

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut



SPRING EDITION 2016 : SLS 20 YEAR MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY

Our Mission

SLS empowers low-income people in Connecticut to obtain justice by providing tools to address their civil legal needs.

At Statewide Legal Services we believe knowledge is power. We are a legal aid advice and referral center helping low income people solve their legal problems. We believe that everyone should have access to justice.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF LEGAL SERVICE

In Celebration of 20 Years of Statewide Legal Services

Happy 20th Anniversary, SLS!

February 6, 2016 is a memorable date for SLS because it marks our 20th anniversary – 20 years of empowering low-income individuals to obtain justice while protecting the civil-legal rights of Connecticut's men, women and families in need.

This newsletter is offered in the spirit of gratitude to all our partners in the CT Legal Aid Network, our dedicated staff, Board of Directors and Pro Bono volunteers who help make these goals a reality.

Our 20th year presents an opportunity to reflect on this past year's achieved goals, while also offering the opportunity to consider the ambitious vision of SLS's future.

A sincere "thank you" to our SLS intake specialists, advocates and staff members – who connect and listen to our clients, provide superior legal advice,

and collectively strive to empower Connecticut's most vulnerable women, men, and children to fight for justice. Thank you for dedicating your lives to bridging the access to justice gap—statewide.

SLS Congratulates Team Members on New Positions

Attorney Elizabeth Pisarski-Buchholz has been promoted to *Managing Attorney* supervising our intake specialists and the Housing Unit advocates. **Attorney Rhoda Micocci** has been promoted to *Managing Attorney* supervising the Public Benefits/Health Unit advocates. **Jonathan Caez** has been promoted from an intake specialist to a Pro Bono Coordinator; under the supervision of Pro Bono Attorney Manager Ashleigh Backman, he will assist with Pro Bono program marketing, volunteer recruitment, and site administration of the ABA Pro Bono National Website (modeled after Online Tenn. Justice). **Congratulations on your well-deserved success!**

Save the Date!

SLS Pro Bono Attorney 3 Part Training Series
"Eviction Army"

Part II: "What to Expect in Housing Court"

April 15th, 1-2:00 PM, 80 Washington St., Hartford

Speakers: Hon. Glenn Woods, Deputy Chief Clerk Jeffrey Hammer, Mediation Specialist Leanne Kennedy

Registration is **FREE** for attorneys pledging to accept one SLS pro bono eviction case.

For more information contact:
ssanemeterio@slsct.org

HEJC Pro Bono Training in Collaboration with the Hartford County Bar Association

Help SLS Celebrate our 20th Anniversary!

\$20 for Our 20th Anniversary Campaign

In celebration, we are encouraging our supporters to pledge a \$20 recurring monthly gift to SLS. To make a pledge, please **[visit our donation page](#)**. Thank you for **[your](#)** 20 years of support!

2015 | SLS BY THE NUMBERS

SLS PEOPLE & VOLUNTEERS



PROFILE: HOTLINE & PRO BONO CASES

| CASE CATEGORY | # CASES CLOSED* |
|---|-----------------|
| Housing | 3,648 |
| Family | 1,806 |
| Public Benefits & Health | 1,096 |
| Consumer | 207 |
| Individual Rights | 124 |
| Employment | 52 |
| Education | 26 |
| Misc. (juvenile, advanced directives) | 13 |
| 2015 TOTAL cases closed *including pro bono cases | 6,972 |

