

Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission

Letter to the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary.....	4
--	---

Reports

Disability Rights Maine.....	8
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project.....	30
Legal Services for Maine Elders.....	41
Maine Equal Justice.....	57
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.....	69
University of Maine/Clinics at Maine Law.....	76
Volunteer Lawyers Project.....	87

Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission
Report to the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary
132nd Legislature, Second Regular Session
January 30, 2026

Commissioners:

Sara A. Murphy, Esq.
Pierce Atwood LLP
254 Commercial Street
Portland, Maine 04101
(207) 791-1100

Edmond J. Bearor, Esq.
Rudman Winchell
P.O. Box 1401
Bangor, ME 04402-1401
(207) 947-4501

Hon. Carol R. Emery
Probate Judge Knox County
62 Union Street
Rockland ME 04840
(207) 594-0427

This page intentionally left blank

MAINE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND COMMISSION

January 30, 2026

Anne Carney, Senate Chair
Amy Kuhn, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

RE: 2025 Annual Report of the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission

Dear Senator Carney and Representative Kuhn:

I am pleased to submit the 2025 Annual Report of the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission (MCLSFC) to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, as required by 4 MRSA §18-A.

Edmond J. Bearor, Carol Emery, and I were the three Commissioners who oversaw the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (“Fund”) during this period.

The 2025 Annual Report includes information about the amounts and uses of the funds allocated from the Fund. This compilation includes a report from each of the seven organizations receiving these funds. In 2025, there were three sources of funds pooled in the Fund for distribution to these organizations: the regular pass-through payments made annually pursuant to 4 MRSA §18-A(3-A)(6); distributions from the general fund resulting from the FY 2025 State of Maine budget appropriation for civil legal aid; and a one-time additional budget allocation pursuant to H.P. 163 - LD 258 Chapter 412 PL.

2025 MCLSF Fund Distribution Per 4 MRSA §18-A(3-A)(6)

The total amount distributed in 2025 from regular pass-through payments was \$1,777,927.25. The distributions in 2025 were made according to the following formula and in the following amounts:

Organizations Receiving Regular Pass-Through Funds from Maine Civil Legal Services Fund	% Share of Allocation	Amount Received (\$)
Disability Rights Maine	3.0000	53,337.82
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project	6.0000	106,675.64
Legal Services for Maine Elders	22.0000	391,144.00

Maine Equal Justice	10.5000	186,682.37
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.	47.5000	844,515.43
Univ. of Maine/Clinics at Maine Law	6.5000	115,565.27
Volunteer Lawyers Project	4.5000	80,006.72
Total	100.0000	\$1,777,927.25

2025 General Fund Allotment

Beginning in FY 2023, the State of Maine annual budget included an annual allocation of funds from the general fund for civil legal services to benefit organizations that qualify as beneficiaries of the Fund. Payments were distributed according to the same percentage share of allocation of the existing MCLSF funds to seven organizations in CY 2024, totaling \$1,300,000.00, as follows:

Organizations Receiving General Fund Allotment via Maine Civil Legal Services Fund in CY 2024	% Share of Allocation	Amount Received (\$)
Disability Rights Maine	3.0000	39,000.00
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project	6.0000	78,000.00
Legal Services for Maine Elders	22.0000	286,000.00
Maine Equal Justice	10.5000	136,500.00
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.	47.5000	617,500.00
Univ. of Maine/Clinics at Maine Law	6.5000	84,500.00
Volunteer Lawyers Project	4.5000	58,500.00
Total	100.0000	\$1,300,000.00

One-Time Additional Budget Allocation of \$4 Million

Pursuant to H.P. 163 - LD 258 Chapter 412 PL, the seven civil legal aid providers receiving allocations via the Fund are scheduled to receive a one-time allocation of \$4 million over FY 2024 and FY 2025. In FY 2025, the distributions were made as follows:

Organizations Receiving One-Time Additional Budget Allocation in CY 2024	% Share of Allocation	Amount Received (\$)
Disability Rights Maine	3.0000	75,000.00
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project	6.0000	150,000.00
Legal Services for Maine Elders	22.0000	550,000.00
Maine Equal Justice	10.5000	262,500.00
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.	47.5000	1,187,500.00
Univ. of Maine/Clinics at Maine Law	6.5000	162,500.00
Volunteer Lawyers Project	4.5000	112,500.00
Total	100.0000	\$2,500,000.00

The remaining distribution of \$1.5 million of the one-time allocation of \$4 million will be made in FY 2026.

In total, **\$5,577,927.25** was distributed among seven civil legal services organizations for CY 2025 via the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund, as compared to a total distribution of **\$5,059,447.36** in CY 2024.

The Maine Civil Legal Services Fund plays a critical role in funding access to justice for Maine community members who are low income, elderly, and/or have a disability. As Commissioners, we will continue to monitor the good work performed by these organizations in order to ensure that the allocations from the Fund are used in a manner that will most efficiently and effectively maintain and enhance access to justice in Maine, consistent with the provisions of 4 MRSA §18-A. On behalf of all persons who benefit from this Fund, we thank you for your support.

If you or any members of the Committee have questions, please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 207.791.1185 or smurphy@pierceatwood.com.

Respectfully submitted,



Sara A. Murphy, Esq., Chair
Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission

Enclosure

cc: Edmund J. Bearor, Esq., Commissioner
Hon. Carol R. Emery, Commissioner

This page intentionally left blank



**DISABILITY RIGHTS MAINE
2025 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
MAINE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND COMMISSION
January 21, 2026**

I. Overview

Disability Rights Maine (DRM) is Maine's statewide Protection and Advocacy agency for people with disabilities. Incorporated in 1977 as a private, nonprofit corporation, DRM's mission is to advance justice and equality by enforcing rights and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in Maine.

DRM is part of a national network of federally funded and mandated disability rights Protection & Advocacy agencies, which are the largest providers of legally based advocacy and legal services for people with disabilities in the United States. As Maine's designated P&A, DRM has standing to bring lawsuits on behalf of people with disabilities, can conduct investigations into allegations of abuse and neglect of people with disabilities, and has the statutory authority to gain access to facilities and programs where people with disabilities receive services.

DRM's priorities focus on ensuring individuals with disabilities are safe from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; are able to live and work in integrated communities and to direct their own lives and services; are not being subjected to unlawful disability-based discrimination; and have access to health care, housing, education, employment and public accommodations.

Using federal and state funds, DRM provides no-cost advocacy and legal services to people with disabilities who have experienced a disability-related violation of their legal or civil rights. DRM currently employs 38 people, 10 of whom are attorneys.

II. Maine Civil Legal Services Funding

DRM has received MCLSF funding to support the provision of legal services to people with disabilities for many years. It has long received 2% and then 3% of the

160 Capitol Street, Suite 4, Augusta, ME 04330
207.626.2774 • 1.800.452.1948 • Fax: 207.621.1419 • drme.org

MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Maine Civil Legal Services Fund until the 2025 public hearing, when the Commission increased it to 5% on October 8, 2025. DRM has requested an increase in the percentage of the Fund every year, and is very grateful to the Commission for this increase, which will help us sustain an attorney position within our organization and mitigate significant staffing losses in 2025, including two attorneys. DRM uses MCLSF funding to supplement our existing funding in cases where the client has a disability, has an income below the federal poverty level, and has experienced disability-based discrimination or a violation of their rights.

At least one in four people in Maine are people with disabilities. Unfortunately, disability and poverty remain closely linked. Between 2017-2021, 52% of working-age Mainers with a disability lived in or near poverty, which was more than twice the rate for Mainers without a disability. Given the significant need for no-cost civil legal services within the disability community, the MCLSF award is essential to maintaining DRM's ability to provide legal representation to Mainers with disabilities whose incomes are below the federal poverty level.

