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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ABOUT SLLS

OUR HISTORY

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
- Succession for Homes
- Fair Housing Rights

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

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

AREAS SERVED

Ascension Parish
Assumption Parish
East Baton Rouge Parish
East Feliciana Parish
Iberville Parish
Jefferson Parish
Lafourche Parish
Livingston Parish
Orleans Parish
Plaquemines Parish
Pointe Coupee Parish
St. Bernard Parish
St. Charles Parish
St. Helena Parish
St. James Parish
St. John the Baptist Parish
St. Tammany Parish
Tangipahoa Parish
Terrebonne Parish
Washington Parish
West Baton Rouge Parish
West Feliciana Parish
Having an SLLS attorney prevents loss of family, food, shelter, income, medical care, or personal safety. In 2021 SLLS handled 14,281 cases, closing over 9,633 of those. As we headed into 2022, 4,648 cases remained open. The charts below are a breakdown of our 2021 closed and open cases.

### Closed Cases

- **Family**: 28%
- **Housing**: 35%
- **Income (Public Benefits)**: 15%
- **Education, Employment, Health**: 6%
- **Consumer**: 6%
- **Wills, Estates, Powers of Attorney**: 5%
- **Miscellaneous**: 0%

### Open Cases

- **Family**: 30%
- **Housing**: 26%
- **Income**: 10%
- **Consumer**: 6%
- **Education, Employment, Health**: 4%
- **Wills, Estates, Powers of Attorney**: 7%
- **Miscellaneous**: 0%
- **CINC**: 17%
The direct economic impact of SLLS’ 2021 work for our clients exceeded $28.5 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. An 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.

$28.5 MILLION

Louisiana saw over $28.5 million in economic benefits by providing Civil Legal Aid through Southeast Louisiana Legal Services

31,757

In 2021 Southeast Louisiana Legal Services handled 14,281 cases helping over 31,000 people

32%
Housing

29%
Family & Domestic Violence

14%
Income (Public Benefits)

In 2021 the top 3 legal issues facing Southeast Louisiana Legal Services clients were Housing, Family & Domestic Violence, and Income (Public Benefits).

Civil Legal Aid is a SMART Investment!

Every $1 Invested in Civil Legal Aid Results in a $9.18 Social Return on Investment
When Hurricane Ida made landfall in southeast Louisiana vulnerable families already destabilized by the pandemic were thrown into a perfect storm of extremely dire circumstances. With lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and the 10 presidentially declared disasters that followed, we hit the ground running providing critical legal aid in some of the hardest hit areas to make sure the most vulnerable people are not left behind in the recovery process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOTAL CLIENTS REPRESENTED</th>
<th>1,705 Survivors</th>
<th>4,053 Household Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 Know Your Rights blog resources</td>
<td>67,827 people</td>
<td>82 Legal clinics and outreach events reaching 1,729 survivors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,792 Calls to our Disaster Legal Helpline</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Disaster Law Trainings for Pro Bono Attorneys, Judges, and Stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,037,511.14 Direct economic benefits to disaster survivors through our legal work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
JUSTICE FOR ALL: SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY WINS

PREVENTING MASS EVICTIONS FOR HURRICANE SURVIVORS

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Ida, a Hammond apartment complex sent eviction notices to almost 100 low-income tenants, citing storm damage to the complex, despite many units still being in good condition. Most of the residents were elderly or people living with disabilities on fixed incomes without the financial means to relocate in a tight housing market. We intervened resulting in an about face from the management allowing most residents to remain in their homes while repairs were made. In Terrebonne Parish when the housing authority attempted another mass eviction based on unpaid rent, SLLS filed a federal suit against it for failure to follow the required procedure for public housing evictions, as well as failure to make timely repairs.

EVICION DIVERSION PROJECT

We developed partnerships with courts in New Orleans and a Jefferson Parish Justice of the Peace to create eviction diversion programs integrating court-based legal assistance, connection to rental assistance funds, and community partnerships to help stabilize families at imminent risk of eviction.