SLS ADVOCATES & HOTLINE CLOSED CASES



SLS HOUSING ADVOCATES: 9
HOTLINE CLIENTS HELPED: 3,526



SLS FAMILY ADVOCATES: 8
HOTLINE CLIENTS HELPED: 1,626

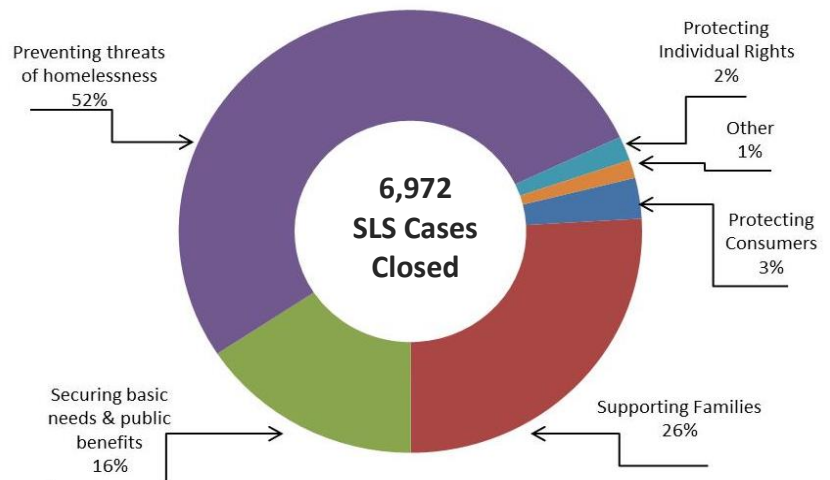


SLS PUBLIC BENEFITS/HEALTH ADVOCATES: 4
HOTLINE CLIENTS HELPED: 1,085

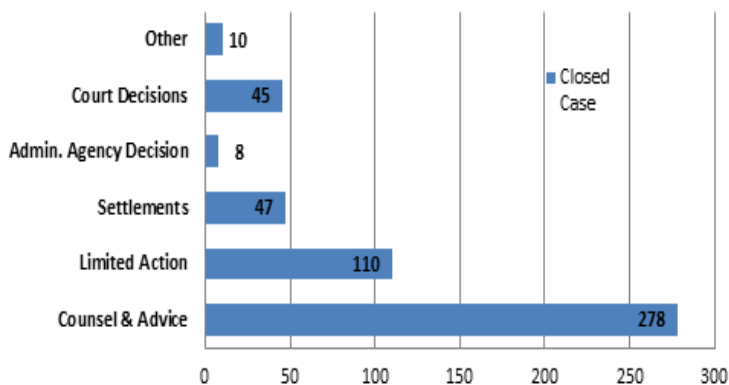


HOTLINE CLIENTS HELPED WITH OTHER LEGAL ISSUES : 187

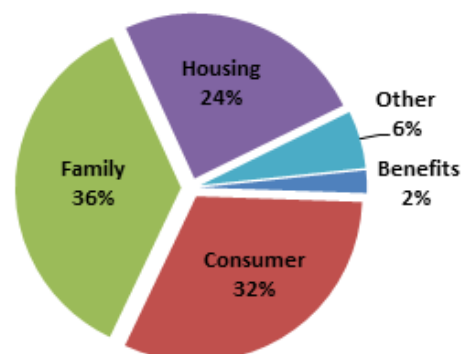
2015 Total Cases Closed | Area of Legal Advice



Pro Bono Attorney Legal Services Provided



Pro Bono Attorney Closed Cases | Legal Topic



2016 CASE SNAPSHOT|

SLS Advocates Help & Empower Low-Income Clients – Statewide

SLS Advice Provides Client More Time to Find Permanent Home

Melissa,* a physically handicapped widow living in Danbury, reached out to SLS for assistance after her husband passed away and she could no longer keep up with her rental payments. Emotionally upset she had been served with an execution telling her she had to immediately pack 35 years worth of belongings and leave in two days, she was desperately seeking a shelter willing to accept individuals—like her—relying on medical oxygen tanks.

A SLS advocate empowered her to immediately file a Stay of Execution with the court. The advocate remained in contact with Melissa as she filed her Stay of Execution and was granted a hearing. As a result of the advocate's legal advice, Melissa was granted a six week extension to pack her belongs and to find a new place to live. Additionally, **she was empowered to successfully negotiate a reduction in her use and occupancy fee from \$1500 to \$700.**

SLS advocates empower low-income clients with the necessary legal tools to seek justice when faced with a legal crisis. **With SLS's help, Melissa did not have to go to a shelter; she was granted the necessary time to pack her belongs and to find a new home to live in.**

Greater Hartford Area Family's Public Benefits Reinstated

Jennifer* is a wife and mother to a young child. Her husband is working but they are struggling to make ends meet. Similar to all parents, Jennifer and her husband want 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 healthcare, she was searching for an explanation and legal advice to navigate the confusing public benefits termination process.

A SLS advocate listened to her, 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 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.

