

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, Inc.

Civil Legal Aid Annual Report



Empowering Low-Income Clients throughout Connecticut
for Twenty-One Years.

**Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice
everywhere.**

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.



a letter from the **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Dear Friends and Supporters,

In celebration of **Statewide Legal Service of Connecticut's 21st Anniversary** of providing free legal assistance to low income men, women and children throughout Connecticut, we are honoring the people who inspire us and to whom we are most grateful – our legal partners, our financial supporters and most important – our clients.

For example, we honor people like Sue*, a disabled woman who had recently lost her husband, and was now losing her home because she could no longer keep up with the rental payments. She reached out to Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut after being served with a notice to vacate her home in two days. Our advocates immediately helped her file a stay of execution and a pro bono attorney represented Sue at her hearing. Thanks to our advocates and pro bono attorney, Sue was granted a six week extension to find an affordable, handicap accessible new place to live. Sue now lives in a safe apartment, rather than living in a shelter or in her car.

The determination and fortitude of our clients motivates us to work harder, as their legal victories and legal empowerment become our victories in bridging the access to justice gap.

The pro bono attorneys, volunteers, generous donors, and partner organizations who invest in these victories are vital to our effectiveness as Connecticut's only **statewide** free, civil legal aid organization.

Indeed, our clients and our supporters share an important quality: **a commitment to justice.**

Clients come to us in crisis because they lack the necessary legal resources to afford seeking justice. But how can society put a price on justice? SLS depends on the generosity and goodwill of people like you to provide us with the resources to empower our clients and to make “justice for all” a reality.

This report is a thank you letter to all of you – our pro bono attorneys, our partners, and our friends. **Your deep commitment motivates us to work harder in advocating for the critical legal interests of those in poverty.**

Warmly,



Janice J. Chiaretto
Executive Director

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**Client names and images have been changed to protect their privacy.*

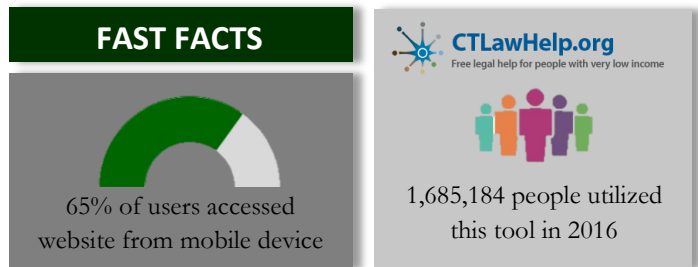
a year of incredible **PARTNERSHIP & INNOVATION**

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut's (SLS) mission is to empower low-income people in Connecticut to obtain justice by providing them with the necessary tools to address their civil legal needs.

As Connecticut's sole award recipient of the Legal Services Corporation's Technology Innovation Grants, SLS has contributed \$491,171 in federal dollars to Connecticut's Legal Aid Network to develop innovative tools for self-represented individuals seeking justice.

SLS recognizes the importance of expanding beyond traditional legal aid resources to develop and utilize technology as a legal tool to assist low income people.

With federal grant support, SLS has developed Connecticut's **CTLawHelp.org** webpage, a critical legal tool for low-income, self-represented parties to advocate and empower themselves to seek justice. SLS's recently developed legal empowerment tools include:



RePresent Game: SLS partnered with Northeastern University School of Law's NuLawLab, and other partners in our judiciary and legal aid community, to develop and implement an *interactive online game designed to provide self-represented parties with a basic understanding of how to effectively advocate for themselves in court.*



LearnTheLaw.org: SLS and our legal aid partners launched a national website, where other legal aid programs and non-profits can build *free online classrooms to help low-income people tackle long and complex legal problems on their own.* These classrooms are accessible in English and Spanish.



FamiliesChange.org: SLS partnered with the Justice Education Society of British Columbia, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, and the Legal Services Law Line of Vermont to replicate and further develop an *age-appropriate interactive tool to help kids, teens, and parents navigate a family breakup.* The content was authored with input from family counselors, lawyers, psychologists, teens, and parents. The tool also provides general information about the law.