We appreciate the opportunity to highlight some of the important work that DRM attorneys engaged in on behalf of Mainers with disabilities in 2025.

A. Types of cases handled

As outlined in the table below, DRM attorneys handled 501 cases in 2025. Although DRM continues to see an increasing demand for legal services, we had a reduction in staff in 2025, including having to let go of two attorneys, with a third, our education attorney, planning to leave in May 2026. This has led to a reduction in cases handled from 698 in 2024. However, the recent increase in MCLSF funding resulted in DRM's ability to retain an attorney who had been laid off, and to train her to take our education cases as our long-time education attorney departs. Additionally, due to state funding that previously went to the Mainer Center on Deafness and was increased for the first time in 12 years, DRM has a new attorney—the first ever in our Deaf Services programs—licensed to practice as of October 2025. She has degrees in Linguistics and Deaf Studies, and is an exciting addition to DRM, as we have not previously had a signing attorney to work of Deaf access issues.

As also outlined in the table below, the majority of individual cases involved protecting people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and other rights violations; advocating for community integration; employment-related advocacy; and securing equal access to education for students with disabilities. DRM attorneys also handled a significant number of guardianship cases and housing-related cases.

While case numbers rose in many areas, the most significant increases in 2025 were in the areas of education, government services, and public accommodations. Requests for assistance with education-related matters continue to rise at a high rate. DRM also handled a significant number of cases involving individuals seeking to terminate, modify, or avoid guardianships.

2025 Attorney Cases Handled
Case Problem Area (Based on Total # of Active Client Cases)

Abuse, Neglect and Other Rights Violations.....	92
Assistive Technology	21
Community Integration	77
Due Process	11
Education	132
Employment.....	14
Government Services & Public Accommodations	28
Guardianship.....	92
Housing.....	34
Total.....	501

Please refer to the [Appendix](#) for selected case narratives for cases closed in 2025.

B. Number of people served

DRM attorneys provided direct representation in 501 cases to 459 individuals with disabilities in 2025. DRM non-attorney advocates, who are supervised and supported by attorneys, provided services to an additional 514 Mainers with disabilities. In total, DRM provided direct advocacy services to 943 Maine citizens with disabilities in 2025.

In addition, when DRM is unable to provide direct advocacy services for various reasons, individuals seeking assistance will receive information and referral services. An additional 1,737 individuals were served in this manner.

Although this report is focused on the individual legal advocacy provided by DRM attorneys in 2025, it is worth noting that DRM attorneys and advocates engaged in a significant amount of work that is not captured here. DRM attorneys and advocates were: a) conducting extensive outreach to unserved and underserved people with disabilities in locations throughout the state; b) conducting monitoring visits in residential treatment facilities, hospitals, juvenile justice facilities, and other places where people with disabilities live and/or receive services; c) serving on boards and commissions; d) providing training and technical assistance on the legal rights of

people with disabilities to individuals with disabilities, service providers, state employees, and the private bar; e) educating policymakers about issues impacting people with disabilities; f) speaking to the press on issues related to disability; and g) engaging in systemic advocacy efforts. During the 2025 federal fiscal year, DRM attorneys and advocates conducted 494 monitoring/outreach events, reaching 18,124 people and 237 training events reaching 9,580 people.

C. Demographic information about people served

Demographic information regarding the cases handled by DRM attorneys in 2025 is included below. This data covers the total number of unique clients with active service requests in 2025 where an attorney was the primary assigned staff.

Age:

Birth – 18.....	145
19 – 30.....	95
31 – 40.....	80
41 – 50.....	42
51 – 60.....	49
61 – 70.....	34
71 & Over.....	14
Total.....	459

Ethnicity/Race:

Hispanic/Latino.....	7
American Indian/Alaskan Native	5
Asian.....	2
Black/African American.....	12
White.....	348
Two or More Races.....	17
Ethnicity/Race Unknown	68
Total.....	459

Gender:

Female.....	205
Male.....	241
Non-Binary.....	6
Unknown/Declines to Respond	7
Total.....	459

Primary Disability:

Absence of Extremities.....	1
-----------------------------	---

Autism.....	108
Blind/Low Vision.....	6
Brain Injury	14
Cerebral Palsy.....	11
Deafness	9
Epilepsy	2
Heart/Circulatory	2
Intellectual Disability.....	148
Mental Illness	125
Muscular Dystrophy.....	2
Muscular/Skeletal Disability	2
Neurological Disability	13
Orthopedic/Physical Disability	8
Tourette Syndrome.....	3
Other.....	5
Total.....	459

Income:

100% FPL.....	271
125% FPL.....	86
Over 125%	88
Unknown.....	14
Total.....	459

D. Geographic area actually served

DRM has a statewide service area. In 2025, DRM provided legal representation to Mainers with disabilities in all sixteen of Maine’s counties. See below for additional information regarding the geographic distribution of matters handled by attorneys.

County:

Androscoggin.....	46
Aroostook.....	22
Cumberland.....	109
Franklin.....	6
Hancock.....	13
Kennebec.....	52
Knox	9
Lincoln	15
Oxford	17
Penobscot.....	65

Piscataquis	2
Sagadahoc	6
Somerset	20
Waldo	16
Washington.....	9
York.....	50
Out-of-State	2
Total.....	459

E. Status of matters handled, including whether they are complete or open

DRM had 501 active attorney cases in 2025. During 2025, 298 cases were opened and assigned to attorneys, and 382 attorney cases were closed. There were also 639 active matters handled by non-attorney advocates in 2025, provided with the support and under the supervision of DRM attorneys.

F. Whether and to what extent the organization has complied with its proposal submitted to the Commission

DRM used MCLSF funding in 2025, as we have in the past, to supplement our existing funding in cases where the client has a disability, has an income below or around the federal poverty level, and has experienced disability-based discrimination or a violation of their rights. The MCLSF funding helps expand our ability to serve Mainers with disabilities who are unable to otherwise access legal representation.

DRM complied with the terms of the award by using MCLSF funding to pay staff attorney salaries to represent Mainers with disabilities with incomes below or around the federal poverty level, and not for any other expenses such as administrative costs, support staff salaries, or non-attorney advocate salaries. This allowed us to be as flexible and as broad as possible in using the MCLSF allocation to fund specific cases handled by specific attorneys.

G. Outcome measurements used to determine compliance

The case numbers and other data included above demonstrate compliance with MCLSF requirements. DRM has continued to serve Mainers with disabilities statewide, serving individuals in every Maine county.

In addition, when DRM closes a case, the reason for closing is documented and reported out as required by various grants. For the 2025 attorney cases reported here, 71% were resolved partially or completely in the client’s favor. Of the balance of those cases, 16% were closed because either the situation changed and the client no

longer needed legal assistance or because the client was not responsive. About 4% of cases were closed because no issues were resolved for the client.

Every year, DRM prepares comprehensive program reports for our federal funders, called Program Performance Reports (PPRs). In these detailed reports, DRM outlines all of its activities in each of the programs, including case and non-case activity and explains how our actions furthered the priorities DRM has established for each of its programs. DRM has similar reporting requirements related to state and private contracts. All of these compliance and outcome measures are also applied to cases that are partially supported by MCLSF funds.

H. Unmet and underserved needs

DRM, like all other civil legal service providers, receives far more requests for assistance than we are able to accept. We must turn down approximately 72% of the requests we receive for direct advocacy assistance. We continue to see significant unmet needs in the areas of education, guardianship, and housing, discussed in more detail below.

