

Freedom

is the **continuous action**
we all must take...

**to create an even more fair,
more just society.**

- U.S. Congressman John Lewis



2024 ANNUAL REPORT

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY OF CLEVELAND



Executive Director's Note

When it comes to the fight to secure freedom, the late U.S. Congressman John Lewis said it best: *“Freedom is a continuous action we all must take ... and each generation must do its part to create an even more fair, more just society.”*

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland made a promise to our clients that we will continue working together to promote freedom and justice. We have made amazing strides this past year, which I am thrilled to share with you.

It's clients like Daphne (*name changed for privacy*), whose bravery and resilience move us forward on the path to justice. Daphne always paid her rent on time, but each month the property manager would threaten to evict her. She felt that he was unprofessional and rude, so she wrote several letters to the corporate office. When she received no response, she withheld her rent and then received an eviction notice. Daphne called Legal Aid to assist her.

Her Legal Aid attorney represented Daphne in court. Unwilling to face a legal battle, the property manager agreed to dismiss the case quickly and allow Daphne to stay if she would pay back the rent owed. With the help of her Legal Aid attorney, Daphne was able to keep her family housed with no further disruptions.

Daphne is just one of the 25,700 people impacted by the 9,700 cases Legal Aid handled in 2024.

Legal Aid's impact spread much further than just individual cases. We partnered with Cleveland State University to research Ohio's problem with debt-related driver's license suspensions, revealing that 60% of driver's license suspensions in Ohio are due to a failure to pay fines or fees – nothing to do with driving. This research also showed that communities with higher poverty and communities with more people of color experienced higher rates of suspension.

With this data and analysis, many organizations across the state began calling for change. Thanks to this advocacy, Governor Mike DeWine signed House Bill 29, implementing new provisions that limit debt-related suspensions.

To build upon more of this important advocacy work, we established a separate entity – Northeast Ohio Legal Aid – to focus on policy advocacy efforts across Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Lorain Counties aimed at creating new pathways to stable shelter, economic security, health, and safety.

We also broadened our impact by launching our Wealth Building Practice, focused especially on communities of color and historically black neighborhoods. This practice is designed to help close the racial wealth gap through estate planning work and clearing tangled titles, thereby helping to build and transfer generational wealth and reverse the ravages of wealth-stripping and red-lining.

It is our honor and responsibility to do the hard work to create a more fair and more just society. We are beyond grateful for the support and dedication of our client community, partners, volunteers and staff.

With sincere gratitude,



Colleen M. Cotter, Esq.
Executive Director

Legal Aid uses the power of the law to ensure access to basic needs and lift people out of poverty. Thanks to thousands of supporters and community partners, Legal Aid provides services that improve safety and health; promote education and economic stability; secure decent, affordable housing; and ensure the justice system and government entities are accountable and accessible.

Legal Aid's mission is to secure justice, equity, and access to opportunity for and with people who have low incomes through passionate legal representation and advocacy for systemic change.

2024 Finances

REVENUE AND OTHER SUPPORT	2024	2023
Legal Services Corporation (LSC)	\$3,668,770	\$3,598,535
Ohio Access to Justice Foundation	\$7,459,738	\$6,586,109
Donations and Private Grants	\$4,013,876	\$3,766,923
Donated Services	\$1,303,549	\$1,413,579
Other Government Grants	\$1,245,299	\$2,925,765
United Ways	\$1,559,813	\$1,030,426
Partner Agencies (contracts for legal services with partner agencies)	\$1,389,405	\$902,106
Other Income [including investment income (loss), net]	\$1,069,716	\$1,233,610
Special One-Time Philanthropic Gift	\$0	\$2,500,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$21,710,166	\$23,957,053
EXPENSES	2024	2023
Program Services	\$18,338,482	\$17,439,984
Support Services (administration & development)	\$3,775,205	\$3,305,563
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$22,113,687	\$20,745,547
Excess of Revenue over Expenditures	\$(403,521)	\$3,211,506
Beginning Net Assets	\$17,318,763	\$14,107,257
NET ASSETS as of year end	\$16,915,242	\$17,318,763
BREAKDOWN OF NET ASSETS	2024	2023
Without donor restrictions		
-Undesignated	\$0	\$0
-Net Investment in Property	\$4,223,547	\$2,980,746
-Board Designated Endowment	\$40,673	\$36,214
-Board Designated Reserve Fund	\$7,093,814	\$9,726,374
-Board Designated - LLC Capital Reserve	\$416,121	\$355,138
-Board Designated - Foundation Supplemental	\$2,588,803	\$2,500,000
	\$14,362,958	\$15,598,472
Temporarily Restricted	\$1,739,337	\$1,014,104
Permanently Restricted	\$812,947	\$706,187
NET ASSETS	\$16,915,242	\$17,318,763



EXTENDING JUSTICE IN N

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 1905, The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland is the fifth oldest legal aid organization in the United States, and serves residents of Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, and Lorain counties.

