OUR MISSION

To achieve justice for low-income people in Louisiana by enforcing and defending their legal rights through civil legal aid, advocacy, and community education.

OUR VISION

A society in which equal justice for all is a reality.
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For over 50 years, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS), with their dedicated team of attorneys, support staff, board members, donors, and volunteers, has fought to ensure equal access to justice to our most vulnerable neighbors. The pandemic has had devastating effects on our communities, and now more than ever, civil legal aid is crucial to protecting the future of those struggling to recover. With an unwavering commitment to our fight for fairness, SLLS continues to grow and adapt to meet the diverse and ever-increasing needs of those around us.

I am honored to serve as the SLLS Board President and proud to present to you our 2020 Annual Report.

Jennifer Van Metre
SLLS Board of Directors President
For over 50 years, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) has provided a legal safety net. We serve 22 parishes covering half of Louisiana’s low-income population from our offices in Baton Rouge, Covington, Gretna, Hahnville, Hammond, Houma, and New Orleans. SLLS attorneys and support staff are complemented by pro bono attorneys, law students, and other volunteers. We work in partnership with other community stakeholders. SLLS provides legal help for indigent and other vulnerable people who cannot afford a lawyer. We protect livelihoods, health, housing, and families. Programs like ours are essential to assuring fairness for all in the civil justice system.

OUR PRIORITIES

**Protecting Children and Families**
- Domestic Violence
- Family Law
- Child in Need of Care
- Elder Law

**Preserving Housing**
- Eviction Defense
- Foreclosure Prevention
- Landlord-Tenant
- Successions for Homes
- Fair Housing Rights

**Economic Stability**
- Employment Law
- Public Benefits
- Education and Health
- Consumer & Tax
- Expungements

**Legal Help for Special Populations**
- Homeless Advocacy
- Rights of the Disabled
- Disaster Survivors
- Veterans Projects

AREAS SERVED
Commitment to Racial Equity

For over 50 years, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) has fought to improve the lives of low-income and other vulnerable people. Opposing racism in all of its forms, such as the death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement, is key to our ability to carry out our mission of achieving justice for low-income people. We know that tragic events such as this perpetuate inequality and impose even greater heartache, difficulties, and pain for people who confront racism in their daily lives.

We acknowledge the day-to-day racism facing the people and communities we serve. Black and brown Louisianians continue to face discrimination in housing and employment; disparities in health conditions, life expectancy and income; wealth gaps; and over-representation in the criminal justice system. They are targeted in destructive ways because of the color of their skin. We stand in support of marginalized and ignored people in Louisiana and are listening to the demands for real change to overcome the inequities faced by too many in our community and country.

Racial justice is the responsibility of all of us and a core value of SLLS. Misconduct by police or others in authority, predicated upon prejudice because of race or any other discriminatory basis, cannot be tolerated. The very lives of black and brown people, the well-being of our nation, and our quest for justice depends upon it. We will use our skills to address issues affecting low-income individuals and families including advocacy to end racism to help achieve lasting change. Black Lives Matter.

65% of our clients are African American
89% Of Our Eviction Cases Are for People of Color
49% of our staff is BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)
44% of our Board of Directors and 44% of our staff are African American
Having an SLLS attorney prevents loss of family, food, shelter, income, medical care, or personal safety. In 2020, SLLS handled 11,468 cases, closing over 7,784 of those. As we headed into 2020, 3,684 cases remained open. The charts below are a breakdown of our 2020 closed and open cases.
The direct economic impact of SLLS’ 2020 work for our clients exceeded $22 million. This represents income secured; assets or benefits protected, such as the value of homes saved from foreclosure; consumer debt relief; health coverage obtained; housing subsidies preserved; financial support for hard-working families; and much more. No price tag can be placed on the value of lives saved through our Domestic Violence and Child in Need of Care work. A new Economic Impact Study on the value of civil legal aid released in early 2020 by the Louisiana Bar Foundation found that for every $1 supporting programs like SLLS, there is $9.18 in social return on investment in immediate and long-term cost savings.

ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Louisiana saw over $22 million in economic benefits by providing Civil Legal Aid through Southeast Louisiana Legal Services.

