



**Connecticut
Legal Services**

Advancing Justice



 **Working
Together**

**2023-2024
ANNUAL REPORT**

ABOUT US

Mission

Connecticut Legal Services provides access to justice and protects critical civil legal rights of low-income individuals and families through representation, systemic advocacy, advice, collaboration, and education.

Vision

Connecticut Legal Services believes that Connecticut can become a state in which all people are heard, are treated fairly, can meet their basic needs, and have equal opportunities to thrive.

Values

At Connecticut Legal Services, we believe in

■ JUSTICE

We know all people are worthy of respect, compassion, fair treatment, and equal opportunity.

■ EXCELLENCE

We strive to deliver high-quality, effective services with integrity and to continually evaluate and improve our work.

■ EMPOWERMENT

We believe in the power of self-advocacy and strive to foster that skill in our clients and the communities we serve.

■ RACIAL EQUITY

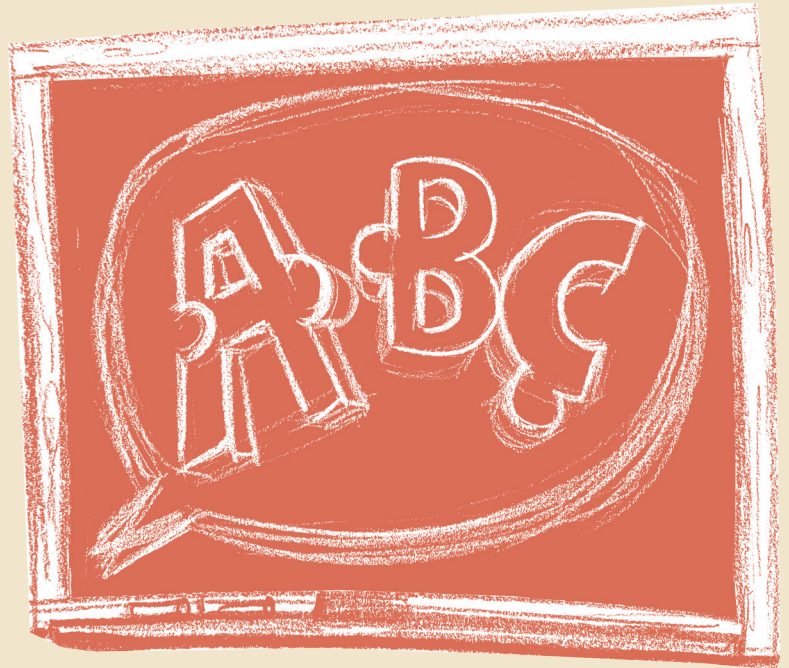
We strive to achieve and maintain racially equitable practices internally and in our services and interactions.

■ COMMITMENT

We understand that achieving our mission requires the unyielding commitment of our staff and board to our clients, to our work, and to one another.

** Names and identifying information in CLS client stories were changed to protect client confidentiality.*

Art by Corey Freer: coreyfreer.squarespace.com



CASE STUDY

CLS helps child get needed services

Harry lives with his grandmother and two younger siblings. At age three, Harry was granted SSI benefits for speech and language delays but later those benefits were terminated after Harry was diagnosed with autism. At a hearing, Harry's CLS advocate demonstrated that he qualified for and was entitled to those benefits and the judge agreed, not only reinstating the SSI but also reimbursing Harry retroactively for benefits he had failed to receive.

In preparing for the SSI hearing, CLS analyzed Harry's special education records and noted that the education services provided to Harry had fallen short. Harry's special education services had been wrongfully terminated during the pandemic. CLS requested a PPT meeting and obtained new evaluations showing that Harry did indeed qualify for those special education services. In addition, CLS sought and obtained additional accommodations, modifications, and related services including two years of tutoring in subjects where Harry struggles most—academics and writing. CLS also helped Harry reconnect with his former therapist (someone he knew and was comfortable with) at the school-based health center, and convinced his current school to arrange Zoom sessions. Now, Harry has an appropriate educational placement, receives the disability benefits that he needs, and is doing well.