RIGHTS FOR VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

SLLS sent a demand letter to the Department of Children and Families Services challenging their agency policy of treating survivors of domestic violence as having neglected their children if the children witnessed an incident of domestic violence. The Department changed their policy to limit it to only the perpetrators of violence in most circumstances.

FAIR HOUSING FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE

After many years of advocacy work by a coalition of community partners, Louisiana Housing Corporation approved a policy for 60,000 Low-Income Housing Tax Credit units that prohibits blanket bans for people with criminal records and requires a lease addendum for all units which only allows a non-renewal of a lease if there is “good cause” in accordance with federal law.

FIGHTING FOR TENANTS RIGHTS

SLLS intervened in the foreclosure action against a New Orleans area slumlord on behalf of a group of tenants living in five properties. The landlord was using stall tactics to avoid turning his property management over to another company while his foreclosure was pending, preventing the tenants from getting much needed repairs on their homes under the new management. He has now been removed from control of 5 properties totaling about 500 units.
Mr. V. is a 65-year-old Navy veteran who was injured during his time in the military suffering a broken femur, hearing loss, and traumatic brain injury. Mr. V. was not receiving service-connected disability benefits from the VA despite his significant injuries received during his military service. This resulted in Mr. V. having lifelong seizures, PTSD, and other significant adverse health issues. When Mr. V. was referred to us, he was facing upcoming surgeries and he was very worried about how he could maintain his housing. His rent was $850 and he only had $910 in income. He had been struggling for many years to make ends meet since leaving the service as his ability to work was permanently damaged. His most recent job was as a part-time grocery worker which often left him in pain after completing his shift.

SLLS completed a medical history review, obtained records from the VA regarding Mr. V.'s service, and connected Mr. V. to treatment. We submitted a brief to the VA for his claim and continued to update his claim with new treatment records. We referred him to the Volunteers of America's housing program to connect him to affordable housing. The decision on his service-connected claim was slowed due to COVID-19 but we were thrilled to learn that he was approved for almost $50,000 in retroactive benefits and a monthly 100% service-connected benefits amount of $3,146 per month. Upon hearing the news that his benefits were finally approved, Mr. V. shared his gratitude and said “you saved my life”. Mr. V. now has the benefits to which he is entitled after putting his life on the line for his country and can live the rest of his life comfortably.

Ms. T.'s landlord filed for an eviction alleging lease violations. She did not have a lawyer and had no idea what to do to fight the eviction. 15 minutes before her eviction case was called, she talked with the SLLS attorney at the Help Desk First City Court in New Orleans and asked for legal representation. Despite being unemployed due to the pandemic, she was only one month behind on her rent. If evicted, she would be homeless in 24 hours. Luckily, Ms. T got a break. Her landlord missed the court appearance, and the eviction was dismissed.

A few weeks later, her landlord filed again for the same lease violations, but Ms. T. never received for the hearing. Because the landlord was at this second hearing and Ms. T. was not, the judge granted the eviction. She was shocked when constables knocked on her door and told her she was being immediately removed from her home, but fortunately the constable said he would come back later to do the physical put out. She rushed to the court and found the SLLS attorney who assisted her at the Help Desk. The attorney quickly filed an emergency motion, and the court stopped the constable from proceeding with the eviction. We negotiated an agreement with the landlord and contacted our partners at OCD who prioritized Ms. T for emergency rental assistance program.
Mrs. H is a 60-year-old widow living on a fixed income from social security with over $100,000 in debt. In 2019 she had a massive heart attack followed by 4 surgeries and was informed by her doctors that she would not be able to return to work due to her serious health issues. After Hurricane Katrina, she was forced to relocate, accumulating debt from her previous mortgage, medical bills, car note, credit cards, and home repair loans. After realizing she could lose her property due to her lingering debt, she reached out to SLLS about filing for bankruptcy. She completed a detailed bankruptcy questionnaire so SLLS could evaluate her case and so she would be able to keep her car when she filed for bankruptcy. Her SLLS attorney prepared the complex pleadings. After filing for bankruptcy protection, she received a notice that $189,118 of debt had been discharged and she finally had a fresh start.

