



SOUTHEAST LOUISIANA LEGAL SERVICES

2024 Annual Report

Fighting for Fairness for Vulnerable People

Letter from the *SLLS Board President*

For over 50 years Southeast Louisiana Legal Services (SLLS) has been a lifeline for vulnerable families in times of crisis. Every day the SLLS team of dedicated attorneys, support staff, board members, donors, and volunteers are fighting for fairness for the most vulnerable people in our community. Now more than ever civil legal aid plays a critical role in ensuring that no one is left behind in the recovery process.

In the face of increasing threats from natural disasters and economic instability, SLLS will continue to grow and evolve in the way we deliver services to ensure equal access to justice for all.

I am proud and honored to serve as the SLLS Board President and to present our 2024 Annual Report to you.

Ryan Ours
SLLS Board President



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SLLS Staff at our Annual Staff Meeting

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

<p>Protecting Children and Families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic Violence Family Law Child in Need of Care Elder Law 	<p>Preserving Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eviction Defense Foreclosure Prevention Landlord-Tenant Succession for Homes Fair Housing Rights 	<p>Economic Stability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment Law Public Benefits Education and Health Consumer and Tax Expungements 	<p>Legal Help for Special Populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeless Advocacy Rights of the Disabled Disaster Survivors Veterans Projects
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Parishes Served

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ascension Assumption East Baton Rouge East Feliciana Iberville Jefferson Lafourche Livingston Orleans Plaquemines Pointe Coupee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St. Bernard St. Charles St. Helena St. James St. John the Baptist St. Tammany Tangipahoa Terrebonne Washington West Baton Rouge West Feliciana
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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.