**Names have been changed to respect each client's confidentiality.*

2016 HEJC SNAPSHOT|

Hartford Equal Justice Collaborative Expands Legal Access to Justice

SLS enjoyed a successful first year of collaboration with Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) and Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN) as part of the Hartford Equal Justice Collaborative (HEJC). The HEJC, funded by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving (HFPG), is implementing **a three-year project designed to increase the legal and education resources to the low-income Hartford and Greater Hartford communities – with a special focus on the underserved Hispanic community.**

In HEJC's inaugural year bridging the access to justice gap in the Hartford area:

- SLS opened 877 cases in the Hartford community;
- Hispanic households represented 47.77% (419) of these 877 Hartford cases;
- A total of 2,206 household members were provided legal help;
- Held 4 service provider education forums attended by 106 providers.

HEJC utilized a case study format to highlight common areas of law affecting those living in poverty –family, benefits, housing and employment law –and to showcase available provider resources, including our online intake system and CTLawHelp.org.

As we expand our geographic reach to the Greater Hartford communities, in our second year, we will continue to foster relationships with providers, engage community members, and pave the way for more low-income people to gain access to justice in Connecticut.

SNAPSHOT| Positive HEJC Client Outcomes Achieved

"Your advice helped me solve my problem. I went to DSS and they were able to help me out and get my HUSKY A reinstated. I just got back my benefits for me and my child." –low-income mother

"You really helped me get my child support. I didn't know you help with so many different things [areas of law]. I told my cousin about you guys." –single mother

PRO BONO RECRUITMENT & COMMUNITY OUTREACH



Attorneys Sandra San Emeterio (Project Manager) & Ashleigh Backman (Pro Bono Attorney Manager) meet UCONN law students at the Spring Career Reception



Hartford Equal Justice Collaborative (HEJC) provide legal information & SLS applicant pre-screenings at the Hartford Public Library with the help of Pro Bono Paralegal Avery Layne (left).

FAST FACTS: SELF-REPRESENTED PARTIES IN CONNECTICUT COURTS

84.9%

of Family cases in CT courts have at least one self-represented party (FY 13/14).

43%

of Connecticut households living in poverty experience 3 or more legal problems a year.

GET INVOLVED : SLS PRO BONO PROGRAM

Partner with SLS's Pro Bono Program to bridge Connecticut's Access to Justice Gap

Connect with Pro Bono Attorney Manager Ashleigh Backman for more information: abackman@slsct.org

Legal Volunteer Spotlight | 2L SLS Extern Changes a Life & Gains Insight into the Legal Aid Profession

As written by 2L Law Extern Patrick Brazel



the way up to the summary process hearing.

This experience showed me why there is a need for legal aid. My supervisor, Attorney Sandra San Emeterio (SLS Project Manager), and I decided to represent a low-income, single mother with two children who was in the process of being evicted.

This mother had fallen on hard times, and was trying to provide her two children with a safe home.

After she reported health code problems to an inspector, the landlord initiated eviction proceedings, leaving the mother in an even more stressful situation.

During the court mediation we were able to achieve what was essentially a "financial clean slate" for the mother.

This gave her the opportunity to leave this apartment and afford to provide her children with a safer living situation.

I would encourage other law students to pursue a legal aid externship or internship in order to broaden their law school experience. I believe in order to be a well-rounded lawyer, law students should have experiences in both the private practice and legal aid.



A legal aid internship provides a different perspective; it gives law students an opportunity to make a significant impact on someone's life.

Having the ability to change the single mother's life and to help her leave her apartment with enough money to find a safer apartment for her children has made my experience in legal aid extraordinary.

The ability to help people who are "down on their luck" certainly appealed to me about legal aid. Prior to this legal aid externship, I worked for two private law firms with clients who were mostly businesses. I wanted to have an experience where I would actually be helping people with their problems.

The chance to make a difference in a client's life also appealed to me about legal aid. The people who come to legal aid for help have dire problems; whether it is custody matters or housing matters, these events can shape their lives for worse if they do not have representation.

There are multiple positive things I have taken away from my experience as a Statewide Legal Services extern, even though I have only been here for a month. First, I get to contact all of the clients SLS has helped in some way and hear about their exceptional experiences.

Second, everyone at SLS has such a positive attitude about the work they are doing for the community, which makes working more joyful.