SLS remains grateful to our federal funders, innovative partners, and dedicated volunteers for partnering to develop effective uses of technology to bridge Connecticut's access to justice gap.

a year of community-based **OUTREACH & ADVOCACY**



Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut's legal work includes joining with community-based social service providers, public libraries, and local nonprofits to educate low income individuals and healthcare professionals about legal resources and access to free legal advice.

SLS's **"I Heart Justice"** collaboration with the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund and Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs focuses on expanding legal services to the Greater Hartford communities, with a special emphasis in reaching out to the underserved Hispanic community. This collaboration is funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and has impacted a total of 2,206 Hartford household members during its inaugural year.



SLS's **"Collaborative for Fair Justice"** project focuses on culturally responsive, holistic, legal and social services for low-income residents living in Waterbury. SLS and our legal aid partner, Connecticut Legal Services, provide legal education trainings at New Opportunities Inc. to train social service providers to identify a constituent's legal issue and work with him to seek legal assistance. This project is funded by the Connecticut Community Foundation.



SLS's **"Your Money, Your Goals"** bilingual financial literacy toolkit allows SLS advocates and pro bono volunteers to conduct community-based learning financial empowerment seminars. These seminars encourage financial goal-setting, effective strategies to manage money, and avoidance of payday loans and credit scams.

SLS is grateful to our collaborating partners, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, and generous institutional supporters who make it possible for SLS to drive free legal services directly into our communities.

a year of preserving **DECENT & AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut recognizes a home provides increased stability and safety for an entire family. Our advocates and pro bono attorneys work with low income clients to prevent evictions and to assist clients in maintaining or increasing the availability of decent and affordable housing.

In 2016, an SLS Advocate partnered with a pro bono attorney to halt a Connecticut disabled veteran's eviction from his mobile home and to leverage the resources of a local veteran organization to donate \$2,903.20 in arrearage rental payments for the veteran.

Victor*, a physically disabled veteran reached out to SLS because he was being evicted from his trailer park for non-payment of rent. Victor was confined to a wheelchair and dependent on his nephew to care for him in his mobile home.



Our SLS advocate advised Victor to file an Appearance and Answer, and to negotiate with the Housing Specialist for more time to relocate. Recognizing Victor could benefit from the help of an SLS Pro Bono Attorney, our SLS advocate partnered with a pro bono attorney willing to directly represent our client in Housing Court.

Our SLS Pro Bono Attorney filed an Appearance and spent more than 25 hours negotiating with opposing counsel to withdraw the plaintiff's claim. Additionally, the Pro Bono Attorney and SLS advocate reached out to a local veteran's organization to help Victor with his arrearage payment. Victor no longer had to worry about finding the money to pay back his overdue rent, and he was able to stay in his mobile home.

SLS advocates and our committed Pro Bono Attorneys work every day to honor our veterans, to leverage the assistance of community-based nonprofits, and to fight homelessness.

SLS empowers low income veterans, like Victor, and other low-income individuals with the necessary legal tools to stay in their homes and to receive fair, affordable housing.

FAST FACTS: HOUSING



74% of housing-related mediation cases involve at least one party not represented by an attorney.

**SLS Housing
Unit**

9 advocates



3,648

**Housing clients
helped**

*"You gave me
something very
special-
your time."*

-Housing Client



a year of securing **BASIC NEEDS & PUBLIC BENEFITS**

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut recognizes state and federal benefits improve a low income family's ability to avoid eviction and debt collection, while also improving the health and well-being of each person. Our advocates and pro bono attorneys work with low income individuals to preserve cash benefits, secure healthcare benefits, and maintain public entitlements.

In 2016, an SLS Advocate empowered a young mother to appeal the termination of her child's HUSKY A healthcare benefits. As a result, a low income family is now receiving the necessary behavioral and physical health coverage their young child needs.

Jennifer* is a mother to a young child. Her husband was working, but they were struggling to make ends meet. Similar to all parents, Jennifer and her husband wanted their child to stay healthy.



Jennifer called SLS after receiving notification her family's HUSKY A benefits had been terminated. In crisis, as her family relied on this benefit to care for their child's physical and mental well-being, she was searching for an explanation and legal advice to navigate the confusing public benefits termination process.

