

**NASSAU/
SUFFOLK
LAW
SERVICES
COMMITTEE**

2022-2023

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Nassau Suffolk Law Services Committee, Inc. (NSLS) closed 5,525 cases benefitting 12,110 people during the period from April 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023. 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 nearly \$3,000,000 in monetary awards and settlements for clients, as well as ongoing benefits amounting to nearly \$100,000 a month. These included back awards and ongoing payments for Social Security Disability and SSI, 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 \$5,794,469.

The number of closed cases reported has rebounded from the numbers reported during those years severely affected by the pandemic. This is largely due to the increased activity in the courts. It is also due to increased government funding for legal services, much of it directed specifically towards providing representation of tenants in eviction cases. During the report year, NSLS added a large number of 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. With the additional funding from NYS's Tenant Assistance Program, we were able this year to expand our eviction prevention staff and bring focus to rural and less populated geographic areas and to courts which have smaller eviction calendars. This new program also gave us the opportunity to subcontract with another civil legal services provider, Empire Justice Center, which does not have the same



Population Served: General Low Income Population

Total Funding: \$14,027,461

Total IOLA Grant: \$1,691,740

Staffing Full Time Equivalent:

- Total Staff: 136.6
- Paralegals: 25.8
- Lawyers: 85.8
- Other: 25

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. Expansion of the eviction defense staff also enables us to deal with the increased numbers of cases moving through the courts, now that the moratorium on evictions has been lifted and the courts are fully functioning.

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 over 106,000 individuals. As a result of these services, individuals and advocates gained the knowledge they needed to help to resolve their own or their clients' legal issues.

DIRECT LEGAL SERVICES: CASES

Case #1

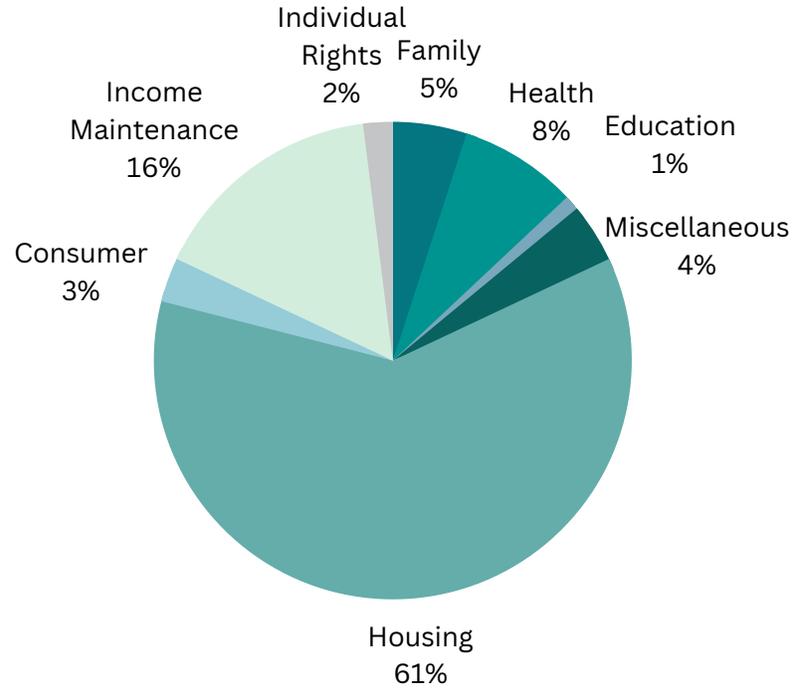
Ms. E. is an elderly woman who is confined to her bed due to Multiple

Sclerosis. On a snowless week in early winter, Ms. E.'s landlord watched Ms. E. being removed from the house by ambulance, due to Covid. Immediately after, her landlord delivered a notice to Ms. E.'s home requiring her to: 1. remove her wheelchair ramp, 2. get rid of her potted plants, 3. mow her grass, 4. shovel her snow and 5. empty out her basement within 10-days to avoid termination of her lease. When Ms. E., newly released from the hospital but still confined to her bed, was unable to accomplish these mostly absurd tasks by her landlord's deadline, he commenced eviction proceedings. A Nassau Suffolk Law Services attorney intervened and sought dismissal of the proceeding on multiple grounds. As a result of our advocacy, the landlord capitulated, withdrawing the eviction petition and instead offering Ms. E. a new written lease.

