktop telephone. At any point during the phone conversation, the user can “flip” the call from the desktop telephone to the application on their cell phone and continue the conversation without interruption. SMS messaging, used frequently by our clients, is included in the new system.

Staff can elect to receive email notifications of incoming voice messages, including a transcript of the message and audio file. The transcript of the voice message is available through the desktop application, along with the ability to play the audio file through the computer. Since the system is cloud based rather than on premises, staff will no longer need to connect to the office through the VPN to use the system.

Building on last year’s implementation of newer firewalls and switches, we are currently expanding on those to convert our existing managed MPLS wide area network to a self-managed SDWAN network. Once converted, the SDWAN will reduce our wide area network costs to approximately 40%. Speeds between sites will increase 8-10 times our current speeds.

Other Services: Trainings

In pre-pandemic years, we train our staff in three ways – in-house events, bar-sponsored events, and webinars broadcast in our conference rooms. All attorney staff are members of the Onondaga County Bar Association and attend any MCLE session appropriate to their practice at no cost. The monthly Lunch-and-Learn sessions, the core of LSCNY’s in-house educational programs, were not conducted during the pandemic years. These will resume when we are back in the office.

In 2021, three staff attorneys attended the remote four-day Trial Academy sponsored by the Young Lawyer Section of the NYSBA. Our staff attorneys have not only attended local and state programs but have been presenters for the Broome County Bar Association, Cornell Law School, Del-Chen-O Chapter of the Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York.

All LSCNY’s lawyers are registered for and regularly attend no-cost programing by the Practicing Law Institute (www.pli.org). During the pandemic period, our lawyers have used this resource to attend programs including Advising Nonprofits, NY CPLR 2022, Subsidized Housing, 1983 Civil Rights Litigation, NY Public Assistance and Food Stamp Advocacy, and Ant-Racist Lawyering.
Impact Cases

Carter, et al. v. Green Skyline Apartments, LLC.
The Skyline is an apartment building in Syracuse with twelve floors and 364-units housing tenants who are low-income, elderly, and people with disabilities. Because of owner mismanagement and neglect, conditions and security in the building deteriorated to the point that the building was no longer habitable or safe. Trespassers routinely wandered in the building, congregating in commons areas to use or sell drugs and prey on residents. Stairways and common areas contained garbage, blood, feces, hypodermic needles, and other biohazards. The elevators were frequently inoperable, leaving the residents who depend on them without means to leave their homes. Residents made hundreds of police calls each month due to violent assaults, robberies, and other crimes committed against them. This culminated with the murder of a 93-year-old resident in her apartment by a trespasser.

LSCNY represents tenants in a class action against Skyline owners seeking damages for violations of the warranty of habitability and injunctive relief ordering the owners to improve security and habitability of the building and resting elevators to working order. Tenants’ motion for class certification is pending.

Women inmates in the Oneida County jail challenged their transfer from newer pod style housing to older linear cell block housing. Women’s block cells were smaller than men’s and their access to recreation time and equipment, water for cooking, showers, phones, work programs, reading material, and television was more limited than for men. The District Court denied a motion for preliminary injunction. The Second Circuit reversed and remanded. On remand, a preliminary injunction was granted. Women are now housed in newer pod cells with improved conditions.

The Black Artist Collective and BlackCuse Pride are small unincorporated community groups seeking permits for non-parade public assemblies, one a cook-out, in city parks for Juneteenth and Pride Month. Under a city ordinance, the groups were required to (1) obtain insurance coverage, (2) pay overtime wages to Syracuse Police Department (SPD) officers assigned to the event, and (3) consent to search of every attendee’s bags and clothing. The groups could not afford the costs and objected to the need to hire SPD as they could provide security. Negotiations with the City continue with a probably positive outcome for the groups.
Significant Collaborations

- **5th Judicial District Access to Justice Committee.** We have been an active partner in the Committee from its inception. Our Executive Director has served as co-chair of the eviction subcommittee. The committee includes attorneys, judges, court personnel, faith community leaders, governmental officials, and human services non-profits.

- **Onondaga County Assigned Counsel Program.** LSCNY assists county residents with re-entry issues. We train and advises assigned counsel on collateral consequences of conviction prior to pleas and sentencing.

- **Workers Center of Central New York.** Because of last year’s advocacy, WCCNY members were able to obtain drivers’ licenses even though they were undocumented. Work done in prior reporting years also resulted in WCCNY hiring its first executive director and additional organizing staff.

- **Benefits Counseling Project.** Our project participated with the Community Services Society of NY in technical and substantive assistance for people with HIV.

- **National Cancer Legal Services Network.** We continue participating in NCLSN activities.

- **7th Judicial District SCIP Court.** We participated in a pilot project for representation of eviction respondents in Cayuga County, consolidating all evictions in Cayuga County Court.

- **In My Father’s Kitchen.** We participated with this local not-for-profit on homelessness matters.

- **Housing & Homeless Coalition of Syracuse and Onondaga County.** One of our staff attorneys is a member of the coalition.

- **NYS Attorney General COVID 19 Tenant Legal Assistance Initiative.** LASMNY received funding to engage pro bono attorneys in eviction defense. As a partner in this initiative, we focused on eviction defense problems in Town and Village Courts. We:
  - Identified gaps in service throughout the region,
  - Identified and addressed systemic issues and submitted a report on these matters,
  - Remotely train private attorneys on housing/COVID issues,
  - Developed COVID “know your rights” brochures to be disseminated to tenants across the region,
  - Supported pro bono attorneys in City and Justice Courts with advice, mentoring, co-counseling, and
  - Provided representation to tenants that LASMNY cannot serve through its pro bono programs due to LSC restrictions.
### Sources of Funding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>IOLA Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>City and County Funding</td>
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<td>State Funding</td>
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