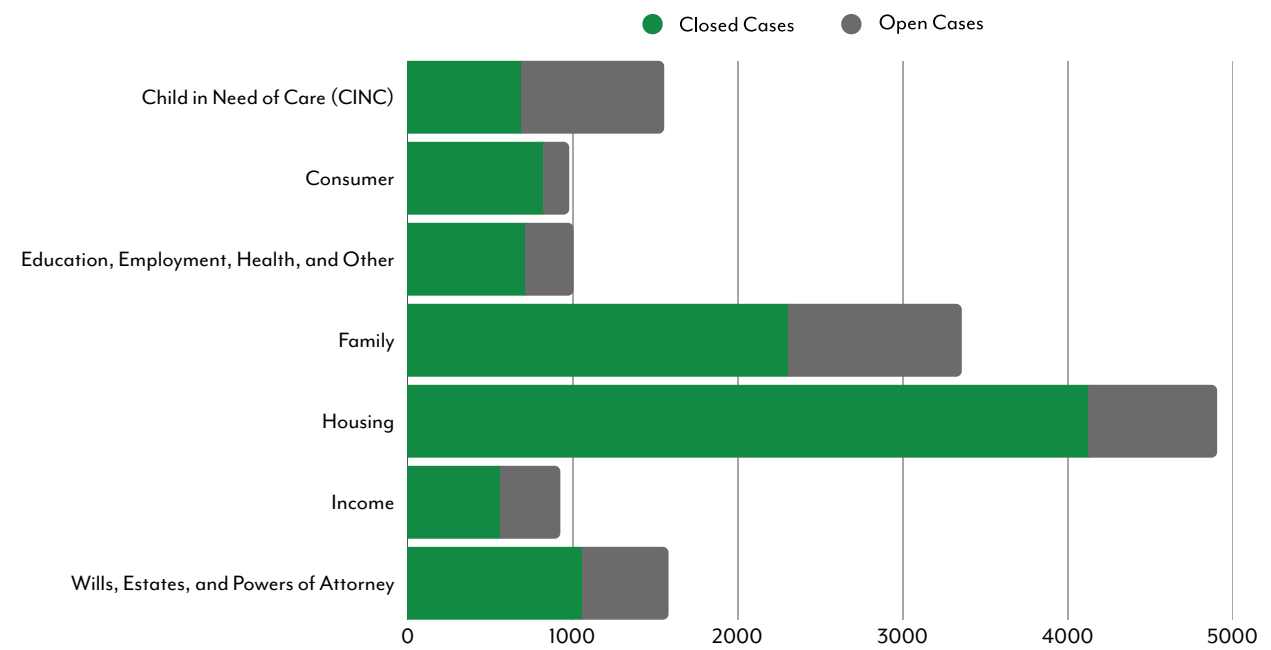
Our Commitment

At SLLS, we know our differences make us better and stronger in achieving equal access to justice and we are committed to make everyone feel welcome to make a positive contribution to our clients, communities, and each other. SLLS is an Equal Employment Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, or veteran status.

By the Numbers

The direct economic impact of our 2024 work for our clients exceeded \$35 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.

Having an SLLS attorney is critical to preventing loss of family, food, shelter, income, medical care, or personal safety for vulnerable people. In 2024 Southeast Louisiana Legal Services handled **14,306** cases helping **30,994** people. We closed **10,278** cases. As we headed into 2025, **4,028** cases remained open.





US Congressman Troy Carter presented SLLS with a Proclamation for Exceptional Service



Tenants' Rights Unit Supervising Attorney Amanda Golob received the New Orleans Bar Association Mark Moreau Award for Public Interest Law



SLLS Managing Attorney Marie Wright received the Louisiana State Bar Association (LSBA) Legal Service Excellence in Advocacy Award.



SLLS Managing Attorneys Julia Jack and Molly MacKenzie received Loyola University New Orleans College of Law Gillis Long Poverty Law Center Public Service Awards

Houma Office Open House



Executive Director Laura Tuggle and Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice John L. Weimer



John Amedee, Terrebonne Parish Council Chairman and Houma Office Managing Attorney Salyria Gumms



Chief Justice John Weimer, Laura Tuggle, and Louisiana Bar Foundation Board Member Charles Bourque



Judge Jason Dagate and SLLS Board Member R. Lee Landreneau



DCFS attorneys Linda Mitchell and Marcia Arceneaux with SLLS staff Mary Ann McGrath Swaim, Dana Moore, and Jessica Duet



HR Manager Shannan Latino, Deputy Director Roxanne Newman and Administrative Assistant Lynette Tillis



Super Tax Day Outreach Event



Red River Bank Heir Property Community Convening in Baton Rouge



SLLS in the Community



Staff Attorney Colin Munn at Veterans Day at the State Capitol



Tulane Medical School Outreach Event



Director of Pro Bono Programs Doug Carey at Loyola University College of Law's Social Justice Lawyering Class

Staff Attorney Isobel Healy at the Eden House Legal Clinic



Managing Attorney Maureen Morrow at National Association of Real Estate Brokers Event