12,110
people
benefitted from
5,525
legal cases
closed

Case #2

Ms. B., her husband and two children with developmental disabilities have lived in federal subsidized housing for many years. In 2022, DB reported maintenance problems to her landlord, but they failed to make the necessary repairs. Shortly thereafter, a kitchen fire occurred, likely as a result of the maintenance problems that Ms. B. reported. Then a building heat pipe exploded flooding Ms. B. 's apartment. Her landlord again refused to make any repairs, instead alleging that Ms. B. was failing to keep her fire- and water-damaged home tidy. Soon after, her landlord started eviction proceedings against Ms. B. and her family, based on the alleged poor housekeeping. Once the eviction case was started, Ms. B.'s landlord refused to accept rent payments from her. Even though Ms. B. had attempted to pay her rent, her landlord started a new simultaneous eviction proceeding alleging nonpayment of rent. A Nassau Suffolk Law Services attorney intervened and spelled out for the landlord the numerous defenses and counterclaims Ms. B. had in opposition to his false claims and his failure to live up to his legal obligations as a landlord. As a result, the landlord withdrew both eviction proceedings, replaced Ms. B.'s kitchen and made other much needed repairs.



Cases by Legal Problem Area

OTHER SERVICES: OVERVIEW

Community education remains a program focus. LSCA and other program units conducted or presented at 20 in-person and virtual trainings reaching over 1,000 advocate and client participants. Collaborations with agencies such as PSEG and local public libraries enrich the trainings. We expect that 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.

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 13 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 between 4,000 and 4,400 individuals, depending upon the targeted audience, for a total of 56,458 publications mailed or emailed. Our current combined mailing list for these publications includes over 4000 agencies, advocates and other interested individuals. Additionally, after a long hiatus, we decided to begin printing our "Law Services News" publication again. This publication includes legal information in the form of "advocacy tips" and client stories from our different units. This newsletter was sent in March 2023 to approximately 4292 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 2022-2023, LSCA provided services on 354 calls from advocates seeking guidance on how to assist a client with a legal problem.

The Community Legal Help Project 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 40 people on each day it operates. While CLHP underwent some staff changes, we worked with the Middle

106,632
people benefitted
from *Community*
Legal Education
Services

Country Public Library to change locations from their Selden location to Centereach in January 2023. We found this has increased our walk-in numbers for that library. Additionally, in September 2022 we worked with the libraries to provide them monthly individual flyers detailing the days we would be at the library and the area of law the attorneys would be able to give consultations on so they could easily post in their newsletters and on their social media.

OTHER SERVICES: TECHNOLOGY

Nassau Suffolk Law Services recently increased its technology staffing by hiring a full time Help Desk IT person to assist the Director of Information Technology with day-to-day problems that arise. This was especially needed due to the recent increase in casehandling staff. NLS also began the transition to a new case management system, to upgrade our data collection and reporting.

NLS continues our work with cybersecurity and HIPPA training. NLS has signed up with Knowbe4 and we have assigned trainings and executed phishing campaigns to our staff which has been a great resource in training our staff about cybersecurity. We also work with the Compliancy Group for HIPPA trainings for our staff. To date 94% of our staff has completed the Kevin Mitnick security training.

During the reporting period, we continued to make substantial improvements to our website to address the need for legal information during the pandemic. NLS authored and continually updated legal information resources which are provided in the form of expandable FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) . We are continually working to have all FAQs in an easily downloadable pdf format that includes simple language and definitions of legal terms. Further, we worked with our website consultants to make our self-help resources more user friendly by separating the resources into easily accessible "Know Your Rights," "Training and Presentations," and "Recent News." This is a continuing project.

OTHER SERVICES: TRAININGS

NLS fosters the professional development of our employees through the efforts of a Professional Development Committee (PDC) which comprises both supervisors and staff. Internally, we have held 2 trainings with the National Institute of Trial Advocacy (NITA) in June 2022 (legal writing) and September 2022 (trial skills). In February of 2023 we held a Racial Justice Training with the Shriver Center on Poverty Law that analyzed issues of racial justice through a legal advocacy lens.

In addition to the training provided in-house, with the help of the PDC, we also send our attorneys to various national and statewide conferences. In October of 2022 we sent about 30 staff to NYSBA's Partnership Conference. Our foreclosure defense unit attended a statewide HOPP training in October 2022. Also, staff attended the National Consumer Law Center trainings in 2022 regarding Consumer Rights Litigation and another training on Mortgages.

Many of our staff attended trainings in which our more experienced staff were involved in the presentations. Our new lawyers and non-lawyer staff are also encouraged to attend our community legal education presentations for non-lawyers, which give them a basic overview of common legal problems they will encounter among our clients.

The Practicing Law Institute has many excellent Continuing Legal Education trainings geared to a legal services practice, and provides them to our staff free of charge, making PLI a good source for staff training.

PRO BONO VOLUNTEERS

NSLS operates 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.



220 Attorneys volunteered 6,300 hours

21 Law Students volunteered 1,557 hours

28 Other Volunteers volunteered 1,526 hours

Each  icon is equal to 26.9 volunteers.

Attorneys are represented through the Green Figure.