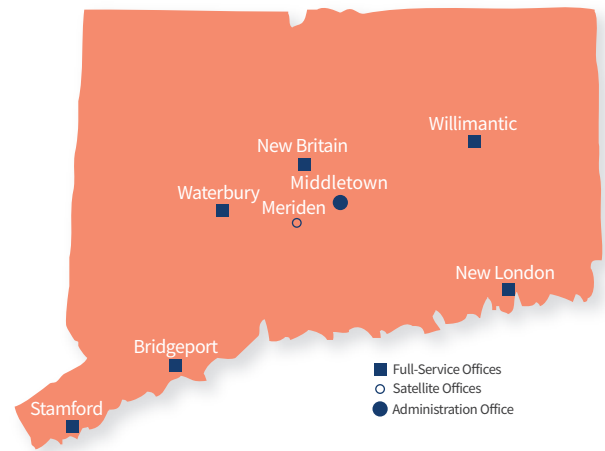
SERVICE AREA, OFFICES, AND STAFF

In the CLS service area—all of Connecticut except the Greater Hartford and New Haven areas—more than 200,000 people are financially eligible for services (2020 census).

CLS has six full-service offices, one satellite office, and one administrative office.

On June 30, 2024, the CLS staff consisted of

42.35	FTE lawyers
11.80	FTE legal assistants
11.00	FTE administrative staff
1.00	FTE paralegals
.55	FTE child welfare advocates



DISTRIBUTION OF CASES

In 2023–2024, Connecticut Legal Services received approximately 15,327 requests for service. We responded by opening 2,326 new cases for legal representation and counseling. We also worked on 1,281 cases opened in previous years. CLS services in these 3,607 cases benefited approximately 8,802 household members, which includes 3,727 children.

DISTRIBUTION OF 3,607 CASES HANDLED IN FISCAL YEAR 2023-2024

Housing and homelessness	42%
Domestic violence, divorce, child support, and other family matters	28%
Education and juvenile law	9%
Health law (including Medicaid, Medicare, and nursing home matters)	5%
Consumer (for elderly)	4%
Social Security	4%
Immigration	4%
Public Benefits and employment	2%
Intellectual Disabilities	1%
Other cases	1%

In addition to working on individual cases, CLS conducted 59 community legal education events attended by 1,257 people.



CASE STUDY

CLS helps elderly man out of hospital

Tyler is in his eighties, has dementia, and was placed in a long-term care (LTC) facility. The short-staffed LTC failed to catch, and thus, treat Tyler's urinary tract infection. This led to serious discomfort and Tyler then began to wander restlessly. Instead of caring for the ailing senior, the facility wrongly committed Tyler to a state mental health hospital without securing medical approval or notifying him, his family, or his conservator. CLS intervened, seeking access to medical records, coordinating with CLS partners to ensure that both the LTC and the state hospital safeguarded Tyler's civil right to control his own medical care, and requesting a hearing required under federal law. The hearing was a success. CLS got the LTC to admit that they failed to spot Tyler's condition, that his room was available, and that they would have to take him back. Once Tyler was re-settled, CLS stepped in again to coordinate a federally-required care plan safeguarding Tyler's right to patient-centered care, ensuring that this kind of mistake could not happen again. In addition, CLS educated both the conservator and the family of their civil rights, providing them with the tools to be advocates for their loved one, laying the groundwork for success.

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Astrid Lebron, Director of Development

Nilda R. Havrilla, Litigation and Advocacy Director

Christine Yanelli, Human Resources Manager

Whit Freer, Information Technology Administrator

Letter from Executive Director and Board Chair

Dear Friends,

For the past forty-seven years CLS has provided access to justice for people living in poverty and helped improve the lives of thousands of clients. But, we could not have fulfilled our mission without the help of the wider community.