Education-Related Advocacy: DRM has two full-time education attorneys, but one will be leaving DRM in May and will not be replaced. The other attorney is onboarding to fill this part of DRM's legal practice, and so, beginning in May 2026, DRM will continue with only one education attorney. DRM receives many more calls for educational advocacy than we are able to provide with both attorneys, and our capacity to take education cases is reduced. We are contemplating ways to mitigate this loss of capacity, including exploring having other DRM attorneys take on some cases, expanding our ability to provide technical assistance to families in lieu of direct representation, and exploring pro bono assistance in some matters. The need for educational advocacy appears to be growing exponentially. As schools struggle with staffing challenges, the needs of many students with disabilities are simply not being met. When students are not getting the supports they need, this can occasionally lead to behaviors that interfere with their ability to access their education, and many schools resort to suspending, expelling, or otherwise removing students from school. In 2025, this practice appears to be increasing. Students with disabilities are entitled to services to address disability-related behaviors so they can access equal educational opportunities. DRM prioritizes cases where students are excluded from school for all or part of their day, and there is such significant demand for representation in those situations that they comprise the vast majority of our education docket. School exclusions have significant impacts on the students themselves, but these impacts quickly spread to the entire family, especially for families already struggling to make ends meet. It is unfortunately all too common for a prolonged school exclusion to result in a parent losing their ability to work, which can result in housing instability

and food insecurity for the entire family. We continue to see a growing need for this vitally important work and are very concerned to reduce our representation in this area.

Guardianship Defense/Termination: DRM attorneys continue to represent adults seeking to avoid, terminate, or limit guardianships, and to restore their basic rights in Maine probate courts. DRM issued a report in October 2024 that analyzed three years' worth of guardianship data, which showed that approximately 75% of "Respondents" go through guardianship proceedings in court without legal representation. DRM has 2-3 attorneys at any given time who have open cases representing Respondents in guardianship matters, and we resolved approximately 16 guardianship matters via direct representation in 2025. When DRM cannot accept a case for direct representation, we provide the individual with information on their right to a court-appointed attorney. There remains a significant shortage of attorneys who represent Respondents well in guardianship matters to meet the need.

Housing-Related Advocacy: DRM does not currently have an attorney dedicated to housing cases. Instead, attorneys across DRM represent clients in disability-related housing matters. Although we have successfully advocated for clients (see case examples in Appendix), we receive many more calls for assistance with housing issues than we are able to fulfill. We are also seeing an increasing number of requests for assistance from individuals who are at significant risk of losing their housing for reasons unrelated to disability. While we refer those cases to Pine Tree Legal Assistance, we know the demand for housing-related advocacy far outpaces our collective ability to meet it.

**DISABILITY RIGHTS MAINE
2025 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
MAINE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND COMMISSION
January 21, 2026**

APPENDIX

Selected Narratives for Cases Closed in 2025

DRM Representation Results in Termination of Exploitative Guardianship.

DRM was contacted by a 26-year-old woman with an intellectual disability requesting assistance with preventing her guardians from firing her case manager against the client's wishes and, ultimately, with terminating her guardianship. One of the guardians was being investigated for financially exploiting our client. A DRM attorney represented the woman in court in objecting to the guardian's plan to fire the case manager. In response, the guardians filed a variety of pleadings, instead asking the court to expand the limited guardianship to a full guardianship. The guardians attempted to interfere with the attorney's representation of the client by asking the court for the dismissal of the attorney. The attorney was able to succeed in thwarting these attempts to undermine the client's rights, and the court denied the guardian's various motions and petitions. The attorney was then able to negotiate an agreement with the guardians in which they resigned. Because of DRM's representation, the court terminated the guardianship, and one of the former guardians was substantiated by APS for financial exploitation.

DRM Helps Client Obtain Court-Appointed Attorney After Fourteen-Month Delay.

A woman in her 50s with hearing loss and a developmental disability contacted DRM for assistance with terminating her parent's guardianship of her. DRM advised the client of her right to a court-appointed attorney to assist, and helped the client draft a letter to the court requesting one. In response, the court communicated that it would need a medical evaluation that the client no longer required a guardian in order to proceed. This is an incorrect assessment of the law; the court is required to appoint an attorney upon a person who wants to modify or terminate a guardianship to which they are subject. The DRM attorney then assisted the client in writing a second letter to the court asserting this, and, in the alternative, requesting the court consider the request as a reasonable accommodation. In response, the court sent the client a nearly identical letter requiring a medical evaluation. At this point, DRM agreed to a limited representation to help the client exercise her right to an attorney. The DRM attorney entered a limited entry of appearance and submitted a motion and legal memo, stating the law and explaining that the client's ability to obtain the medical evaluation sought by the court had been removed by virtue of the guardianship—the client's ability to consent to any medical

evaluation belonged to the guardian, who was the adverse party. The court granted the motion soon thereafter and acknowledged the client's right to an attorney. However, it took the court over three more months to find an attorney to represent her. Once an attorney was appointed, the DRM attorney contacted the new attorney to consult and to connect the client with her new attorney. Overall, it took almost 14 months between the time the client first contacted the court until her right to an attorney under the law was recognized and completed. DRM has continuing concerns that probate courts do not recognize the rights of individuals subject to guardianship to have attorneys appointed, as well as other due process concerns, and will continue to monitor these issues, both through individual cases and systemically.

DRM Helps Client Terminate Guardianship After He Obtained Protection from Abuse Order Against Guardian. DRM was contacted by a 39-year-old man with an intellectual disability seeking to terminate his guardianship, having recently obtained a temporary Protection from Abuse order (PFA) against his guardian. Promptly, a DRM attorney filed a Motion for Temporary Restraining Order (TRO), requesting immediate restoration of the client's decision-making authority in light of the PFA, his history of successful decision-making, and imminent risk of harm absent suspension of the guardianship. Within 24 hours of receipt, the court ordered the TRO, suspending the guardianship pending final hearing on the Petition for Termination. As a result of DRM's representation, the court terminated his guardianship, having found the basis for the guardianship no longer existed.

DRM Ensures Hospital Policy Complies with Trauma-Informed Care Principles After Violating Patient's Rights. A 48-year-old PAIMI-eligible individual was involuntarily held in the behavioral health emergency department of a general hospital. During their stay, the individual was forcibly made to change into scrubs despite disclosing a history of trauma and suggesting alternative solutions to ensure safety. Hospital staff informed the individual that if they did not comply, they would forcibly remove their clothing. DRM found no evidence that an individualized safety assessment had been conducted prior to this action, even though the individual did not pose an imminent safety risk. DRM worked with the individual to meet with hospital administration, and a formal complaint was filed. As a result, hospital administration issued a formal written apology to the individual, acknowledging that their processes were not in compliance with trauma-informed care principles. The administration further stated that substantial staff reeducation would be undertaken to ensure that future searches are based on individualized risk assessments and conducted with respect for patient dignity.

DRM Assistance Allows Client to Remain in Home and While Seeking More Independent Housing. DRM assisted a 50-year-old, PAIMI-eligible woman facing

eviction from her community mental health group home after the state's Medicaid Managed Care Organization (MCO) denied her coverage. Her case manager's request for evaluation for a different group home led the MCO to reassess her overall eligibility, resulting in the service denial. DRM identified violations of her due process rights in the MCO's actions and filed an administrative appeal with pre-hearing motions and subpoenas. Before the hearing, the MCO reversed its decision, allowing her to remain in the group home and be waitlisted for alternative placements. DRM's continued advocacy enabled her to work with her case manager to seek independent housing, mental health services, and rental assistance.

DRM Assistance Results in a Myriad of Education Services for Child After Nearly Two Years of Languishing in Secluded Classroom.