An SLS Advocate reviewed Jennifer's termination paperwork, explaining to Jennifer her HUSKY A benefits had been terminated because she had not completed the complicated review process.

The SLS Advocate advised her to immediately go to the State of Connecticut's Department of Social Services Office in Manchester, where she had originally applied for the benefits, and to ask for the paperwork to finish the review process.

Jennifer and her family are now receiving the health coverage they need; their HUSKY A benefits have been reinstated.

SLS advocates counsel and advise low income parents, like Jennifer, and individuals about the complicated steps to secure or to appeal decisions about their public entitlements.

FAST FACTS: BENEFITS



38% of CT residents have an education level less than 12th grade

SLS Benefits
Unit

4 advocates



1,085

Benefits clients
helped

*"She helped me
every step of
the way."*

-Benefits Client



a year of improving **SUPPORT TO FAMILIES**

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut recognizes that by improving a low income individual's ability to advocate and navigate the complicated Family Court system, we are helping her make life-changing decisions when decision-making is most challenging for her and the well-being of her family. Our advocates and pro bono attorneys support, educate, and empower low income men and women with the tools to navigating the Family Court system.

For example, an SLS Advocate partnered with a pro bono attorney to assist a survivor of domestic violence in drafting a Temporary Restraining Order and achieving service of process in Saudi Arabia, a country with complex and challenging governmental and legal systems.



Monica*, an American citizen and domestic violence survivor, fled from her home in Saudi Arabia to the United States with her children. Although safely living with extended family in the United States, she was concerned her husband would follow her from Saudi Arabia. Monica reached out to SLS because she wanted a divorce and legal protection from her husband's physical and verbal abuse.

Our SLS advocate advised Monica about the jurisdictional challenges she would face in serving her husband and filing for custody because her children were citizens of Saudi Arabia. The advocate provided brief service drafting the necessary divorce motions and temporary restraining order.

Recognizing Monica would benefit from the help of an SLS pro bono attorney, our SLS advocate partnered with an international law firm with an office located in Saudi Arabia. The pro bono attorney was able to serve process to our client's husband, and is working with her to negotiate our Family Court system.

SLS advocates and our committed pro bono attorneys work every day to empower and protect low income individuals faced with complicated divorce and domestic violence issues.

FAST FACTS: FAMILY



84.9% of family court cases involve at least one party not represented by an attorney

SLS Family Unit

8 advocates



1,026

Family clients helped

"My beacon of light. You've restored my faith in people."

-Family Client



a year of integrating

A PRO BONO VIRTUAL LEGAL CLINIC

Jim* is a single father working an hourly-wage job, supporting his two children, and living in his two-bedroom apartment. His boss has cut back his hours because the retail business is slowing down. This pay cut leaves him with less money to pay for groceries, child care, and transportation to work. He's falling behind on his rent payments and worries his landlord will lock him out of his apartment with no where to go. He's actively looking for a second job during the holiday season to catch up on his rental payments.

Standing in the bus line, Jim pauses, closes his eyes, and pictures a future where he is able to ask an attorney about his legal rights without having to leave work early to attend a legal clinic; where access to legal answers – and access to justice – is literally at his fingertips.



In late 2016, Jim's dream became a reality. Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, partnering with the American Bar Association, launched "CT Justice Online Anytime," (ct.freelegalanswers.org) a virtual pro bono legal advice clinic to increase access to volunteer attorneys.

The virtual legal advice clinic creates a secure, confidential forum for eligible clients to have civil legal questions answered by pro bono attorneys with substantive expertise in their legal practice area. The asynchronous online interaction is convenient for pro bono attorneys to decide how and when they are able to contribute their pro bono services.

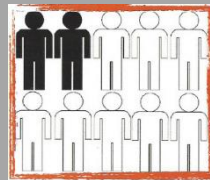
SLS was approached by the ABA to implement Connecticut's virtual legal advice clinic as part of the ABA's national 'Free Legal Answers' Initiative. This national initiative was replicated using Tennessee's virtual legal advice clinic model and technology distributed as an open source platform.

SLS is grateful to the Connecticut Bar Foundation for their generous financial support, to the American Bar Association for providing in-kind administrative support, to Baker Donelson Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz for developing the technology, and to our dedicated pro bono attorneys willing to utilize technology to deliver pro bono services.