Staff Attorney Amythist Kearney at a Northshore Housing Outreach Event



Lead Intake Specialist Gayle Evans at a St. Charles Parish Resource Fair

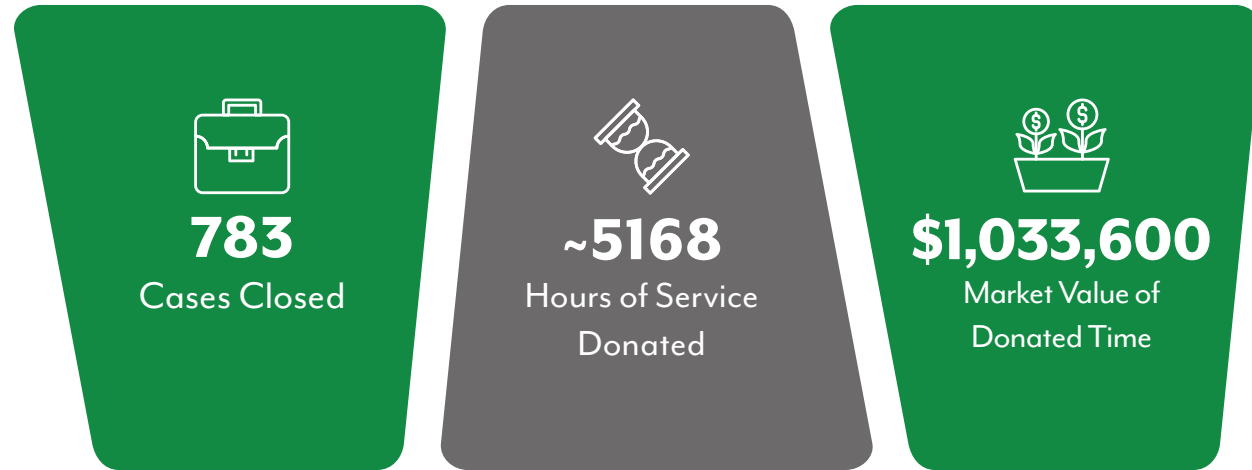


Ascension DePaul Community Health Center Open House

Pro Bono Programs and Projects

Baton Rouge City Court Eviction Desk
 Pro Bono Innovation Fund Security Deposit Theft Project
 Pro Bono Project Subgrant

Informa Pauperis Clinic
 Low-Income Tax Payer Clinic Project
 SLLS Northshore Pro Bono Project
 Baton Rouge Bar Foundation Subgrant



SLLS volunteers and staff at a "Be a Nurse for a Notary" event



SLLS Northshore Pro Bono Project volunteers and staff at a "Wills for Heroes" event

SLLS is fortunate to have law clerks assisting in delivering civil legal aid from Loyola, LSU, Southern, and Tulane Law Schools. Going virtual has also allowed us to host law students nationwide. In 2024, 118 law students and other student volunteers provided 12,256 hours of service valued at \$183,840. We appreciate these dedicated future lawyers and their schools for helping us to advance our mission to serve vulnerable clients.



Summer law clerks at Civil District Court



Summer law clerks at federal court with Judge Lance Africk



Summer law clerks with Louisiana Supreme Court Chief Justice John Weimer



Summer law clerks with Duane Evans, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana



Aggie Young

Ms. Young, an elderly and disabled survivor of Hurricane Ida, had been living in her grandmother's home for years when the hurricane struck, destroying the house and leaving only the slab behind. She applied for recovery assistance from Restore Louisiana but could not prove ownership of the property because a succession had never been opened for her grandmother. Her attorney, Elizabeth Hammant, traced her family tree along her grandmother's line and drafted an affidavit of death, domicile, and heirship, which Restore Louisiana accepted as proof of ownership. She received an \$85,000 grant for a new trailer, replacing the FEMA trailer she had lived in for nearly three years after the storm.

SLLS Helps Grandmother Secure Family Home and Build

Generational Wealth



Ms. W., a 56-year-old African-American grandmother raising her two grandchildren, struggled to make ends meet after her mother's death in August 2023. She was shocked when the Ascension Parish Assessor's Office notified her that property taxes were increasing and the homestead exemption was being removed because there was no legal owner of record after her mother's death. Already stretched financially, Ms. W. sought

help from SLLS through a partnership with the Assessor's Office. Since Ms. W. was the sole heir, SLLS quickly gathered information and recorded a Judgment of Possession in the local court. This allowed the Assessor's office to restore the homestead exemption. Ms. W. is now working with the mortgage company to transfer the mortgage and insurance into her name. This will help protect the family home from harm in the future if there is a disaster and a claim needs to be made on the insurance or if she needs to request a loan modification on the mortgage. Thanks to a Wells Fargo grant, she can preserve the home as a source of generational wealth and plans to draft a will for the future protection of this critical asset.