An unfortunate reality of domestic violence is that many abusers perpetrate violence against multiple victims. Carli came to SLLS hoping to get sole custody of her son and to have her abuser’s supervised visitation rights terminated. He had continued to display a pattern of abuse in his recent relationships. She feared that her son might be harmed if the visitation continued. While preparing her case, SLLS learned Carli’s abuser had hurt another of his girlfriends. At the custody hearing, SLLS put the abuser’s recent ex-girlfriend on the stand as a witness. Her testimony was key in persuading the judge that the abuser had continued to perpetrate family violence. The judge awarded Carli sole custody of her son and terminated the abuser’s visitation until he completed batterer’s intervention and parenting classes. Carli is thrilled with the outcome of her case and is finally at peace and ready to move on with her life.
Mr. C’s lifelong home had rain, roof, and other damage from Hurricane Ida. He was grateful that the home was still livable. The home was purchased many years ago by his parents. FEMA only approved him for $500 in assistance and his damages were below his homeowner insurance deductible. At 72 years old and living on a fixed income, he could not afford to make necessary repairs. He planned to make a loan at a local bank to fix his home. But when he went to the bank, he was told that he had to have a succession done since his parents were both deceased. He was referred to SLLS by the local Council on Aging for legal help. The SLLS attorney assigned to his case quickly discovered after Mr. C’s interview as he began his probate research, that Mr. C was already the 100% owner of the home. Mr. C’s parents had each donated their 50% interest in the home to Mr. C during their lifetime. Mr. C had not realized this meant he owned the home free and clear and that a succession was not necessary to clear the title. He had also misplaced some important documents that the attorney located in his title search. Upon learning this welcome news, Mr. C went back to the bank with the documents his attorney located and was able to make a loan to fix the hurricane damages to his home.
Ms. W. was laid off from her job shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic started. She received unemployment compensation benefits for several months, but then they stopped. She tried to no avail to get the issue resolved on her own through the Louisiana Workforce Commission’s (LWC) online portal. As financial pressures mounted, her marriage became strained. Her husband left her and she had no source of income coming in to pay the rent and other household expenses. She didn’t know where to turn. Someone referred her to SLLS. Our attorney reviewed her online account with LWC and quickly determined her benefits were stopped because she had inadvertently checked a box on the online recertification form that she had a job offer. We advocated for her directly with the LWC and were able to get the inadvertent error quickly corrected. Ms. W.’s benefits were reinstated, and she received back pay of $6,300. She now has the resources to stabilize her situation while she seeks other suitable employment.

Mr. J was a 64-year-old widow living in the home he shared with his wife and two children after her death in 2017. Although it was community property, the home and the mortgage were still in his wife’s name. With no warning, the mortgage company stopped accepting his payments in June of 2020 and asked him to make a $16,000 payment or the property would go into foreclosure. He made several attempts to negotiate with the mortgage company on his own, but they proceeded with the notice of foreclosure. His SLLS attorney was able to work with the mortgage company to have the mortgage transferred to him so he could resume making payments, a complete a loan modification to lower his monthly payment to just $154.79. Mr. J can now rest comfortably knowing that the home he and his wife worked hard for is safe.
An elderly married couple came to see us as they were overwhelmed with medical bills and credit card debt. They were living on a fixed income of under $2500 per month while attempting to juggle a house note of $900, a car payment of $220 and ongoing monthly medical co-pays. They had no savings. The husband was in poor health that was rapidly declining. The stress of the constant collection calls from the creditors was taking its toll.

During a consult with one of our Northshore Pro Bono Project attorneys, unencumbered assets were discovered that would have been at risk in a Chapter 7. Therefore, a Chapter 13 Plan with a small, manageable monthly payment was calculated that would rid our clients of the remaining unsecured debt, while protecting their assets from seizure and reworking the finance term for their vehicle to lower the note.