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

During this report year, our staff gave presentations at 2 in-person trainings related to handling eviction cases for attorneys. The target audience was current and potential volunteer attorneys and NSLS staff, as well as landlords' attorneys — to make sure they understood that ERAP funds could benefit both their clients and ours. The trainings were attended by 68 attorneys.

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.

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.

SIGNIFICANT COLLABORATIONS

Some of our most important collaborations are with our two local bar associations. In both Nassau and Suffolk Counties, we run Bankruptcy Clinics with the cooperation of the bar associations and the participation of their members. Although the clinic model has not yet returned from its hiatus during the pandemic, nonetheless, 26 low-income clients obtained bankruptcy relief with the help of volunteer attorneys associated with the clinic.

Our Volunteer Lawyers Project operates a highly successful Landlord/Tenant Attorney of the Day Project with the Nassau County Bar Association's Senior Attorney Committee. In this program volunteer attorneys represent low-income tenants facing eviction in Nassau County District Court. During the 2022-2023 report year, 449 such cases were closed with the involvement of volunteers of this project. We continued to play a leadership role in the Suffolk Access to Justice Committee, with NSLS staff chairing the housing subcommittee that coordinated legal service providers, the private bar and community-based organizations in Suffolk in addressing the housing moratorium, and pandemic-related eviction. As described in more detail above in Section C, we provided staffing and management for the Community Legal Help Project.

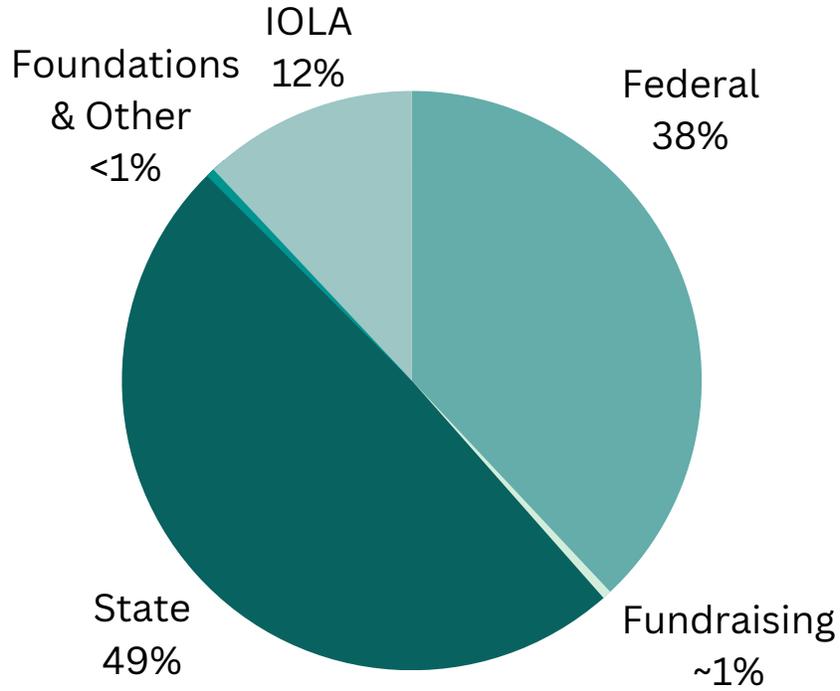
Two NSLS staff attorneys, funded in part by a NYS Department of Health grant through the Community Service Society of New York (CSSNY), provide legal assistance as part of the Independent Consumer Advocacy Network (ICAN). ICAN assures that individuals who require managed home healthcare get the help they need. ICAN staff advocate on behalf of these most vulnerable of clients with Managed Health Care Plans and Medicaid. Our attorneys participate in weekly conference calls with ICAN staff throughout the state to discuss emerging trends and develop strategies to address these issues statewide. As a result, our attorneys are having a positive impact not only on their individual clients, but on important health care issues statewide.

NSLS participates in the legal subcommittee of the Long Island chapter of Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) and has used the meetings to alert other members to our availability to serve clients affected by the pandemic as well as to educate the organizations assisting in disaster response efforts about the frequent changes in the law as a result of the pandemic. Due to a decrease in the COVID-related legal inquiries, the committee stopped meeting in June 2022.

NSLS formalized its long-term partnership with Empire Justice Center by subcontracting with them under our new NYS Tenant Assistance Program (ERAP) grant to assure persons not eligible for representation by NSLS due to federal regulations could still obtain legal assistance in eviction cases. In our partnership with The Safe Center Long Island, NSLS is the subcontractor in an effort to combat elder abuse. We are also working with the Transgender Legal Defense and Education Fund on their Name Change Project and other mutual referrals.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Nassau/Suffolk Law Services Committee received **\$14,027,461** in total funding this past year



IOLA Grant	\$1,691,740
Foundations	\$8,000
Federal	\$5,303,846
Fundraising	\$115,556
State Funding	\$6,880,939
Other	\$27,380
Total	\$14,027,461