SLLS Helps Tenant Remain in her Long Term Neighborhood

Ms. F was a 79-year-old living in a rural area impacted by Hurricane Ida. She had lived in the house for 27 years and paid only \$500 per month in rent. Initially, her landlord said she could move to another one of their properties while the hurricane damage was repaired. She had not been served an eviction notice when someone appeared at her door claiming to be the new owner and said they were there to help her move out. She was on an oxygen tank and a walker, with no vehicle and limited ability and resources to look for a new place. Shortly after contacting SLLS, she received an eviction notice requiring her to vacate within a few weeks.



Her SLLS attorney negotiated an amended lease with the new property owner, extending her lease for an additional year. The eviction was dismissed, and Ms. F moved to another property owned by the landlord next door. Ms. F was able to remain in the neighborhood she had lived in for almost 30 years. She also requested a ramp to make the property accessible, and the landlord constructed one for her.

Ms. Sharp was homeless and living with multiple debilitating health challenges - bipolar disorder, HIV/AIDS, fibromyalgia, and vision loss. She couldn't work and struggled to survive without a stable income. She applied for disability benefits on her own and was denied twice. Despite being connected to housing resources through a social services organization, without disability benefits, she had no income to pay her rent. After a 15-month appeals process, Blake Allen, her attorney, helped her obtain disability and survivor's benefits from her late husband, allowing her to secure stable housing. While she was living on the streets, her daughter would not allow her to see her grandchildren. Now that she has an income to maintain safe and stable housing, she has been reunited with her family.

Gina Sharp



SLLS Helps Grandmother Secure Custody and Stability for Grandchildren

Ms. M. struggled to raise her two young grandchildren while working a low-wage job. After her daughter-in-law passed away, her son, who was battling a drug addiction, threatened to take the kids into his unstable living situation. Ms. M. visited SLLS at our St. Charles Parish Access to Justice Center Help desk for help getting legal custody and Kinship Care benefits. Her son wouldn't agree to a voluntary transfer of custody, so SLLS helped her file a custody lawsuit. After a challenging court process, the judge granted Ms. M. full custody. With that issue resolved, she obtained \$900 monthly in Kinship Care benefits. Her grandchildren are thriving in her home, and she has the additional resources she needs to care for them.



Ms. Graddy came to SLLS after several incidents of horrifying domestic abuse at the hands of her children's father. He broke into her home and stole items on multiple occasions, escalating threats of violence, before being arrested for burglary. One evening, her abuser broke down the door with a sledgehammer and was armed with a handgun. Their four-year-old child was present at the time. He fired several shots before a friend of Ms. Graddy's shot him in self-defense. While her abuser was incarcerated for multiple offenses related to

the incident, her attorney, Greg Hughes, was able to secure a restraining order against the abuser and sole custody of the two minor children. Ms. Graddy now has peace of mind knowing that she and her children no longer have to fear for their safety.

Maddy Graddy



Larry Savage

Mr. Savage is a 70-year-old US Navy Veteran, living with his wife and two teenage grandchildren. He came to SLLS because he received notice that he owed a \$51,047 VA debt. He applied for a waiver on his own, but it was denied. The VA wanted him to pay \$260 per month to repay the debt, but the Savages live on a limited income, and this was unaffordable for them.

His SLLS attorney, Megan Snider, requested a more reasonable payment plan, and the VA countered with an even higher amount, at \$600 per month. We were able to reduce Mr. Savage's payment plan to \$100 per month, which was affordable for the family while we pursued debt forgiveness. His attorney argued the VA was at fault for overpaying him despite having data on the other income he was receiving. In March 2024, we received a letter from the VA stating that it would not collect the \$51,047 debt and reduced the debt balance to \$0, relieving him of this crushing burden.