Our client was a 14-year-old girl with autism, whose case manager and mother reached out to DRM with concerns that the child had been removed from her classroom to an isolated location in the school, and was coming home every day with the same color-by-number math sheet. When a DRM attorney investigated their concerns, it became clear the child had been provided with scant educational programming for almost two years.

Moreover, the child had been removed from her self-contained functional life skills classroom, placed in a small room with one ed tech for one period of the day, and left to sleep in the sensory room for the remainder of the day, nearly every day. Her participation in physical education had stopped mid-year because an educational technician had resigned; speech services were usually undelivered because our client was usually sleeping; no functional behavioral assessment had ever been done; it was not possible to determine the child's present levels of academic and functional performance; and the school was overdue with the student's triennial evaluation. DRM filed a complaint and due process hearing request for the denial of a free appropriate public education and violation of the child's right to be educated in the least restrictive environment. Through DRM's advocacy at mediation, the district agreed to provide expert AAC and psychological evaluations and appropriate consultation to implement recommendations and create appropriate educational programming. In addition, the district agreed to a re-entry plan designed to allow the child to return to a supported and integrated classroom setting in the fall, provide daily communications with the parent, perform expedited evaluations remaining under the triennial obligations, staff an educational technician position for the child, and provide specific compensatory physical education.

Child Receives Educational Support and Trauma-Informed Care After Suffering Restraints and Seclusion in School.

The parents of an 8-year-old boy with severe generalized anxiety disorder and ADHD reached out to DRM with concerns that their son had been removed from his 2nd grade classroom, put on a shortened 2.5-hour school day, and placed into a self-contained and virtually empty

classroom where he was subjected to scores of restraints and seclusions. Throughout the school year, the district had failed to provide the parents with any report cards, progress reports, or indication that their son had been given any education whatsoever. When the parents reach out to DRM, they shared that their child had developed signs of trauma, emotional regression, and general fear of leaving their presence. A DRM attorney assisted the family filed local and state Chapter 33 complaints for illegal use of restraint and seclusion. The DRM attorney then directly represented the child in a due process hearing request for the violation of the child's right to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Through mediation, the district agreed to engage an expert to lead a team of school-based and outside professionals, parents, and child, in creating a re-entry plan to support the child in the general education setting, and for a full day of school. The child was awarded significant compensatory education in the form of a fund for accessing tutoring and other educational programming, as well as reimbursement for expenses associated with emotional therapy. The district also agreed to have its teachers and staff receive training from a national organization, in practices designed to appropriately support children's behavioral-health needs and eliminate the use of restraint and seclusion.

DRM Represents Client in Terminating Guardianship, Clearing the Path for Him to Obtain His Driver's License. Client, a 26-year-old male with autism, had been under his mother's guardianship since turning 18. He lived in a group home and had maintained stable employment for the past three years. Additionally, he had successfully completed his driver's education course and fulfilled all required driving hours. However, his guardian refused to sign the paperwork for his license exam, citing safety concerns. With support from his case manager and staff, he sought to gain independence by terminating his guardianship. A DRM attorney represented him in filing a petition for guardianship termination. The guardianship was successfully terminated after a contested hearing, and the client is now pursuing his driver's license.

DRM Successfully Defends Against Client Being Put Under Unnecessary Guardianship. A young woman with a developmental disability contacted DRM after her mother filed for emergency guardianship of her. The client wanted independence and privacy from her mother, and, in an effort to prevent the client from asserting these boundaries, the mother had filed to become her guardian instead. A DRM attorney represented the client, and, after a hearing, the judge denied the petition for emergency guardian because there was no basis for a guardianship at all, let alone an emergency one. After the initial hearing, the attorney was able to negotiate a resolution in which the mother dismissed the petition for guardianship, and our client retaining her full rights.

DRM Assists Parent in Maine Human Rights Commission Complaint after Early Childhood Education Program Abruptly Discharges Client on Basis of Disability. The parent of a 3-year-old contact DRM after he was abruptly discharged from the early childhood development program for a clear manifestation of his disability. Even after the mother attempted to work with the program to seek ways to accommodate his son, the program refused to discuss their decision. A DRM attorney worked with the family to file a complaint against the program with the Maine Human Rights Commission. Ultimately, they successfully engaged in settlement negotiations and resolved the matter prior to the outcome of the investigation with a monetary settlement to compensate the family for the discrimination. During this time, the child had been successfully attending another early childhood education program with no issues.

DRM Helps Parent File DOE Complaint Which Results in Client Returning to School from Segregated Day Treatment Program. DRM was contacted by the parent of a 9-year-old student with autism regarding a suspension from school and a proposal to return him to a segregated day treatment program in the school district where he had previously been subjected to seclusion and restraint. The DRM attorney provided extensive self-advocacy assistance to support the student in filing a complaint with the Maine DOE. After the complaint was filed, the school proposed a resolution that was acceptable to the family, and the hearing was withdrawn. The school agreed to conduct a functional behavioral assessment and develop a behavior intervention plan designed to support the student's transition to a full school day. The student and the parent sought a slow transition back to school, beginning with targeted 1:1 instruction and participation in the gifted and talented programming at the school, as well as participation in band. The student was happy to avoid a return to the day treatment program and has been doing well in school since these changes were made.

Student Able to Return to Full School Day and Access to Services After DRM Files for Due Process Hearing. DRM was contacted by the parent of a 7-year-old with autism regarding concerns that his school had removed him from class and placed him on 2 hours per day of tutoring (which the school could not even provide) due to what everyone agreed were disability-related behaviors. Her efforts to secure continued education were not successful, and DRM filed a due process hearing. After filing the hearing, the parties reached a negotiated resolution which provided for the return to a full school day in the district's specialized autism program, a functional behavioral assessment by a mutually agreed-upon expert, a comprehensive communication evaluation, and an AAC evaluation by an outside provider. There was an agreement to use the evaluations to develop a plan to ensure that the student, who is academically very gifted, maintains access to non-disabled peers. In addition, the

agreement provided for over 200 hours of compensatory education to address the time out of school and a portion of fees to DRM. The student is now attending school all day, every day and he really likes his new school.

DRM Files Due Process Hearing After CDS Fails to Provide Services to Child.

The grandparent of a 4-year-old boy with autism contacted DRM with concerns that, although her grandson had qualified for an IEP when he turned 3, he was still waiting for services. He had never received a placement, never received any of the specially designed instruction under his IEP, and never received occupational therapy or speech therapy under his IEP, outside of a few appointments CDS had made available at a provider's office a great distance from the family's home. In addition, the grandmother's local school district was refusing to allow the child to attend their pre-K program because they "didn't have the services" to support him there. The grandmother was especially concerned because her grandson would be entering kindergarten the following year, potentially without having received any services whatsoever before starting school. DRM filed a due process hearing request against CDS on the child's behalf. Shortly after filing, an educational technician was hired and trained, which prompted the local pre-K to "accept" the child into their program. However, the pre-K immediately implemented exclusionary practices including unilaterally determining, based on the child's diagnosis, that the child should stay indoors for recess instead of going outdoors to play with his peers "until they got to know him better," and having him spend time in a "calming room" instead of the classroom. DRM assisted the family in mediation to ensure that the child was not segregated at recess or in the pre-K program. DRM also assisted the family obtain considerable compensatory services to make up for nearly a year of lost speech therapy and occupational therapy. In addition, DRM ensured that the child received an AAC evaluation, which CDS had not previously contemplated even though the child was nonverbal. The evaluation led to the successful trialing of a speech generating communication device, which the child continues to use. Finally, CDS agreed to provide compensatory services on a schedule that considered the child's needs: not only would he receive some services while in the public pre-K program, but compensatory services would be provided while the child attended his regular day care program in the community. Notably, this program had been available as a potential placement for IEP services since the child had first turned 3; as a result of DRM's involvement, this "oversight" ended.