PEOPLE

In 2020, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services handled 11,468 cases in Louisiana, thereby helping over 25,500 people.

LEGAL ISSUES

In 2020 the top 3 legal issues facing Southeast Louisiana Legal Services clients were Family & Domestic Violence (33%), Housing (23%) & Child in Need of Care (CINC) (12%).

Family & Domestic Violence

Housing

CINC

33%

23%

12%
COVID-19 Crisis

IMPACT

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on our community has been devastating and widespread. Our eviction caseload has tripled, and we have seen a 2020% increase in requests for legal help with unemployment benefits compared to the same time period in 2020. Many suddenly out of work families who never thought they would need civil legal aid are reaching out for our assistance. Southeast Louisiana has not seen a crisis this wide-reaching since Hurricane Katrina.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployment Compensation</td>
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<td>Family</td>
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Our COVID-19 hotline has received over 15,000 calls in 2020. It streamlined our processes to make it easier for clients to get the help that they need in a crisis.

RESPONSE

Our online outreach has been hugely successful in connecting the community with the resources they need. We had over 25,000 Facebook Live views and nearly a million views on our website.
At the start of the pandemic, Jefferson Parish Juvenile Court stopped hearing child abuse cases, leaving vulnerable children at serious risk of abuse and neglect. SLLS successfully advocated to the LA Supreme Court for these critical hearings to resume.

SLLS sent letters to the Sheriffs in Orleans, Tangipahoa, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, East Feliciana, Plaquemines, and St. John Parishes asking for foreclosures sales to be suspended during the pandemic, even before any formal legally required moratorium. The Sheriffs in Orleans and Tangipahoa parishes announced the suspension of these sales, and all eventually halted sales.

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SLLS developed a Judicial Bench Card on the CARES Act eviction protections. Drafts were vetted by local judges and circulated by the Justices of the Peace Association. Partners including the Louisiana State Bar Association continued to work on the Judicial Bench Card. It was adopted and distributed by the LA Supreme Court to all other courts in the state, and was widely used by judges to navigate the details of the new eviction moratorium.

As a result of our advocacy to keep our clients safe from COVID-19 exposure, several courts modified their processes for remote hearings and ADA accommodations.

SLLS was grateful to receive almost $1.5 million in COVID-related grant funding to help us respond to the surge in demand from families and individuals adversely impacted by the pandemic including from the Bob Woodruff Foundation, Capital One Bank, the City of New Orleans CARES Act Emergency Solution Grant, Funders for Housing Opportunity, the Greater New Orleans Foundation, Hancock Whitney, the Humana Foundation, the Legal Services Corporation, the Louisiana Bar Foundation, the Loyola College of Law’s Gillis Long Foundation Social Justice Fellowship, Public Allies, Tulane University School of Law’s Lutz Fellowship, the United Way of Southeast Louisiana, and Wells Fargo.

COVID-19 FUNDING PARTNERS

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Mr. C, a 58-year-old Navy veteran, became a cab driver after leaving the military. He received a letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) informing him that he was being audited for three years of taxes. Mr. C. was not worried about the audit since he had paid his taxes and he had even hired an accountant to handle preparing his tax returns. Mr. C. was shocked when he was later notified by the IRS that he owed about $18,000 in taxes. He had to appeal this decision timely or else risk being saddled with this additional tax debt. He was worried that the IRS would place a tax lien on his home.

Mr. C. was referred to SLLS’ Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic for legal assistance. Our staff quickly obtained his tax records and reviewed the matter for errors. After our review, we determined that Mr. C. did not owe $18,000 in back taxes. After SLLS’ intervention, we successfully got the tax debt reduced by $13,917. Mr. C. was then able to make payment arrangements on the remaining balance. He no longer has to worry about a tax lien being filed against him and his assets are protected.

Mr. T was a 59-year-old homeless veteran. A majority of his veterans’ benefits were being taken for child support. The problem was the child was not his and he had never been in a relationship with the mother. An SLLS Pro Bono attorney helped prove that he was not the actual father of the child and got his VA benefits reinstated. With his full benefits, he was able to afford to rent an apartment and get off the streets.
Ms. B., a struggling single mother working a low-wage job, panicked when her boss told her that her wages were about to be garnished. Ms. B. had about $20,000 in credit card and other loan debt. Now raising a minor child on her own and already having a tough time making ends meet, she was worried her family would become homeless if her paycheck were cut.