SLLS Helps Crime Survivor Overcome Barriers to Employment



Our Equal Justice Works Crime Victims Advocacy Fellow met Ms. S at a criminal records expungement clinic at the Justice and Accountability Center (JAC). Ms. S lost both of her adult sons to gun violence in late 2023 and is raising her young granddaughter and caring for her disabled daughter. She currently works in a hospital cafeteria. A 1998 drug possession charge repeatedly obstructed her opportunities to get a higher paying job.

Our Fellow filed a motion to expunge Ms. S's record and represented her in court. The Orleans Criminal District Court granted the expungement and waived the \$550 filing fee, clearing a major hurdle for Ms. S and offering her a chance at a better future.



SLLS Prevents Fraudulent Sale of Family Home

Ms. S came to SLLS for help with an eviction after discovering that the administrator of her mother’s estate had sold their family’s home without her knowledge or that of most of the other heirs. Additionally, the sale resulted in \$7,000 being paid to the administration, with no money transferred to the estate, while the house was sold for \$87,000.

After months of persistent advocacy, her SLLS attorneys successfully obtained a court order to remove the administrator and annul the fraudulent sale. This halted the wrongful eviction and safeguarded the property for the rightful heirs. Ms. S can now remain in her family home and access the full value of the estate.

SLLS Prevents Eviction for Tenant Impacted by Hurricane Francine

Ms. A., a 54-year-old African American woman with a disability, lived in a subsidized apartment in a rural parish, depending on her daughter for transportation. As Hurricane Francine approached, she attempted to travel to the management office to pay her \$194 rent, but the manager refused it due to a \$27 late fee and told her she could avoid eviction by paying the full amount by 9/11/2024. The hurricane hit early on 9/11/24, causing power outages and unsafe travel conditions. When she tried to pay the next day, no one was in the office. It was still empty on the following day, so she slid the payment under the door. Days later, the manager said she now owed even more money - court fees for the eviction that had been filed. When she contacted SLLS, her attorney filed a Sworn Answer and In Forma Pauperis Affidavit, and the eviction was dismissed. Ms. A. remained in her subsidized housing and regained peace of mind knowing she would not lose the only home she could afford.



SLLS Prevents Eviction for a Working Mother



Ms. S. lived in a public housing unit with her children. When her income increased after she returned to work, she wasn’t notified that her rent would go up due to the change in income. She soon received an eviction notice claiming she owed \$3,500 in back rent, putting her and her children in danger of losing their home.

Fearing the loss of their only affordable housing, Ms. S. turned to SLLS for help. We quickly corrected the Housing Authority’s records, confirmed her new rent was \$325, and negotiated a \$700 payment to stop the eviction. Additionally, we secured Emergency Rental Assistance to cover the arrears. The eviction was dismissed, and Ms. S and her children were able to remain in their home.

SLLS Helps Elderly Widow Save Her Family Home

Ms. C’s home faced foreclosure after her husband died in 2023. For 50 years, he had paid the mortgage and handled all financial matters. She was unsure of how to pay the mortgage, and the mortgage on her family home went unpaid while her husband was sick with his final illness. Her SLLS attorney filed her husband’s succession quickly, but it took months of conference calls and two CFPB complaints against the mortgage servicer to have Ms. C and her sons recognized as Successors-in-Interest. Once everyone was recognized on the title, her attorney filed a loss mitigation application on their behalf. The threat to the client’s homeownership has been resolved, successfully saving her family home.