Client Liberated from Abusive Guardianship with DRM's Representation.

DRM was contacted by a 25-year-old woman with an intellectual disability who was under her mother's guardianship. Her mother also served as her shared living provider. Over time, several Adult Protective Services referrals were made against the guardian for alleged financial exploitation, and there had been instances of police

involvement. Despite the guardianship, the client was fully capable of making her own decisions, and had full support for terminating the guardianship from her case manager, the agency who oversaw the shared living service, her community support provider, and a crisis worker who had worked closely with her. A DRM attorney represented the client in petitioning for termination of the guardianship. At the contested hearing in August, the attorney presented testimony from the client's full support team. The guardian opposed the petition, offering only testimony about the client's inability to complete certain chores independently. The judge terminated the guardianship from the bench. The client is now exploring new shared living placements and hopes that living apart from her mother will improve their relationship.

Another Abusive Guardianship Terminated with DRM Assistance. A 23-year-old woman with autism contacted DRM requesting assistance with terminating the guardianship to which she was subject. The woman's guardian served as her shared living provider; and, following substantiated reports of substance use, neglect, and emotional abuse, the oversight agency had terminated its contract with the guardian, leaving the client without residential support or a home. Soon after, the woman moved in with a relative. A DRM attorney represented the client in petitioning to terminate the guardianship. Because of the DRM's assistance, the client's rights were restored. She is able to access new services and is taking steps towards getting her own apartment.

DRM Representation Leads to Formal Recognition that Community-Based Mental Health Group Homes are Subject to the Fair Housing Act. DRM represented a 29-year-old man in a claim of housing discrimination through the administrative process of the Maine Human Rights Commission against an agency running his former community mental health group home. DRM's previous two reasonable accommodation requests to the agency had been denied, in part as the agency repeatedly denied that they were housing subject to federal and state fair housing laws. DRM represented the client based on a violation of his fair housing rights. A DRM attorney assisted the client in through the complaint process, including the filing of an objection to the investigator's report and the related representation of the client at the Commission's hearing. While the Commission ultimately concluded that no reasonable grounds for discrimination were present, it did conclude that the agency was in fact considered to be a "housing provider" and thus was subject to federal and state fair housing laws. As a result, all 24 agencies providing community mental health group home services in Maine are clearly subject to state and federal fair housing laws, allowing opportunity for individuals' housing rights, as related to these residences, to be protected.

Client Facing Eviction Able to Remain in Home While Searching for New Services Due to DRM's Intervention. A 35-year old man had been living as a resident in a supported apartment-style mental health group home for about 5 years. He received a notice telling him his services were being terminated and he needed to leave his residence. However, he needed more time to find alternative housing, and he faced the strong likelihood that, at the end of the notice period, he would become homeless. A DRM attorney researched property records and funding sources related to the client's building, and advocated for the client's rights as a tenant of the unit. The agency running the group home concluded that the client would be allowed to stay in the unit, even if the mental health services were terminated. The client was therefore able to begin mental health services through an assertive community treatment team for his needs to be met while remaining in his home.

DRM Helps Client Correct Improper MaineCare Termination, Allowing Him to Remain in Supported Housing. DRM responded to a request for assistance from a 36-year-old PAIMI-eligible man living in a supported apartment through a community mental health program. The client had received notice that his state Medicaid benefits were terminated, placing him at immediate risk of institutionalization, because Medicaid coverage was essential for his housing and services. DRM assisted him in notifying the Medicaid agency of his intent to appeal, and quickly filed both a notice of appeal and entry of appearance on his behalf. Within days, the agency revisited his case and issued a revised decision, restoring his Medicaid eligibility retroactive to the termination date. As a result of DRM's intervention, the client maintained access to services and was able to remain in the least restrictive, community-based setting.

DRM Represents Client in Obtaining Compensation After Employment Discrimination. An individual with a physical disability contacted DRM after she faced discrimination at her job based on her disability. She was sent home from a jobsite after a supervisor noticed she had a prosthetic leg based on the incorrect and discriminatory assumption that she could not do the job. In addition, the agency drastically reduced her work placements after she raised the issue. A DRM attorney filed a complaint before the Maine Human Rights Commission. The client had suffered significant financial setbacks due to the discrimination. At mediation, the DRM attorney was able to negotiate a monetary settlement for the client. The client received compensation for the harm caused, and the business was held accountable for its discrimination against her.

Student Moves from Segregated Placement with Unlawful Restraint and Seclusion to Home School District and Receives Needed Supports with DRM Assistance. DRM was contacted by the parent of a child with multiple disabilities

regarding concerns that he was being subjected to unlawful restraint in a segregated day treatment program and that he was not learning in the placement. The DRM attorney attended multiple IEP meetings to try and advocate for appropriate services, but the school was reluctant to bring our client back into the school district. In reviewing the student's file, it became clear that there were no documented interventions to address his clear and growing academic needs. The DRM attorney helped the family obtain an evaluation at a special purpose school focused on addressing learning disabilities, which indicated that the student had very significant unmet academic needs. DRM requested an independent educational evaluation and the district elected to file a hearing request to try and avoid paying for it. DRM prepared a hearing request as well and then the parties agreed to meet in mediation to reach a resolution. At mediation, an agreement was reached that provided for placement in a specialty school designed to address the student's academic needs with the support of a trained behavioral health professional as well as an evaluation by and ongoing support from an expert in addressing challenging behaviors. Several years of intensive summer programming were included as a compensatory measure, and DRM received a portion of its attorney's fees in settlement. The student really enjoys his new school and it has been amazing that the behaviors that so concerned school staff for years have fallen away in large part with the provision of appropriate academic services and supports.

DRM Files Systemic Complaint Against Which Results in Stop of District's Unlawful Use of Abbreviated School Days and Increased Supports for Students with Disabilities. DRM was contacted by the parent of a Kindergarten student with Autism who had been excluded from school then placed on shortened school days due to a lack of staff. DRM heard from other families in this same school district around the same time and obtained consent from a number of families to include the students in a systemic complaint with the Maine DOE. MDOE subsequently resolved the matter by requiring the district to do the following: 1) provide hiring updates to MDOE; 2) conduct a thorough review of all students who have been subjected to shortened days and meet to develop plans to return them to full day, reporting those to MDOE; 3) make individual determinations regarding compensatory education through the IEP team process for all impacted students and report this to MDOE; 4) provide a report to MDOE regarding each impacted student to include a summary of the circumstances that led to the abbreviated services, the duration of the abbreviated services, the compensatory education services offered, and the compensatory education services accessed for each of the students and the associated paperwork documenting such services; 5) provide a staffing action plan to MDOE; 6) work with the school board and others to ensure appropriate fiscal incentives for teachers as well as substitute teachers and other staff; and 7) develop a plan with neighboring "special purpose private schools" to propose a collaborative

plan to have SPPS staff “push in” to the district school to support students in special education. MDOE also agreed to provide ongoing technical assistance regarding the planning outlined above. After DRM filed the complaint, all students that had been in contact with DRM were provided access to a full school day.

DRM Enforces Student’s Right to FAPE, Resulting in Her Return to School and in Wide-Ranging Due Process Acknowledgement for Other Students with Disabilities.