WHO WE SERVE

Legal Aid serves people and groups with low-income in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake and Lorain counties, whose household income is 200% of the federal poverty guidelines or below (\$64,300 for a family of 4), and who have a qualifying civil legal issue. We prioritize cases where people face significant risk and Legal Aid attorneys can make a positive difference.

OUR MISSION

is to secure justice, equity, and access to opportunity for and with people who have low incomes through passionate legal representation and advocacy for systemic change.

OUR WORK

We carry out our mission by providing high-quality legal services at no cost to clients with low incomes, helping ensure fairness for all in the justice system—regardless of how much money a person has.

WE ACCOMPLISH OUR WORK BY



LEGAL REPRESENTATION, ASSISTANCE & ADVICE:

representing clients, providing *pro se* assistance, advising individuals to make decisions based on professional guidance



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, COALITIONS, PARTNERSHIPS, AND EDUCATION:

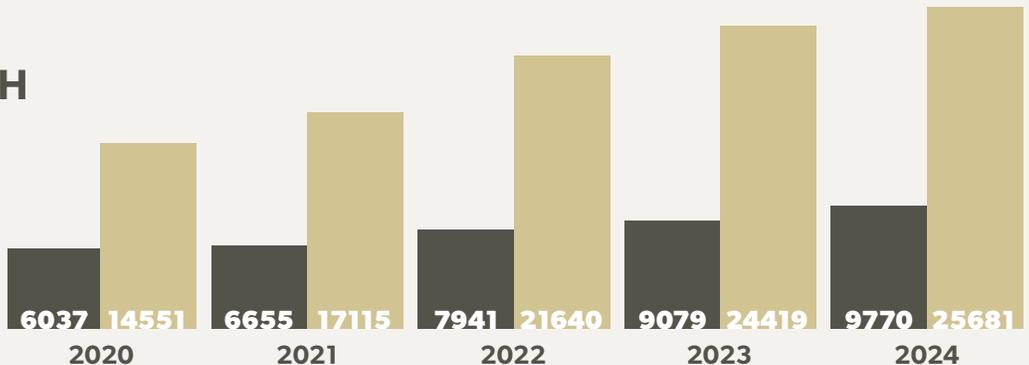
providing legal information and resources, partnering to elevate the impact of our services



IMPROVING SYSTEMS:

partnering with others to improve systems and create broad-based change

LEGAL AID'S GROWTH



2024 OUTCOMES

IMPROVING SAFETY & HEALTH



Clients secured health insurance in **83%** of relevant cases, ensuring they can get quality healthcare.



Clients secured a temporary restraining order in **93%** of relevant cases, safeguarding themselves and their families.

PROMOTE ECONOMIC SECURITY & EDUCATION



Clients secured assets like homes and savings in **98%** of relevant cases, creating wealth and economic mobility.



Students secured educational programming in **93%** of relevant cases, ensuring they have supports to succeed in school.

NORTHEAST OHIO SINCE 1905

2024 BY THE NUMBERS

69% 

of households served **MADE LESS THAN \$25K/YR**



55% of all households helped included **CHILDREN**



19% of all cases involved clients who are **OLDER ADULTS (60+)**



695 cases helped **SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**, impacting **2,080 PEOPLE**

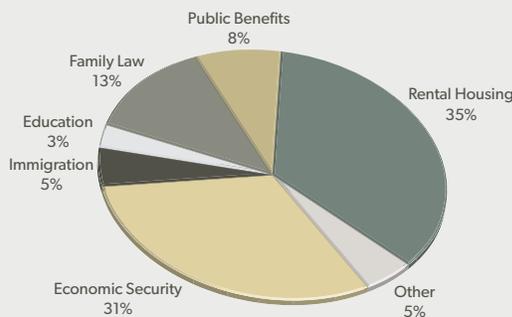


415 cases involved **U.S. VETERANS** or **ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY MEMBERS**, impacting **886 PEOPLE**

LEGAL CASES

Legal Aid handles cases that impact basic needs such as health, shelter and safety, economics and education, and access to justice.