FAST FACTS



43% of low income people experience 3 or more legal problems per year



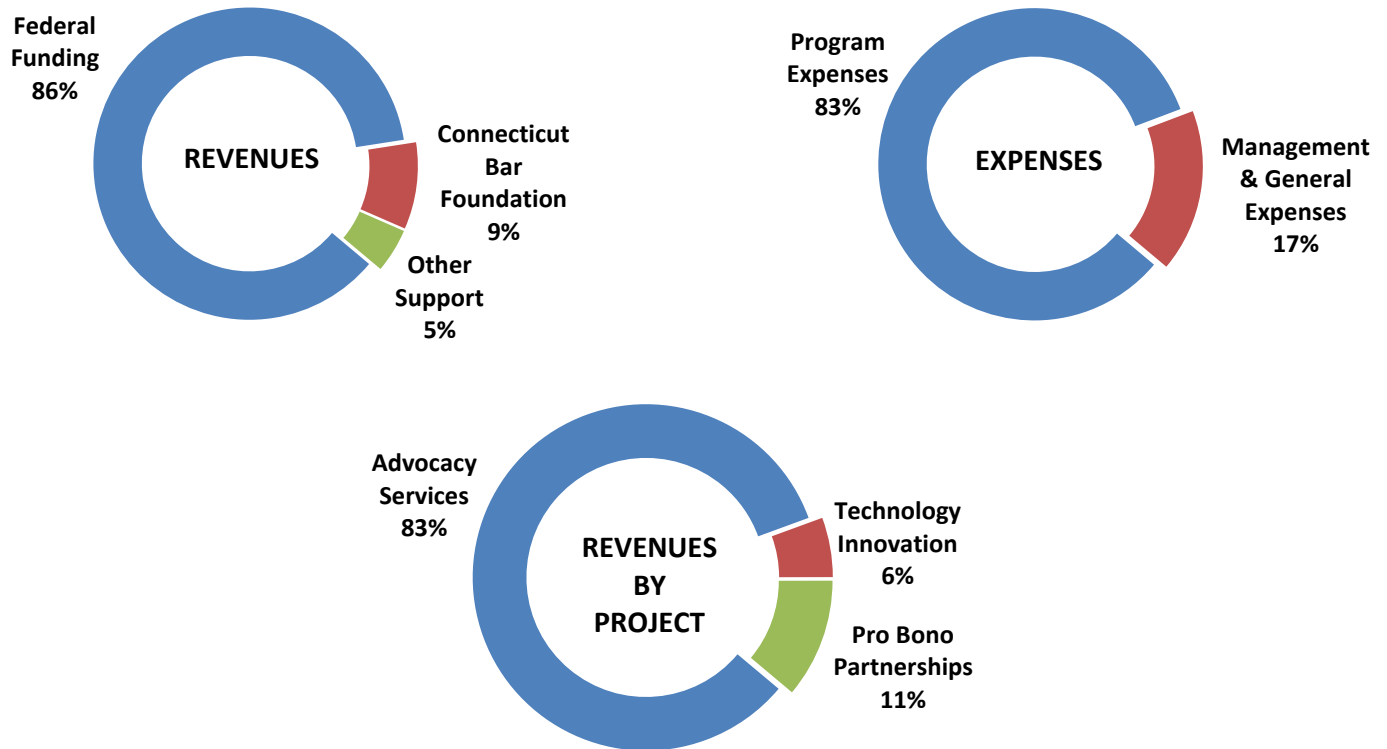
2:10 legal aid applicants receive legal aid help

1.86

Civil legal aid attorneys per every 10,000 Connecticut residents in poverty



a year of
FINANCIAL DATA & REVENUE (2015)



2015-2016 Financial Supporters

- Bank of America Settlement Award
- Connecticut Legal Services (Department of Housing Contract)
- Connecticut Bar Foundation Court Fees Grants-In-Aid
- Connecticut Bar Foundation Interest on Lawyers Trust Account Program
- Connecticut Bar Foundation Judicial Branch Grants-In-Aid
- Connecticut Community Foundation
- Cy Pres Award (Consumer Law Group, LLC)
- General Donations
- Grace Jones Richardson Trust
- Harford Foundation for Public Giving
- Legal Services Corporation Basic Field Grant
- Legal Services Corporation Technology Initiative Grant
- Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation
- New Haven Legal Assistance Association (IT Support)
- Pine Tree Legal Assistance
- Pro Bono In-Kind Support