CLS relies on countless persons outside our organization to rally together with us to respond to our clients' crises, including community and medical service providers, domestic violence advocates, private attorneys, social workers, funders, families, and friends. Together we have been able to deliver a bigger, better, and longer-lasting impact on the lives of our clients.

Nothing demonstrates the effects of working together better than our clients' stories highlighted in this Annual Report —whether it is Harry's therapist helping him navigate access to educational resources, Tyler's family doggedly advocating for his rights, the network of referral sources helping scared asylum seekers like Emma obtain legal counsel, the Housing Authority Director doing right by Laura, or the domestic violence advocate helping us secure Liza's safety.

By working together, we are able to build trust, strengthen our community relationships, and bring unique and diverse perspectives to overcome challenges that might otherwise seem insurmountable. By working together, we accomplish so much more than we ever could working alone.

We all are part of the bigger picture, and your generous support is an invaluable part of that picture.

Thank you.

With gratitude,



Deborah Witkin

Deborah Witkin
Executive Director



Jeffrey Plotkin

Jeffrey Plotkin, Esq.
Board Chair

Financial Support 2023-2024

GOVERNMENT- BASED GRANTS	SUPPORT
Agency on Aging, Senior Resources (Eastern Connecticut)	\$49,477
Agency on Aging, Southwestern Connecticut Area	\$47,402
Agency on Aging, Western Connecticut Area	\$48,172
City of Middletown	\$10,000
State of Connecticut Department of Social Services	\$595,976
State of Connecticut Judicial Branch	\$26,191
State of Connecticut Department of Developmental Services	\$110,549
State of Connecticut Office of the Chief Public Defender	\$54,888
State of Connecticut Office of Victim Services	\$1,917,989
Town of Ashford	\$1,000
Town of Coventry	\$500
Town of Groton	\$7,260
Town of Mansfield	\$6,500
TOTAL GOVERNMENT BASED GRANTS	\$2,875,904

PRIVATE GRANTS	
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Interest on Lawyer's Trust Account)	\$3,053,292
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Court Fees Grants-In-Aid)	\$5,438,014
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Judicial Branch Grants-In-Aid)	\$922,966
Connecticut Bar Foundation (RTC Eviction Defense)	\$1,060,166
Connecticut Bar Foundation (RTC Restraining Orders)	\$286,913
Connecticut Bar Foundation (Cy Pres Award)	\$48,326
Community Foundation of Eastern CT	\$15,198
Community Foundation of Fairfield County	\$57,510
Jeffrey P. Ossen Family Foundation	\$180,000
The Tow Foundation, Inc.	\$120,000
United Way, Central and Northeastern Connecticut	\$9,000
United Way, Greater Waterbury	\$15,050
United Way, Southeastern Connecticut	\$15,291
TOTAL PRIVATE GRANTS	\$11,221,726

DONATIONS AND OTHER INCOME	
Program Fees	\$61,915
Campaign for Justice	\$277,361
Donated Goods & Services	\$107,099
United Way Donor Designations	\$2,662
Investment Income	\$105,907
Other Income	\$490
TOTAL DONATIONS AND OTHER INCOME	\$555,434
TOTAL CLS INCOME	\$14,653,064