After meeting with an SLLS attorney and weighing her options, Ms. B decided the only way to get a fresh start was to file a Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Her SLLS attorney prepared the documents for the bankruptcy court. We notified her employer that a bankruptcy was filed so the garnishment would stop. At first, the employer did not acknowledge the effect of the automatic stay from bankruptcy court. Her employer became agitated with her when she pleaded for the garnishment to now stop and she was worried she would lose her job. SLLS intervened and convinced the employer to stop the garnishment. Within a few months of the bankruptcy being filed, Ms. B. was granted a discharge of debts totaling $20,891.

Ms. B. now has the new start she needed to stabilize her family and she no longer has to worry about losing her home and her job.

Protecting a Survivor of Domestic Violence

Kelly had endured years at abuse at the hands of her boyfriend. When she was several months pregnant with their child, she finally called the police and left the relationship. She lived alone with her newborn, and allowed the child’s father to visit. During one visit, he kidnapped the child and refused to return her. Kelly’s SLLS attorney got an emergency temporary restraining order that allowed her to get her baby safely returned. Now Kelly has the safety and security she needs to recover from the trauma of abuse.
Roberta, a senior citizen undergoing cancer treatment, got behind on her mortgage and was facing foreclosure. By the time she was referred to SLLS for help, it was almost too late. The mortgage lender had hired their own attorney, and added thousands of dollars in extra legal fees to her debt. Her SLLS attorney acted quickly to begin the process to reinstate her mortgage. With our help, she was also approved for $10,000 in mortgage assistance from Catholic Charities. Through the swift and diligent work of SLLS, her foreclosure was prevented. Now Roberta can focus on her health recovery in her own home.

Bill and his family were struggling with their landscaping business due to COVID-19. Work dried up at the start of the pandemic. Because he was self-employed, there was an issue with getting his unemployment claim approved. He was served an eviction notice from his landlord. SLLS helped negotiate a payment plan and got his unemployment benefits approved.

Ms. R was a 42-year-old single mother living with her adult daughter and teenage child. She was employed as a caregiver prior to being laid off due to COVID-19. Her daughter was also laid off and had many comorbid conditions that made it difficult for her to safely return to work during the pandemic. When her mother passed away from COVID-19, she had to make the heartbreaking choice between paying her rent or paying $2,500 for funeral expenses. She applied for rental assistance funds, but her landlord declined requests for information and she was unable to receive any assistance. After missing only one month rent her landlord filed for eviction. When she contacted SLLS, her attorney was quickly able to have the eviction dismissed due to the CDC Eviction Moratorium.
Stories Behind the Numbers

Ending Homelessness for a Vulnerable Mother

Ms. P was homeless and suffered from bipolar depression and schizophrenia. With the help of SLLS, she was approved for over $20,000 in retroactive benefits and a monthly disability payment of $880. She is now no longer homeless and is obtaining medical care.

Library Partnership Stops Eviction and Secures Unemployment Benefits

Ms. M was laid off from her job in the hospitality industry due to COVID-19. She signed up for the new SLLS Virtual Legal Clinic at the New Orleans Public Library and was determined to be eligible for immediate help.

An SLLS attorney negotiated a payment plan with her landlord to prevent eviction and got the $7,800 in unemployment benefits she was owed. She was able to stay afloat, and not have to worry about eviction, or how she would pay her bills until she was able to return to work as things reopened.
Mr. S, a person living with disabilities on a fixed income, contacted our COVID-19 housing hotline stating that he had been stabbed by his landlord and that he was concerned he would be evicted. As a result of the attack, Mr. S had numerous injuries including a collapsed lung. There was an ongoing criminal case and a restraining order against his landlord had been issued.

An eviction court date was set, and the judge granted our request that Mr. S be allowed to appear via video because of his injuries. His SLLS attorney won the case. We were able to connect Mr. S with Catholic Charities for rental assistance and the local Crime Victims Compensation fund to get him funds to move to a safer place.