Shortly after the bankruptcy case was filed, our client’s husband passed away. His widow was been able to continue on in the Chapter 13 case, ensuring the debts will be eliminated and their home and other assets were protected. Despite the emotional challenges, she is able to remain in her home in comfort and familiarity and in peace.

Mrs R. is a 54-year-old woman living with her husband and one grandchild. She lives on a fixed income from her husband’s disability income and her grandchild’s SSI. In 2019 she contacted SLLS seeking representation in tax disputes with the IRS and the Louisiana Department of Revenue. We helped her get into filing compliance by filing several federal and state income tax returns. We then helped her file an Offer in Compromise with the IRS to settle her federal tax and state returns which was accepted by the IRS. Ms. R.’s tax liability was reduced to $1 on her $3,528 debt. She now has peace of mind as she plans to return to the workforce.
Mr. L was referred to the Homeless One Stop Legal Clinic project by a casemanager from the Volunteers of America. He was 61 years old at the time we met him, had been evicted from his apartment four years ago, and had been homeless off and on ever since his eviction. He was physically assaulted and injured during a robbery in 2019 which impacted his memory and cognition. Mr. L had lost his identification, had been cut off food stamps, and Medicaid. We determined through our work with him this was due to his extremely significant neurological impairments and memory loss. He had no stable address and was not responding to correspondence to continue his benefits. He did not have the stamina to complete applications on his own or any consistent follow-through to help stabilize his life. In addition to mental health challenges, he had foot and back pain consistent with having been on the streets for an extended period of time. Due to his age and disability, it was clear we needed to obtain benefits for him as soon as possible.

After several meetings, our team was able to piece together what happened in Mr. L’s life to help support his claim. We worked closely with a social worker to help get him reconnected to food stamps, Medicaid, and to replace his lost identification. We got him admitted to a housing program to get him off the streets. Mr. L was referred to one of our volunteer psychiatric residents to do a mental health assessment to support our “dire need” disability application. The results of that examination revealed just how dire his situation was and we immediately wrote a brief and obtained further records to help support a request for expedited consideration to the Social Security Administration. We are happy to report that Mr. L was approved for $10,995 in a lump sum for past due benefits and $814 per month for ongoing monthly benefits for an annualized income of $11,350. Mr. L has now been admitted to Permanent Supportive Housing with ongoing case management assistance. He now has the funds to furnish his apartment and the long-term supports he needs to avoid becoming homeless again.
SLLS IN THE COMMUNITY

SLLS Staff Attorney Amyhist Kearney and Equal Justice Works Rural Justice Fellow Casey Hardwick at a rural library.

SLLS Staff Attorney Lakethia Bryant and Intake Specialist Louella Chaisson at an outreach event in Houma.

Outreach at a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center with SLLS Staff Attorney Steven Reed.

SLLS Staff Paula Charles, Tiffany Whitley, SLLS Board Member Emma Dixon, ADAPT Director Rusty Fornea at a Washington Parish outreach event.

SLLS Presented with Capital Area United Way Grant for our Disaster Hotline.

SLLS Disaster Legal Clinic at Joe Brown Park with Staff Attorney Constance Tullier, AVODAH member Ellie Moskowitz, and Disaster Legal Fellow Sam Calvit.
Our Child in Need of Care Unit received an LSBA Children’s Law Award.

The First City Court Eviction Diversion Project received the LSBA 2021 Legal Services Innovation Award.

Andrea Jeanmarie Managing Attorney of our Gretna office received the LSBA Career Public Interest Award.

Salyria Gumms Managing Attorney of our Houma office received the Terrebonne Bar Association Community Service Award.