Statements of Financial Position

JUNE 30, 2024 AND JUNE 30, 2023

ASSETS	JUNE 30, 2024	JUNE 30, 2023
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Equivalents—Operating Funds	\$2,706,069	\$3,391,543
Cash in Escrow—Client Funds	\$1,183	\$79,150
Short Term Investments	\$2,081,077	\$1,976,026
Receivables		
Grants and Contracts Receivable	\$669,818	\$595,988
Promises to Give	\$3,388,365	\$1,935,478
Other Receivables	\$51,836	\$40,983
Prepaid Expenses	\$93,461	\$109,331
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS	\$8,991,809	\$8,128,499
FIXED ASSETS		
Property, Equipment, and Software	\$1,399,064	\$1,392,392
Leasehold Improvements	\$287,322	\$287,322
Total Fixed Assets Before Depreciation	\$1,686,386	\$1,679,714
Less, Accumulated Depreciation	(\$1,133,376)	(\$1,082,707)
TOTAL FIXED ASSETS	\$553,010	\$597,007
OTHER ASSETS		
Right of Use Assets	\$1,872,631	\$2,226,504
Security Deposits	\$51,075	\$51,075
TOTAL OTHER ASSETS	\$1,923,706	\$2,277,579
TOTAL ASSETS	\$11,468,525	\$11,003,085
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	JUNE 30, 2024	JUNE 30, 2023
LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable	\$421,614	\$458,051
Accrued Expenses	\$55,074	\$95,977
Refundable Advances	\$1,091,696	\$770,154
Accrued Annual Leave	\$465,852	\$465,068
Current Portion of Lease Liabilities	\$396,934	\$367,449
Client Trust Deposits	\$1,183	\$79,145
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES	\$2,432,353	\$2,235,844
Accrued Pension Liability	\$4,286,366	\$4,984,172
Long-term Lease Liabilities	\$1,633,311	\$2,030,245
TOTAL LONG-TERM LIABILITIES	\$5,919,677	\$7,014,417
TOTAL LIABILITIES	\$8,352,030	\$9,250,261
NET ASSETS		
Without Donor Restrictions		
Attributable to Operations	(\$535,245)	(\$500,840)
Attributable to Pension Liability	\$697,806	\$521,199
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$162,561	\$20,359
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	\$2,953,934	\$1,732,465
TOTAL NET ASSETS	\$3,116,495	\$1,752,824
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	\$11,468,525	\$11,003,085

Campaign for Justice Contributors

JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024

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CASE STUDY

CLS helps woman find safety

Emma was a teacher in her native country in west Africa, which is in the middle of a civil war due to government oppression of the minority group of which Emma is a member. Emma was arrested when the government opposed some of her teaching materials, and during the arrest, the military killed one of her three sons. After her release, Emma found her way to the United States where she was referred to CLS. CLS helped Emma file for asylum and prepare well for what is often a very difficult hearing. Thanks to CLS, Emma's presentation of her case was so successful that the government attorney asked very few questions and the judge granted asylum. Emma now can remain in the U.S. permanently, get a green card in a year, and petition to bring her remaining two sons—who continue to be in danger—to the United States to join her. Emma is very happy and looking forward to reuniting with her children.



Campaign for Justice Contributors

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CASE STUDY

CLS helps woman against her abuser

Liza, a mother of a child with special needs, was victimized and sexually abused by her partner. She escaped and was granted a restraining order that allowed her and her child to stay in the home that she had shared with her abuser, who was removed from the home. However, the abuse and harassment continued. At this point, Liza contacted a domestic violence advocate who helped her obtain shelter through the local domestic violence agency. Liza then took all of her and her child's belongings and left her home. Liza's former partner took full advantage of the situation, manipulating it to bring about eviction proceedings against Liza, to further abuse, harass and annoy her, but also to mar her credit report: an eviction on her record would make it difficult to rent an apartment in the future. The shelter referred Liza to CLS for help. Several CLS attorneys stepped in: one worked on her eviction successfully getting it dismissed and another helped her obtain sole legal and physical custody of her child. By working together, the domestic violence shelter and the CLS attorneys were able to ensure that Liza and her child were safe and protected from her abuser.