Finally, and most importantly, I had a first-hand chance to help a person who was in need of our services. SLS gave me the opportunity to take on the client's [housing] matter from pre-interview, all

Pro Bono Attorney Spotlight |

SLS Pro Bono Attorney Recognized as “Star” in CT Pro Bono Legal Community



The Connecticut Bar Association recently **awarded SLS Pro Bono Attorney Craig Coulombe the 2016 Honorable Anthony V. DeMayo Pro Bono Award**. Named in honor of the late Judge Anthony V. DeMayo (1924-2012)—who tirelessly fought for fundamental fairness and championed the legal rights of the poor and accused—the award recognizes a volunteer from the Pro Bono Network demonstrating dedication to the provision of legal services without expectation of payment to those in need.

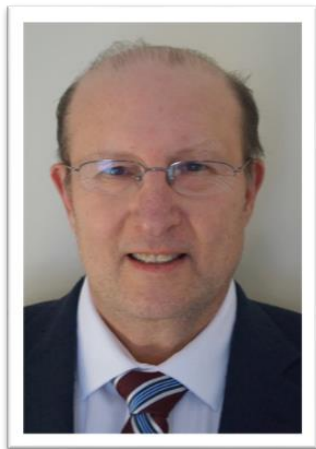
Attorney Coulombe actively volunteers his time participating in our Pro Bono Security Deposit Clinics and Call4Law program. He tirelessly provides in-person, legal assistance to very low-income men and women struggling to reclaim their security deposits—often traveling to New Haven when our clients are unable to attend our monthly Security Deposit clinics in Wethersfield. Additionally, Craig participates in our Call4Law program counseling low-income clients facing relentless consumer collections agencies and the threat of bankruptcy.

Attorney Craig Coulombe will be recognized at the CBA’s **“Celebrate with the Stars”** event on April 14, 2016.

Congratulations, Attorney Craig Coulombe!

Pro Bono Attorney Recognition |

SLS Nominates Pro Bono Attorneys for 2016 ABA Pro Bono Publico Awards



SLS has nominated **Attorneys Michael Smiley (solo practitioner) and Latonia C. Williams (Shipman & Goodwin, LLP)** for the American Bar Association (ABA) 2016 Pro Bono Publico Award.

The ABA Pro Bono Publico Award program seeks to identify and honor individual lawyers, firms, governmental offices, and other legal institutions that have enhanced the human dignity of others by improving or delivering volunteer legal services to our nation’s poor and disadvantaged.

Attorney Michael Smiley (left) actively accepts full-service pro bono representation involving significant time commitments. Additionally, Attorney Smiley was a pioneer pro bono attorney participating in our unbundled, pro bono



service program – Call4Law—and remains an active Call4Law attorney reaching out to low-income individuals unable to travel or to speak with a SLS advocate during their work day. Besides participating in SLS Pro Bono programs, Attorney Smiley joins SLS advocates and Pro Bono attorneys providing legal assistance to our country’s Connecticut Veterans at the CT Veteran Affairs’ STAND DOWN outreach events. Attorney Smiley actively demonstrates dedication to the delivery of legal services to Connecticut’s low-income men, women, and families.

Named as a Connecticut Super Lawyer Rising Star: Bankruptcy three years in a row (2013-2015), **Attorney Latonia C. Williams (right)** is a rising legal leader in our Connecticut legal community. Recognizing the need to bridge the access to justice gap in our low-income communities, Attorney Williams voluntarily serves on the SLS Board of Directors in a leadership capacity, as the Secretary. Here, she volunteers her time collaborating with fellow Board members and the Executive Director, Attorney Janice Chiaretto, shaping SLS’s priority programming and the effective delivery of legal assistance to Connecticut’s most vulnerable men, women and families. Additionally, Attorney Williams dedicates many of her work day mornings traveling to our office to advise pro bono, low-income clients seeking help at our Security Deposit and Family Law clinics. Attorney Williams contributes significant work towards the development and delivery of innovative volunteer legal services.

PRO BONO PROGRAM SNAPSHOT |

SLS Utilizes Web-Based Solutions to Bridge the Justice Gap

SLS is excited to announce the implementation of an innovative pro bono opportunity to bring legal advice to Connecticut's low-income residents. In conjunction with the American Bar Association (ABA) Standing Committee on Pro Bono and Public Service's push towards a national interactive pro bono website, **SLS—together with all 50 states—is undertaking the launch and administration of an interactive pro bono website.** This interactive pro bono website has been modeled after the successful Online Tennessee Justice model (www.onlinetnjustice.org). It has been piloted in Minnesota (www.mnlegaladvice.org), Indiana (www.indianalegalanswers.org), South Carolina (www.sclawanswers.org), Alabama (www.alabamalegalanswers.org), and West Virginia (www.wvonlinelegalhelp.org).