The parent of a 15-year-old with autism reached out to DRM because her daughter had been removed from her functional life skills classroom and placed on an abbreviated school day in a segregated setting without access to any peers. Months had passed and there was still no plan in place for restoring the student to a full day of school or returning her to her any classroom setting. A DRM attorney discovered that the student had never received a functional behavioral assessment, had never received a consultation or services from a BCBA, and did not have a positive behavioral support plan, despite a clear, years’-long need for behavioral and functional communication supports to enable her to access her education. As the attorney began assisting the parent on how to access the MDOE complaint process, the student’s high school, a private academy, unilaterally stopped allowing the student access to the campus entirely, denying the student her federally-protected substantive and due process rights under the IDEA. DRM assisted the parent with amending her complaint and bringing to light the untenable position students with disabilities face when they live in Maine school districts which are served by private academies: potentially unchecked denial of their substantive rights and procedural safeguards under the IDEA (in addition to, as in the case at hand, potential denial of 14th Amendment procedural due process and equal protection rights). When the results of the MDOE’s investigation were untimely delayed, DRM assumed direct representation of the student and continued advocating for her to receive appropriate programming and access to peers under state and federal special education law. As a result of the complaint investigation request, the Maine DOE addressed a longstanding problem in Maine, demanding that the student (and all students in the district with disabilities more generally) be afforded her substantive and procedural rights under federal and state special education law. Such rights are not to be erased when a student’s district provides a high school education by contract with a private academy. In addition to finding that the student was owed considerable compensatory education, the DOE clarified that the district must continue to meet its obligations to students with disabilities under state and federal law, and any contracting with private academies to meet these obligations must ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure academies follow suit.

DRM Files Successful Complaint that Addresses School’s Long-Term Use of Unlawful Restraint and Seclusion. The parent of a 10-year-old boy with a

neurodevelopmental disorder contacted DRM with concerns about his son's education and the use of restraint and seclusion at the special purpose private school (SPPS) where the child had been placed by his sending school district. DRM learned that, beginning in the second grade and extending across three school years, the child had been subjected to serial unlawful use of restraint and seclusion at the hands of teachers and staff, sometimes being forced to spend hours and whole days in the "quiet room" as a programmatic response to disability-related behaviors. No individualized positive behavioral support plan had been developed; no behavioral expertise had been brought to bear in supporting the child. Instead, the child's mental health and behavioral manifestations of his disability worsened as he continued to be subjected to scores of restraints and seclusions. DRM filed a local complaint in accordance with Chapter 33, wherein the SPPS investigated itself and found it had not once stepped outside the bounds of the law. DRM then filed a State Chapter 33 Complaint with the Maine DOE, who found that the SPPS had engaged in repeated unlawful use of restraint and seclusion, that the SPPS did not have a demonstrated command of the emergency threshold that must be met to trigger lawful use of restraint and seclusion, and that the SPPS's very understanding of seclusion did not comport with the law. As a result of DRM's efforts, the DOE has issued a robust corrective action plan to bring the SPPS's practices and reporting requirements in alignment with Maine law.

DRM Intervention Results in Client Avoiding Eviction During Involuntary Hospitalization. A 38-year-old PAIMI-eligible individual was involuntarily hospitalized at a private psychiatric facility when DRM learned that their mental health group home planned to discharge them from the program. The stated reason was that the individual had been out of the home for 30 days, a result of the involuntary commitment. DRM contacted the state Office of Mental Health to challenge the termination and engaged in negotiations regarding the individual's placement. As a result, the state agreed that the individual could return to the group home upon discharge from the hospital. DRM's intervention helped preserve the individual's housing placement and supported continuity of services following hospitalization.

DRM Attorney Assists Client in Maintaining Section 8 Voucher and Avoiding Prolonged Homelessness. A 45-year-old PAIMI-eligible woman contacted DRM after spending years on the Section 8 waiting list and facing homelessness, even though she had previously been selected from the list eight years earlier. Because of the impact of her disability, she was unable to respond to required communications at the time and lost her place. Without correction, she would have been forced to start over at the bottom of the list, adding years to her wait for safe and stable housing. A DRM attorney analyzed the State Housing Authority's Administrative Plan and

relevant state and federal disability laws and submitted a detailed reasonable accommodation request asking that her application be restored to its original 2017 date. The State Housing Authority approved the request and reinstated her 2017 application date, preserving her position on the list and dramatically reducing her risk of prolonged homelessness.

DRM Attorney Helps Client Access Right to Court-Appointed Counsel to Challenge Guardianship. DRM was contacted by an individual with a brain injury seeking assistance in terminating her guardianship. When she contacted DRM, she had already filed a petition to terminate with the court, who had accepted the filing and advised her it had scheduled a hearing on the matter. What the court did not do, however, was appoint an attorney to represent the woman, even though, upon learning she wanted to challenge the guardianship, it was legally required to do so. A DRM attorney explained this to the client, and assisted her in writing a letter to the court asserting this right. Upon receipt, the court appointed her an attorney to represent her on the termination. Without DRM's intervention, the client would not have had representation at the hearing, nor would she have been aware she had a right to representation. The DRM attorney maintained contact with the court-appointed attorney and learned that the guardianship had been terminated.

DRM Involvement Results in Client's Reasonable Accommodation, and to Change in Landlord's Policy Across All Properties. A woman with cerebral palsy contacted DRM to request assistance with challenging her landlord's denial of her requested reasonable accommodation. Specifically, she requested installation of a bidet in her apartment per recommendation of her doctor. A DRM attorney made a reasonable accommodation request and engaged in informal negotiations with the landlord. Not only did the landlord agree to the requested accommodation, he also changed the policy regarding bidets at all of his properties. Because of DRM's representation, the woman is able to independently address her personal health needs and over 1,200 people across Maine who are living in properties managed by the woman's landlord may now utilize a bidet if needed.

DRM Advocacy Results in Public Building Being Made More Accessible. An individual with a physical disability who uses a wheelchair contacted DRM. He wanted to attend town meetings, but they were held in a building that was not accessible because of the lack of a push-to-open door button. Although there was a remote option to attend, the client wanted to attend in person, which was also required to vote on town business. A DRM attorney worked with the client in contacting the town and the school, where the meetings were held. After some hesitation, they agreed to install a door opener. This was done more quickly than expected, and the client was able to attend the next town meeting in person, and was

able to enter the building unaided. Because of our client's and DRM's advocacy, the building is now more accessible to anyone who wishes to enter it.

DRM Representation Results in End to School's Unlawful Restraint and Seclusion of Student to the Training for Educators. The mother of a 9-year-old boy with a complex disability profile including autism, ADHD, and a neurological disability reached out to DRM with concerns that her son was being restrained and secluded at school. Additionally, prior to calling DRM, the school district had opted for a law enforcement response to the child's disability-related behaviors (he briefly ran outside the school's playground field), which resulted in multiple officers restraining the child, handcuffing him behind back, and leading him from the playground into the seclusion room in the building. An investigation by a DRM attorney revealed that the child did not have a positive behavioral support plan, he had not received an adequate functional behavioral assessment, he had been subjected to repeated unlawful restraint and seclusion coinciding with the time he was placed in the district's new "social emotional learning" classroom; and staff were routinely removing him from his least restrictive environment placement and making him "earn" his way into his IEP placement. DRM represented the child and filed a due process hearing request with the Maine DOE contesting the appropriateness of his educational programming and for the District's failure to have provided the child with a free appropriate public education for the prior two years. As a result of DRM's involvement, the District settled the claims with the family, committing to provide him with appropriate programming and compensatory educational services, as well as committing to provide staff and administrators with training specific to preventative and alternatives to restraint and seclusion.

DRM Assists Client in Accessing In-Person ASL Interpretation for Medical Procedure. A Deaf man whose primary language is ASL contacted DRM after his medical provider refused to provide in-person ASL interpreter services for an upcoming procedure. A DRM attorney wrote a letter to the medical provider, explaining the client's language background and communication needs. The medical provider contacted the client soon after, confirming that they would provide him with an in-person interpreter during his procedure. The client informed DRM that his medical provider did bring an in-person interpreter to the appointment, which ensured the client's access to effective communication and enabled him to feel more comfortable during the procedure.