Campaign for Justice Contributors

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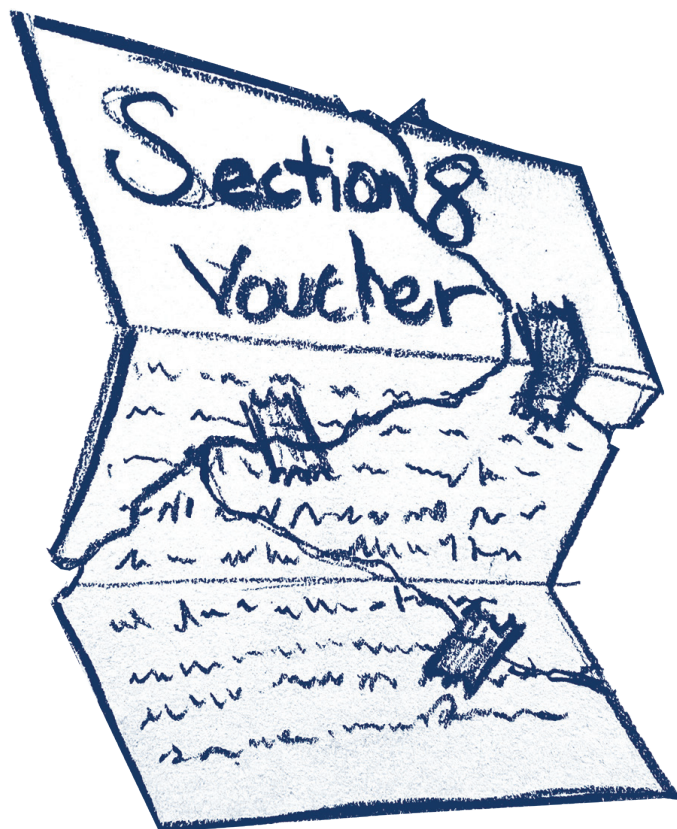
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CASE STUDY

CLS helps mom avoid homelessness

Laura is a single mom who lives with her minor child and adult son. She depends on the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program to help her pay the rent. Her landlord resisted renewing Laura's lease and began eviction proceedings, at which point Laura sought help from CLS. CLS negotiated an agreement with the landlord that gave Laura time to find another apartment and move. During the move, Laura arranged with the city's trash and recycling services to pick up some items she left at the curb. In spite of this, the landlord deceitfully convinced the Housing Authority that he had incurred the cost of removing those items. Without verifying the veracity of the landlord's claim, the Housing Authority issued Laura a termination notice threatening to take away her rent voucher, without which she could not afford to pay the current market rates; Laura and her children would become homeless. CLS represented Laura at the hearing but the hearing officer decided against her even though the landlord didn't attend the hearing or prove his loss, and the grounds for the termination were weak. CLS went to Director of the Housing Authority and requested a review of the determination. The Director overruled the hearing officer's decision and secured Laura's rent voucher. Laura and her children are now living in a new apartment with their crucial rental assistance in place.





Connecticut Legal Services

Advancing Justice

62 Washington Street, 4th Floor
Middletown, Connecticut 06457
povertylaw@ctlegal.org

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1000 Lafayette Boulevard
Bridgeport, CT 06604
203-336-3851; 1-800-809-4434
(serving the Greater Bridgeport area)
bridgeport@ctlegal.org

16 Main Street
New Britain, CT 06051
860-225-8678; 1-800-233-7619
(serving the New Britain and Meriden areas,
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newbritain@ctlegal.org

125 Eugene O'Neil Drive
New London, CT 06320
860-447-0323; 1-800-413-7798
(serving the New London County)
newlondon@ctlegal.org

1177 Summer Street
Stamford, CT 06905
203-348-9216; 1-800-541-8909
(serving the Greater Stamford
and Norwalk areas)
stamford@ctlegal.org

85 Central Avenue
Waterbury, CT 06702
203-756-8074; 1-800-413-7797
(serving the Waterbury and Danbury
areas as well as Litchfield County)
waterbury@ctlegal.org

1125 Main Street
Willimantic, CT 06626
860-456-1761; 1-800-413-7796
(serving Tolland and Windham Counties)
willimantic@ctlegal.org

Satellite Office:

5 Colony Street
Meriden, CT 06450

Administrative Office:

62 Washington Street
Middletown, CT 06457
860-344-0447
povertylaw@ctlegal.org