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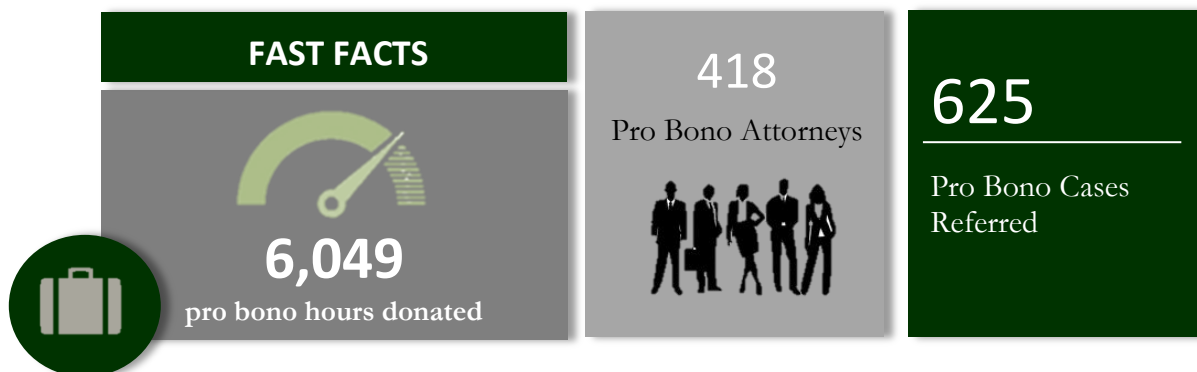
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Zorn, Jonathan

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Bushnell, Steve
Khanna, Rachna
Peijs, Lizzy

Pro Bono Awards & Recognition by Bar Associations

Coulombe, Craig, 2016 Honorable Anthony v. DeMayo Pro Bono Award
Shanley, Leslie, 2016 National Law Day Hartford Bar Association Award
Castinado, Maggie, 2016 NLADA Kutak-Dodds Award Nomination
Colket, Kathleen, 2016 NLADA Arthur Von Briesen Award Nomination
Kupfer, Brett, 2016 NLADA Arthur Von Briesen Award Nomination
Smiley, Michael, 2016 ABA Pro Bono Publico Award Nomination
Williams, Latonia C., ABA Pro Bono Publico Award Nomination



a year of leadership

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Sara Ramos, Program Administrator
Wendy Vazquez, Intake Specialist

a future of commitment to justice

SUPPORTING OUR WORK

Thanks to the generosity and commitment of our Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut supporters, SLS was able to provide direct legal advice to **more than 6,350 low-income Connecticut individuals** living in crisis but unable to afford an attorney.

These vital legal services increase a family's access to basic necessities, ensure safety and stability, and encourage economic stability. In 2017, SLS remains committed to:

- Collaborating with community-based service providers to identify emerging legal needs;
- Evaluating the impact of our legal services on our clients and in our communities;
- Developing and enhancing our self-represented litigant toolkits and online advocacy tools; and
- Expanding the network of engaged Pro Bono attorneys and supporters to build upon our existing legal aid programs.

Your support makes it possible for SLS to continue to expand our direct legal services, to develop innovative technology to connect and empower those in need, and to drive community-based lawyering in our most vulnerable communities.

Donate online. Making an online gift at www.slsct.org is quick, safe, and secure.

Donate by mail. Send your check – payable to **Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, Inc.** to 1290 Silas Deane Highway, Suite 3A, Wethersfield, CT 06109.

Together we can help Connecticut's most financially vulnerable individuals obtain free legal help to resolve urgent life problems. Every donated dollar will go towards making a difference in the lives of our low-income clients. **Thank you for your continued support of SLS as we celebrate our 21st Anniversary providing free legal assistance – statewide.**

With great appreciation,



Janice J. Chiaretto
Executive Director