This page intentionally left blank



IMMIGRANT LEGAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Annual Report to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission
January 21, 2026

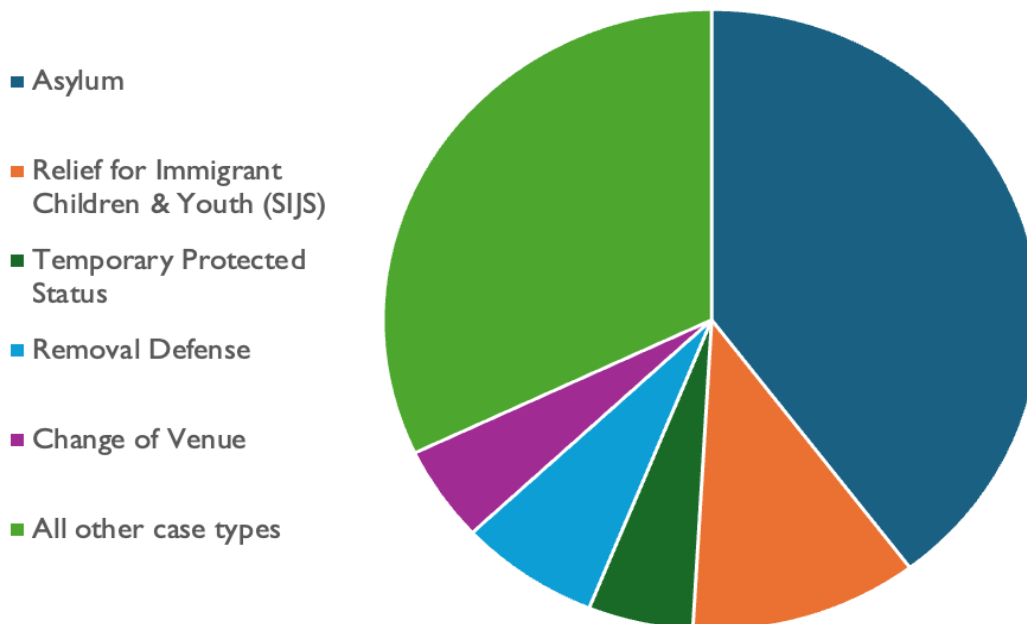
In 2025, funding from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (MCLSF) allowed the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) to advance justice and equity for immigrants and their families through direct immigration legal services and community legal education. Other sources of funding supported our systemic advocacy work.

In total, ILAP served 5982 people, including:

- 2178 people through direct legal service cases (case types detailed in the chart below)
- 3804 people through 134 community legal education and outreach events.

Immigration cases have increased in complexity and longevity in recent years, including many more humanitarian cases for clients in immigration court amid growing court backlogs. These cases require removal defense and often involve interaction with immigration enforcement/detention.

Top Cases Types in 2025



Overview

Founded in 1993, ILAP's mission is to help low-income immigrants improve their legal status and to work for more just and humane laws and policies affecting immigrants. ILAP is Maine's only statewide immigration legal services organization, with full-time offices in Portland and Lewiston and a regular presence across the state through its Rural Maine Project. Technology, volunteers, and partner organizations support ILAP's ability to engage directly with immigrant community members across all sixteen Maine counties.

ILAP's core work advances justice and equity for immigrants and their families through three complementary strategies:

- 1) **Provide a continuum of direct legal services** to low-income immigrants to help them find safety from violence and persecution, keep their families together, and advance toward economic security.
- 2) **Offer accurate, timely, and translated education and outreach** to immigrant community members and service providers to share knowledge, prevent future legal complications, and support informed decision-making in an increasingly complex legal environment.
- 3) **Collaborate with immigrant-led groups and partner organizations on systemic advocacy** at the local, state, and federal levels to safeguard and promote legal protections for immigrant communities.

In recent years, many thousands of newly arrived immigrants have settled in Maine, and the need for free, high-quality immigration legal services continued to grow during the reporting year. This demand was further shaped by the transition to a new federal administration, increased immigration enforcement activity, and expanded use of detention, all of which contributed to heightened uncertainty and legal risk for immigrant communities. Against this backdrop, ILAP continued to deliver direct legal services and community legal education while adapting to increased case complexity and urgency.

Types of cases handled

The core of ILAP's work is our direct legal services, which are provided by highly trained staff attorneys, accredited representatives, and paralegals. ILAP's casework addresses immediate legal needs for immigrant community members while also deepening organizational expertise that supports community legal education and informs our advocacy priorities.

In 2025, ILAP handled **388 full representation cases** and **1625 limited representation cases**. In line with our mission and strategic plan, we prioritize humanitarian cases involving individuals at risk of persecution or violence—including asylum seekers, survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking, and immigrant children and youth—as well as cases involving family separation, due process concerns in immigration court, and access to work authorization or other forms of legal stability that support economic security. Many of these cases were shaped by increased enforcement activity, immigration court backlogs, and heightened risk of detention, contributing to greater case complexity and urgency.

Case Type	Number
Asylum	799
Relief for Immigrant Children & Youth/Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)	226
Temporary Protected Status	104
Removal Defense	139
Change of Venue	100
Permanent Residency	205
General Options Consultation	117
Relief for victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and other crimes	88
Work Authorization	51
Permanent Resident Card Renewal/Replacement	31
Family Reunification	30
Other	123
Total	2013

Number of people served

Direct legal services

ILAP provided direct immigration legal services to **2178 people** during the reporting year across the case types detailed above. This number is higher than the number of cases handled because some cases included multiple parties/family members. Services included both full representation and limited representation, delivered by staff attorneys, accredited representatives, and paralegals.

Demand for direct legal services remained high throughout the year and was shaped by immigration court backlogs, increased enforcement activity, and the risk of detention. These conditions contributed to greater case complexity and urgency, requiring careful intake, case selection, and supervision within available capacity.

ILAP's direct legal services were supported by a network of **volunteer attorneys who provided pro bono legal assistance to ILAP clients**. During the reporting year, **58 pro bono attorneys** contributed **2931.9 hours** of legal services, providing full representation and asylum application assistance to eligible clients, including asylum seekers and immigrant children and youth. The estimated value of these pro bono services was **\$1,121,333.50**.

ILAP also benefited from volunteer support from community members who assisted with interpretation and translation, mental health evaluations, and other organizational needs.

Community legal education

Through our community legal education work, we provided timely, accurate, and accessible group informational workshops and resources on immigration law matters to immigrant community members, service providers, schools and adult education programs, healthcare providers, and the public. Our materials and presentations were offered in multiple languages and were designed to address common questions, correct misinformation, and help participants understand immigration processes and legal rights in order to avoid preventable legal complications, including exploitation related to the unauthorized practice of immigration law.

During the reporting year, **3804 immigrant community members and service providers** across the state participated in **134 outreach and education events**.

Demand for accurate and timely immigration information remained high throughout the year and was shaped by increased enforcement activity, widespread misinformation, and rapid federal policy changes that consistently narrowed pathways to relief, limited access to existing protections, and increased legal risk for immigrant community members. These changes created significant uncertainty for individuals who were already navigating complex legal processes, including people whose eligibility for humanitarian protections such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) was restricted or eliminated.

In response, we adjusted community legal education content and delivery methods on an ongoing basis to address frequent policy shifts that reduced legal options or imposed new procedural barriers. Education efforts focused on helping immigrant community members and service providers understand how changes affected eligibility, filing requirements, and timelines, as well as to identify any remaining avenues for relief or protection.