Similar to the other states, Connecticut's low-income residents will have the opportunity to bring their legal concerns into a virtual-based consultation with pro bono attorneys—statewide. Although not a "live-chat," via a web-based question and answer format, low-income individuals can ask their legal question, then, pro bono legal volunteers can select an area of expertise and answer the specific legal question.

Prospective Connecticut clients must register and are pre-screened for eligibility. If qualified, clients are allowed to post a legal question to a private message system. They have the ability to check the system for answers and other messages at any time.

At their convenience, SLS Pro Bono lawyers and supervised law students can log into the website to review Connecticut client questions. Pro bono volunteers reviewing questions will only see the user's created name. Then, the pro bono volunteer may provide a legal answer or request additional information. This limited attorney-client relationship is detailed in the User Agreement clients must acknowledge, and provides pro bono volunteers the control when deciding to accept follow-up questions.

Based on previous program experiences, other states have asserted:

- **The ability to log into the website 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, together with the choice to devote as much or as little time as a pro bono volunteer can afford, makes providing pro bono legal services flexible and convenient;**
- **The program allows for "attorney mentoring" because newer attorneys can participate in easier/procedural questions, draft a response, then seek out senior attorneys or fellow colleagues to review responses before virtually submitting an answer;**
- **The program helps newly admitted attorneys build a comfort level with client interaction in a non-threatening way;**
- **Pro bono legal volunteers appreciate the program's built-in anonymity, as a pro bono attorney's identity is not known to the client unless the attorney decides to disclose his/her name.**

SLS has assigned a Pro Bono Coordinator to monitor the website for new pro bono attorney applications, to welcome and answer new pro bono volunteer questions, to monitor the categories of client questions, to monitor client follow-up questions the attorney has marked "closed," and to respond to self-represented parties who may submit questions outside the scope of the program.

As **SLS plans to launch this website in August 2016**, we are currently seeking interested pro bono attorneys, law schools, and law students to participate in its inauguration. Currently, SLS is developing a marketing plan to reach and educate low-income Connecticut residents, social service providers, faith-based communities, and librarians about this new, free legal service.

For more information, please contact Ashleigh Backman at: abackman@slsct.org

SLS looks forward to this launch and is excited to offer a web-based way for pro bono volunteers to connect with low-income men, women, and families seeking legal help—statewide.

CT Judicial Branch's Volunteer Attorney Program Seeking Pro Bono Attorney Engagement

The Connecticut Judicial Branch is seeking additional volunteers for the **Volunteer Attorney Program.**

The Volunteer Attorney Program provides legal assistance to self-represented men, women, and families seeking help in the areas of **contract collections, family law, foreclosure law, and small claims.**

Pro Bono Attorneys volunteering with the Judicial Branch's Volunteer Attorney program:

- receive a detailed training program binder;
- are given the opportunity to "shadow" current pro bono volunteers.

The Small Claims Program is a joint venture with the Connecticut Bar Association (CBA). Volunteer Attorneys participating in the Small Claims Volunteer Attorney Program receive malpractice insurance provided by the CBA.

Join area Pro Bono Attorneys at our Superior courthouses to help our community members navigate the legal process as self-represented parties.

For more information, contact:
Krista Hess, Superior Court Operations, Krista.Hess@jud.ct.gov

SLS PRO BONO PROGRAM NEEDS YOUR HELP:

The Pro Bono **Call4Law Program** helps significantly more low-income clients seeking consumer collections and bankruptcy advice than other areas of law. Hence, **we are seeking more Pro Bono Attorneys willing to assist our consumer collections and bankruptcy Call4Law pro bono clients.** SLS offers free On-Demand trainings for those attorneys unfamiliar with this area of law. Please contact: Call4Law@slsct.org

The **Direct Representation Program**, is seeking **Pro Bono Attorneys willing to help our low-income pro bono clients with Housing and Eviction cases in the New London area.** Please contact: abackman@slsct.org & jbozzi@slsct.org

LEGAL AID PARTNERSHIP SNAPSHOT |

What's New on CTLawHelp.org?



Legal Help Finder Makes Legal Resource Access Easier for People Seeking Legal Information

The [Legal Help Finder](#) at CTLawHelp.org allows individuals looking for help with a legal problem in Connecticut to simply click on a few choices before being directed to a list of agencies able to help them.