Our Housing Unit received Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center’s “Fair Housing Heroes” Award.
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. In 2021, law students and other student volunteers provided 10,989 hours of service valued at $164,835. Special thanks to all these dedicated future lawyers and their schools in supporting our work for vulnerable clients.
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 are helping SLLS address the critical needs of domestic violence survivors. The Loyola College of Law Gillis Long Social Justice Fellows help to close the justice gap for unstably housed and formerly incarcerated people. Disaster Legal Fellows funded by United Way of Southeast Louisiana, Greater New Orleans Foundation, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, and Northshore Community Foundation are leading efforts to provide services to survivors of Hurricane Ida. Through a partnership with the Equal Justice Works Foundation and the Legal Services Corporation, SLLS was also able to bring three Disaster Resilience Fellows in rural parts of our service area.

Executive Director Laura Tuggle was chosen for New Orleans CityBusiness’ 2021 Leadership in Law class.

Since second grade, Laura Tuggle knew she wanted to be in a “helping profession.” It was in her third year at Tulane Law School, though, that she knew she would pursue public interest law full time.

After working with the clinic program at Tulane University Law School, she began her career as a staff attorney with the New Orleans Pro Bono Project, coordinating their homeless advocacy plan. Eventually, though, Tuggle wanted to focus on direct representation, and joined the local legal aid office.

COVID-19 has brought on another housing crisis since Hurricane Katrina, said Tuggle, and SLLS has grown by about 20% since the onset of the pandemic. With the loss of jobs, family members, and livelihoods at the hands of the virus, caseloads have increased by as much as 2,500%.

Now, Tuggle works to expand her resources to meet the needs of the community, to transition her team to a virtual work policy, and “probably responding to the biggest civil legal aid crisis for low income people in my lifetime.”

A particularly inspiring moment came in April 2020. A housing and eviction crisis was already in full swing, and Tuggle saw one of her attorneys on the news. She was “wearing a mask, had a bottle of hand sanitizer on her hip, and she is literally out on the streets trying to prevent a family from being evicted in the middle of the pandemic during the lockdown.”

“Seeing our folks in action really tantamount to a first responder at a time when it was pretty grim days, that was pretty inspiring to me,” she said.

— Julia Prager-Hesel
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 2021.

**Total Revenue: $10,598,330**

- Federal Government 20%
- LSC 39%
- Foundation 38%
- Local Government 2%
- Fundraising <1%

**How Does Your Contribution Support the Fight for Fairness?**

- **$100** Provides legal advice to an at-risk community college student to remove barriers to completing education and improving employment opportunities
- **$150** Underwrites a community outreach event to 100 seniors to help them understand their legal rights
- **$250** Protects a domestic violence survivor and his or her children from future abuse through an uncontested divorce and permanent stay away order
- **$500** Protects a child from abuse and neglect by providing a year of legal representation to a child in need of care
- **$1000** Gets a disabled homeless veteran off the streets and into safe, permanent housing by providing representation in Veterans and Social Security benefits matters
SLLS was grateful to receive nearly $1 million in Hurricane Ida grant funding to help us respond to the surge in demand from hurricane survivors from Capital Area United Way, Baton Rouge Area Foundation, Greater New Orleans Foundation, Northshore Community Foundation, AARP Foundation, McArthur Foundation, United Way of Southeast Louisiana, United Way of St. Charles, Louisiana Bar Foundation and Legal Services Corporation.
Circle of Justice

The “Circle of Justice” comprises some of the strongest individual supporters of civil legal aid. Our Circle of Justice donors have made an annual contribution of $1,000 or more to support the fight for fairness.

Anonymous Donors
Jude Bratman
Jesse Czekanski-Moir
Frank Descant
Al and Sue DiCristofaro
Steve Herman
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Jane Johnson & David Marcello
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Lorraine LeBlanc

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Emma O’Hara
Rittenberg Family Foundation
Schafer & Schafer, LLC
Mark and Monica Surprenant
Honorable Sarah S. Vance and R. Patrick Vance
James Weiss
Rella and David Zapletal

Thank you to all of our 2021 donors for your generous support! Your support in the midst of crisis helped thousands of families struggling to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 and Hurricane Ida.

Please accept our apologies for any omissions.
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thank you!