BY PRACTICE AREA



BY COUNTY

8,048 Cuyahoga	739 Lorain	432 Lake
353 Ashtabula	121 Other	83 Geauga



25,700+
Ohioans impacted



312 trainings for social service providers



143 total staff
(**75** staff attorneys)



823 active volunteers
(**542** attorneys)



10,883 volunteer service hours



\$11.9 million = total assets increased & debt reduced for clients

SECURE STABLE & DECENT HOUSING



Clients avoided an eviction in **81%** of relevant cases, keeping families safely housed.



Clients reduced their rent or fees in **91%** of relevant cases, promoting long-term housing stability.

IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY OF JUSTICE SYSTEMS & GOVERNMENT ENTITIES



Our recent work inspired Ohio House Bill 29, which ends driver's license suspensions for unpaid court fines and fees, helping **hundreds of thousands** of Ohio drivers get their licenses back.



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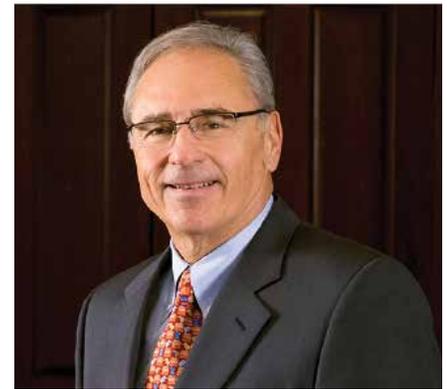
in honor of Michael N. Ungar
Steve Shafron

A special celebration

Long-time Legal Aid volunteer and supporter Steve O’Bryan turned 80 on December 9, 2024. For his birthday, Steve’s family organized an undercover effort to encourage his network to support Legal Aid in his honor. Their idea to mark his milestone birthday was to get 80 people to donate to Legal Aid by his 80th birthday, and their target was to collectively raise \$12,900 (symbolic of 12/9, his date of birth).

In a terrific show of support, **over 100 donors** rallied together to raise **\$20,000** for Legal Aid!

At his party, his family presented Steve with a giant “check” made out to Legal Aid, signed from his “fan club” – a heartfelt gift to celebrate Steve’s milestone and generously advance justice in Northeast Ohio.



in honor of Stephen M. O’Bryan

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Celebrating 119 years of extending justice

Legal Aid's 2024 Annual Meeting included keynote with Ruby Bridges

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland held its **119th Annual Meeting** on Monday, November 25, 2024 at the Hilton Cleveland Downtown. The theme was centered around the words of Legal Aid's 2011 annual meeting keynote speaker, the late U.S. Congressman John Lewis: *"Freedom is not a state; it is an act. Freedom is the continuous action we all must take...to create an even more fair, more just society."*

At the Annual Meeting, **Spangenberg Shibley & Liber LLP**, a staunch supporter of Legal Aid, graciously announced a \$100,000 matching gift challenge. With Spangenberg leading the charge, the matching challenge was met with enthusiastic support, resulting in gifts from 450 unique donors during the 3-week match period and exceeding the fundraising goal!

Held each fall, Legal Aid's Annual Meeting is a chance for philanthropists, community members, nonprofit organizations, and business leaders to gather and reflect on Legal Aid's accomplishments over the past year, as well as learn about new initiatives and plans for the year ahead.

The featured keynote speaker was civil rights icon, activist, and author **Ruby Bridges**. 2024 marked the 70th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court case ruling that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. In her remarks, Ms. Bridges reflected on her personal experience as the first Black student to integrate an all-white elementary school in Louisiana, and echoed the importance of Legal Aid's ongoing civil justice work today.

Ms. Bridges delivered her keynote remarks via a conversation with award-winning American broadcast journalist and Legal Aid supporter, **Lori Stokes**. Ms. Bridges also received Legal Aid's highest honor, the Louis Stokes Paragon Award.



Awards were presented to outstanding employees and volunteers who demonstrate excellence and display profound support for Legal Aid's mission.

Honorees included:

Staff members **Kimberly Barnett-Mills**, **Julia Lauritzen**, **Olivia Pollack**, and **Anna Seballos**, each receiving the Claude E. Clarke Award.

Staff member **Katherine Hollingsworth**, receiving the Leadership Award.

Staff member **Maria Smith**, receiving the C. Lyonel Jones Lifetime Achievement Award.

David Kutik, receiving the Volunteer Lawyers Program Legacy of Justice Award.

Lynn Rowe Larsen and **Daniel Leizerman**, each receiving the Volunteer Lawyers Program Access to Justice Award.

Delores Gray and **Judge Terri Stupica**, each receiving the Volunteer Lawyers Program Community Impact Award.





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