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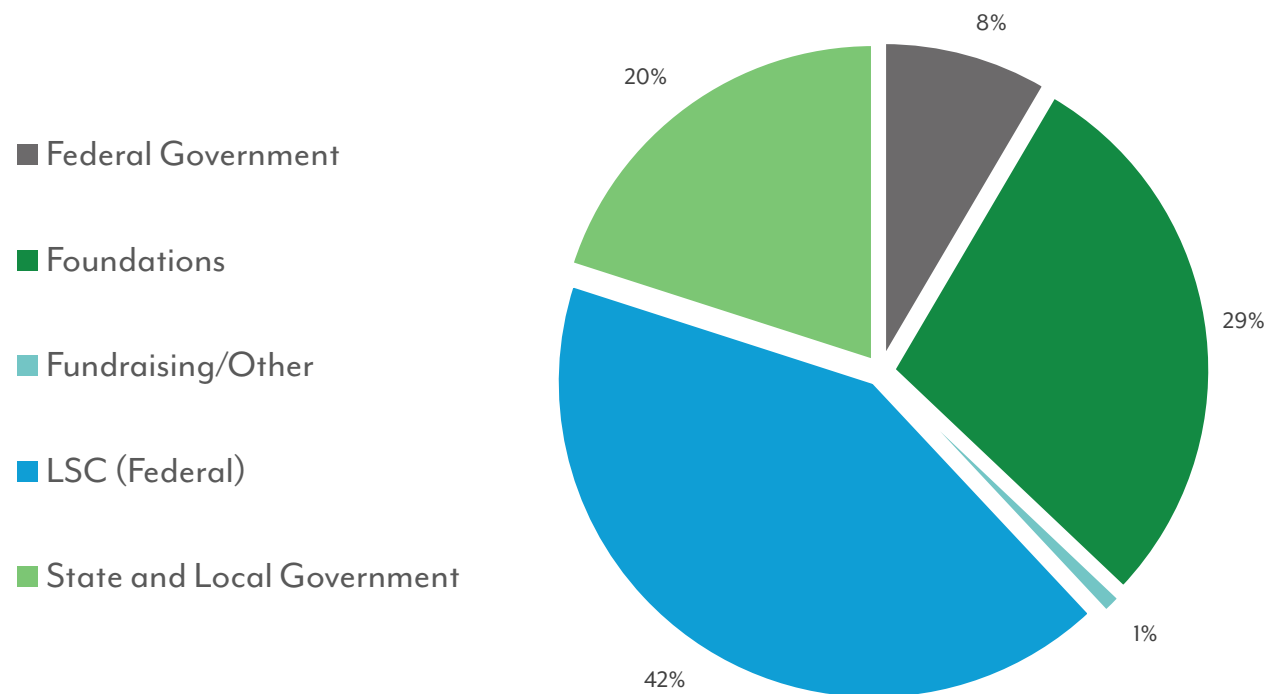


Allies of Justice



An Economic Impact Study on the value of civil legal aid released by the Louisiana Bar Foundation found that for every \$1 supporting programs like SLLS, there is \$13.28 in social return on investment in immediate and long-term cost savings. This includes emergency services, law enforcement, healthcare, justice returns, and other public cost savings. Your support improved the lives of thousands of vulnerable people across Southeast Louisiana in 2024.

Total Revenue: \$17,991,983



How Does Your Gift Make an Impact?

\$100	\$150	\$250	\$500	\$1000
Provides legal advice to a community college student in need, helping to remove obstacles to education and enhance job prospects.	Underwrites a community outreach event to 100 seniors to help them understand their legal rights.	Protects a domestic violence survivor and his or her children from future abuse through an uncontested divorce and permanent stay away order.	Protects a child from abuse and neglect by providing a year of legal representation to a child in need of care.	Helps a disabled homeless veteran secure safe, permanent housing by providing representation for Veterans and Social Security benefits.

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 Baton Rouge Area Foundation
 Bob Woodruff Foundation Grant
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SLLS Board Members R. Lee Landreneau, Regina Joseph and Bianca Moore with Executive Director Laura Tuggle



SLLS and Pro Bono Project staff at a brainstorming session hosted by the Northshore Community Foundation

Donors



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.

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Honorable Sarah S. Vance and R.
Patrick Vance
James Weiss
Kim-Pok Wong

Thank you to all of our 2024 donors for your generous support! Your support helped thousands of families get the critical legal help they needed to overcome life’s hurdles. Please accept our apologies for any omissions.

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