Mr. V is a 66-year old Vietnam veteran who was discharged with an “Other than Honorable” status, which prevented him from receiving many benefits afforded to veterans. During his military service Mr. V suffered serious injuries in an accident that resulted in loss of sight in one eye. His SLLS attorney helped upgrade his status to General Discharge, allowing him to access a VA pension, medical treatment through the VA, and other critical resources.

Ms. L received an eviction notice from her landlord for several months of unpaid rent. She had been furloughed from her job at UNO shortly after Covid-19 and her unemployment benefits had not been approved because of a bureaucratic issue. SLLS helped to negotiate with her landlord an acceptable payment plan while also getting her approved for unemployment benefits.
SLLS in the News

We expanded our media footprint going from one feature pre-pandemic to over 130 stories in 2020 in local, state, national, and international publications to raise awareness about the devastating impact of the pandemic on our clients and how civil legal aid is an often overlooked but essential solution to stabilizing communities. SLLS attorneys and clients were featured in many media outlets including the Associated Press, CNN, NBC News, and Bloomberg Law.

Landlords Are Illegally Evicting Tenants During The Coronavirus Pandemic. Lawyers Fear A “Tsunami” Of Evictions When State Moratoriums End.

Legal aid lawyers say they’re still seeing illegal evictions, and expect a surge in need from millions of newly unemployed tenants once state and local moratoriums end.

Which states are doing a better job protecting renters from being evicted during the coronavirus pandemic

For millions of renters who have lost income, next month is a looming disaster. A majority of the country’s 43.6 million renting households have lost at least some of their income due to the pandemic.

Millions of Americans may not be able to pay their rent in October. What to do if you’re one of them
While the pandemic limited our in-person community outreach in 2020, SLLS staff and volunteers were still able to provide community legal education through Wills for Heroes events, veterans outreach events, our new virtual library legal clinic, Hurricane Laura recovery resource fairs, and more.
SLLS is fortunate to have law clerks assisting in the delivery of civil legal aid from Loyola, LSU, Southern, and Tulane Law Schools. Going virtual has also allowed us to host law students from across the country from schools like the University of Michigan, University of Virginia and Georgetown. This nationwide interest in volunteering at SLLS started as an outpouring of support after Hurricane Katrina and continues today. In 2020, law students and other student volunteers provided over 8,700 hours of service valued at $146,992. Special thanks to all these dedicated future lawyers and their schools in supporting our work for vulnerable clients.
SLLS Honors

SLLS received United Way of Southeast Louisiana’s (UWSELA) 2020 Community Impact Grantee Award for our outstanding work during the COVID-19 crisis.

Shown: Foreground, Laura Tuggle, Executive Director; Background, Tap Bui, UWSELA Vice-President, Community Impact, Health & Fund Distribution

Salyria Gumms, Managing Attorney of our Houma Office, received Louisiana Appleseed’s 2020 “Good Apple” Award at the January 2020 Good Apple Gala

Amanda Golob, Managing Attorney of our New Orleans Housing Unit, received the Louisiana State Bar Association’s Legal Service Excellence in Advocacy Award at the LSBA Justice Community Conference in October 2020
With generous support from local and national organizations, SLLS hosts innovative one-year post graduation fellowships for recent law graduates to help respond to urgent community needs. The New Orleans Bar Association and the New Orleans Bar Foundation currently fund a Veterans Justice Fellowship to address unmet legal needs of vulnerable veterans. Two Tulane Law School Lutz Fellows, two Loyola College of Law Gillis Long Social Justice Fellows, Hancock Whitney, and the United Way of Southeast Louisiana in partnership with the Louisiana Hospitality Foundation are helping SLLS address the critical needs of domestic violence survivors, abused children, and struggling workers and tenants impacted by COVID-19. The Yale Public Interest Law Foundation provided support for a Fellow to close the justice gap for unstably housed formerly incarcerated people. Through a partnership with the Equal Justice Works Foundation and the Legal Services Corporation, SLLS was also able to bring a three-month law student Fellow on board to help us better serve low-income people living in rural parts of our service area.
Civil Legal Aid is a SMART Investment

Every $1 invested in civil legal aid results in $9.18 of Social Return on Investment

For every $1 invested in civil legal aid in Louisiana, our communities receive a $9.18 social return on investment. This includes emergency services, law enforcement, healthcare, justice returns, and other public cost savings. That is why strong support from our funders and donors is so important. Because of you, we were able to improve the lives of thousands of vulnerable people across Southeast Louisiana in 2020.