Additionally, Legal Help Finder directs help-seekers to resource on CTLawHelp.org that discuss about their legal questions.

Centralizing legal assistance resource searches saves individuals time and energy, while also suggesting the appropriate resources best suited to answer their legal questions.

Try accessing your legal resources at : <http://ctlawhelp.org/legal-help-finder>.



CTLawHelp.org Monthly Web Traffic

26,000 people visited the site
51,000 pages were viewed

CTLawHelp.org Top Legal Topics

- ❖ Evictions
- ❖ Tenant's Rights

CTLawHelp.org Helps Launch New National Website Classrooms Teaching Self-Represented Parties About the Law



We have just launched a new national website, [LearnTheLaw.org](#), where legal aid programs and other non-profits can build free online classrooms. We have built some

classrooms to help people, who cannot afford a lawyer tackle long and complex legal problems on their own.

Check out our latest classes in English and Spanish, including:

- Applying for a Temporary Restraining Order
- Changing a Child Support Order
- Filing a Motion for Contempt
- Dealing with SSI and SSDI Overpayments

These classrooms are accessible for free on the national website: [LearnTheLaw.org](#).

Interactive Online Game Prepares Self-Represented Parties to Seek Justice in the Courtroom

Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, along with Northeastern University School of Law's [NuLawLab](#), and other partners in our judiciary and legal aid community developed and implemented an interactive online game.

It was designed to provide self-represented parties, people who cannot afford a lawyer when they go to court, with a basic understanding of how to effectively advocate for themselves in court.

There are many good resources for self-represented parties to help them create, complete and file the necessary documents to "get their day in court." Nonetheless, once that day comes, most self-represented parties lack the skills they need to effectively represent their ideas and arguments in court. Because self-represented parties have no prior experience addressing a judge, questioning a witness, or offering documents into evidence, they suddenly find themselves having to carry out these tasks, for the very first time, in a real-life hearing environment with a lot at stake. The online game, RePresent, walks self-represented parties through the courtroom process.



Check out the game, RePresent, [here](#) or visit <http://ctlawhelp.org/represent>.

CTLawHelp.org and our web projects are funded by the LSC Technology Initiative Grants Program and the CT Bar Foundation

SLS BOARD OF DIRECTORS SNAPSHOT |

Board Member & Past President Recognized for Outstanding Service



SLS sends a heartfelt “thank you” to Attorney Daniel Blinn (Consumer Law Group, LLC) for his many years of volunteer service as a member and former President of our Board of Directors.

During Attorney Blinn’s tenure, SLS developed and implemented its online intake system, unique pro bono programs, and innovative initiatives and legal aid delivery systems to bridge Connecticut’s access to justice gap for low-income men, women and families –statewide.

Attorney Blinn continues to serve as a pro bono attorney participating in our Direct Representation program where he advises pro bono, low-income clients facing challenging consumer rights issues. He is a volunteer presenter at our Pro Bono Attorney Consumer Law Training Sessions.

During SLS’s Annual Board Meeting, **Attorney Blinn (right)** is recognized by Board Member and former President, **Attorney Dave Bozzuto (left)** for his dedication to SLS.

SLS BAR ASSOCIATION PARTNERSHIP SNAPSHOT |

SLS Project Manager Appointed CHBA Pro Bono Committee Chairwoman

SLS is proud to announce **Attorney Sandra San Emeterio (right)**, SLS Project Manager, has been appointed by the Connecticut Hispanic Bar Association’s (CHBA) President, Attorney Margaret Castinado, as the Chairwoman of the CHBA Pro Bono Committee.

As the CHBA Pro Bono Committee Chairwoman, Sandra looks forward to implementing pro bono initiatives that will continue to serve the low-income Hispanic community in Connecticut.

Currently, Attorney San Emeterio is the Project Manager at SLS. She manages several projects on behalf of SLS, including the Hartford Equal Justice Collaborative (HEJC) – a collaborative funded by Hartford Foundation for Public Giving.

Congratulations, Attorney Sandra San Emeterio!



Statewide Legal Services of CT

Our call-in hours are:

Monday – Friday

9 am to 12 noon and 1 to 2 pm

Toll-free: 1-800-453-3320

From Middletown and

Hartford:

860-344-0380

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