Total Budget: $9,363,751
THANK YOU

American College of Bankruptcy Foundation
American College of Trial Lawyers Foundation
Bob Woodruff Foundation
Capital Area Agency on Aging
Capital Area United Way
Capital One Bank
Delgado Single Stop
East Baton Rouge Council on Aging
Equal Justice Works
Funders for Housing & Opportunity - New Ventures
City of New Orleans - Emergency Solution Grant
Gillis Long Poverty Law Center
Greater New Orleans Foundation
Hancock Whitney
Humana Foundation
Internal Revenue Service
Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation
Justice & Accountability Center
Jefferson Parish Office of Community Development
Lafourche Council on Aging
Legal Services Corporation
Livingston Parish Council on Aging
Louisiana Bar Foundation
Louisiana Budget Project
Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement
New Orleans Bar Foundation
New Orleans Bar Association
New Orleans Council on Aging
Southeast Advocates for Family Empowerment (SAFE)
Plaquemine Council on Aging
St. Charles Council on Aging
St. James Council on Aging
St. John Council on Aging
St. Tammany Council on Aging
Start Corporation
State of Louisiana
Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government
Terrebonne Council on Aging
The Haven
The Hope Center
Tulane Law School Lutz Fellowship
U.S. Department of Justice Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)
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United Way of St. Charles
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Jeffrey Morton
Rick Riehm
Rittenberg Family Foundation
Frank Roccaforte
Mark and Monica Surprenant
R. Patrick and Honorable Sarah Vance
Patrick Yancey

One of our final in-person events before the COVID-19 pandemic began was our Circle of Justice Cocktail Reception, to recognize some of our exceptionally generous donors 2019 Circle of Justice donors at the home of Mark and Monica Surprenant.
2020 Donors

Thank you to all of our 2020 donors for your generous support. Your support in the midst of crisis helped thousands of families struggling to make ends meet during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please accept our apologies for any omissions.

Mr. David Abbenante
Ardis Agosto
Christina Albers
AmazonSmile Foundation
Kyle Anderson
Mr. Stephen Armbruster & Ms. Tamarin
Armbruster
Phyllis Arnold
Mr. Doug Arsham and Ms. Jenny Effron
Brenda Atkinson
Committee to Elect Connie Aucoin for Judge
Clyde Babylon
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Gianluca Cocito-Monoc
Sam Coley
Costco II
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YOU Can Increase Access to Justice in Southeast Louisiana

MAKE A DONATION TODAY!

Your donation to SLLS helps ensure families can escape abuse, keep their homes, become self-sufficient, and access health and education services they need to succeed. The demand for our services continues to grow at a pace that outstrips resources. Your support makes it possible for SLLS to respond to urgent needs like helping crime victims, supporting disaster survivors, and helping struggling families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

You can join our community of donors by making a gift today at: https://slls.org/donations/

Or your tax-deductible donation can be mailed to:
Roxanne Newman, Deputy Director
Southeast Louisiana Legal Services
P.O. Drawer 2867
Hammond, Louisiana 70404

How Does your Contribution Support the Fight for Fairness?

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<tr>
<td>$100</td>
<td>Provides legal advice to an at-risk community college student to remove barriers to completing education and improving employment opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150</td>
<td>Underwrites a community outreach event to 100 seniors to help them understand their legal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$250</td>
<td>Protects a domestic violence survivor and his or her children from future abuse through an uncontested divorce and permanent stay away order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500</td>
<td>Protects a child from abuse and neglect by providing a year of legal representation to a child in need of care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1000</td>
<td>Gets a disabled homeless veteran off the streets and into safe, permanent housing by providing representation in Veterans and Social Security benefits matters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>