We also used technology to extend the reach of our community legal education efforts, supplementing in-person services in Portland and Lewiston and outreach conducted through our Rural Maine Project. As protections were rescinded or narrowed and new requirements were introduced, online resources allowed us to update information quickly and make it, when possible, accessible in multiple languages, while continuing to provide direct points of contact for individuals seeking guidance in a rapidly changing enforcement environment.

During the reporting year, digital platforms supporting community legal education had the following reach:

- ILAP's website (www.ilapmaine.org) had 142,938 unique visitors and 290,791 visits
- *Golden Door* e-newsletter reached 4360 subscribers monthly and achieved a 37.27% open rate.
- ILAP's Facebook page had 187.3K views and 4,820 followers, and ILAP's Instagram page had almost 95.2K views, ending the year with 2441 followers.

In response to rapid federal policy changes following the new administration, ILAP also launched a new **Community Updates** newsletter during the reporting year. Distributed using the same subscriber list as the *Golden Door* newsletter, this publication provides timely law and policy updates with brief legal analysis to help immigrant community members, service providers, and partners understand how changes may affect them in practice. The Community Update was distributed weekly during the first 100 days of the administration and transitioned to a monthly publication thereafter.

Systemic advocacy

In 2025, our systemic advocacy work was shaped by information gathered through direct legal services and community legal education. Policy and advocacy work heavily focused on responding to increased immigration enforcement in Maine, denial of due process, and improved protections for

vulnerable noncitizen children. At the state level, ILAP and partners successfully passed LD 1971, a key piece of legislation clarifying the role of Maine’s state and local law enforcement agencies versus federal immigration authorities.

Over the course of 2025, ILAP’s direct legal services program helped document dozens of people handed over to immigration officials by Maine law enforcement during minor traffic incidents, including people in valid immigration processes, with valid work permits, and no criminal records. The bill will help safeguard the due process rights and safety of Maine residents while ensuring that Maine’s public safety resources are not diverted away from Maine communities.

ILAP and partners also passed a state bill to help at-risk noncitizen children in Maine to secure immigration protections in the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status process. SIJS provides protection for noncitizen children who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent. The process begins at the state-court level. The bill provided important clarifications to the judiciary and practitioners to ensure an efficient process, helping to conserve limited resources for this vulnerable population.

On the federal level, ILAP joined national partners in advocating for legislative and policy change in 28 policy recommendations, letters and public comments.

ILAP was featured in the media in response to a range of immigration issues more than 51 times in 2025.

Note that MCLSF funds supported ILAP’s direct legal services and community legal education, but not our systemic advocacy work. We include a short summary here simply to share the full scope of our interconnected model.

Demographic information about people served

ILAP services are available to people living in Maine with incomes up to 200% of federal poverty guidelines. Demographic information for the 2178 people reached through our direct legal services is detailed in the table below.

Category	% of people
Gender	48% female 51% male <1% nonbinary/gender nonconforming <1% unknown
Age	14% under 18 82% ages 18-60 4% over 60 <1% unknown
Race/ethnicity	62% African or African American 4% Asian 28% Latinx <1% other 4% White 1% unknown

Citizenship status	99% noncitizens <1% U.S. citizen by birth or naturalization
Top countries of origin	Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Venezuela, Ecuador (more than 90 countries total)
Top primary languages	Spanish, Portuguese, French, Lingala, Haitian Creole (more than 40 languages total)

Note that although we do not collect detailed demographic information for people participating in our community legal education, the data listed above is broadly reflective of those services as well.

Geographic area served

In 2025, approximately 59% of ILAP clients lived in Cumberland County and 41% lived outside of Cumberland County. This split continues a trend in recent years of greater geographic diversity amongst our clients—in 2020, 75% of clients lived in Cumberland County and 25% lived outside of Cumberland County.

Geographic information for 2196 clients served through our direct legal services is reflected in the table below.

County	# of people
Androscoggin	299
Aroostook	1
Cumberland	1285
Franklin	2
Hancock	25
Kennebec	85
Knox	7
Lincoln	5
Oxford	9
Penobscot	58
Piscataquis	2
Sagadahoc	11
Somerset	21
Waldo	16
Washington	20
York	263
Unknown	69

Note that although we do not collect detailed geographic information for people participating in our community legal education, the data listed above is broadly reflective of those services as well.

Status of cases handled, including whether they are complete or open

For our 388 full representation cases, at year-end, 259 of these cases remained open, and 129 were closed/completed. For our 1625 limited representation cases, 301 were open and 1321 were closed/completed at year-end.

Whether and to what extent the organization has complied with its proposal to the Commission

As detailed in this report, ILAP fully complied with our proposal submitted to the Commission in fall 2023 for 2024 and 2025 funding. In total, we reached 5982 people in 2025, exceeding our target of 2,750-3,300 people per year. These outcomes indicate that we achieved our goal of helping more immigrants in Maine attain and maintain legal status, a threshold need and the critical first step towards finding safety from persecution and violence, keeping families together, and improving economic security.

Outcome measurements used to determine compliance

ILAP uses specialized case management software to track our legal work and determine compliance with requirements imposed by MCLSF and other funders. This software allows us to retain quantitative data on client demographics, legal services provided, case outcomes, and much more.

We measure the quality of our full representation work by tracking the outcomes of all intermediate or final decisions received. In 2025, we maintained a greater than 91% approval rate for full representation cases that received a final decision (which can take several years). This rate reflects the increasingly complex nature of cases accepted for full representation combined with increasingly harsh immigration policies and adjudication trends.

Because decisions on limited representation cases go directly to the client, rather than ILAP, we are unable to track final outcomes. Instead, we measure our performance by the number of applications successfully filed without being rejected by the relevant government department or agency.

Program updates and additional accomplishments

ILAP continued to progress towards our 2021-2025 strategic plans goals of providing more direct legal assistance and outreach, making services equitable statewide, and advancing racial justice for immigrants, including:

- Strengthening core services, including full representation, *pro se* assistance, and *pro bono* partnerships, to meet the growing immigration legal needs in local communities.
- Continuing to innovate projects to reach special populations, including newly arrived individuals and families seeking asylum, immigrant children and youth, and immigrants living in rural Maine who may have experienced labor exploitation or trafficking.

Strengthening Core Services

Over the reporting year, we continued to strengthen our core services in response to sustained and evolving demand for free, high-quality immigration legal services across Maine. This work took place amid significant federal policy changes that narrowed or eliminated certain forms of humanitarian protection and increased legal instability for many immigrant community members. A key strategy during the year was the continued use of *pro se* (limited representation) services to address urgent legal needs at scale, while prioritizing full representation for individuals with highly complex legal needs.

ILAP staff provided *pro se* assistance to **104 individuals** seeking or renewing Temporary Protected Status (TPS). During the reporting year, federal actions narrowed or terminated TPS designations for several countries, leaving many individuals uncertain about their legal status, work authorization, and ability to remain with their families. ILAP's assistance focused on helping individuals understand evolving eligibility criteria, comply with filing requirements where applicable, and identify alternative forms of immigration relief when TPS protections were reduced or ended.

Throughout the year, we hosted a regular Change of Venue clinic to assist individuals in preparing and filing motions to transfer their immigration court cases to the Chelmsford Immigration Court in Massachusetts, which serves Maine residents. Many newly arrived immigrants continue to have their cases docketed in immigration courts located in other states, creating substantial barriers to participation in required proceedings. Failure to appear at a scheduled immigration court hearing generally results in a removal order. During the reporting year, ILAP assisted with **84 motions to change venue** for **104 people**, supporting their ability to pursue their cases in the court with jurisdiction over their place of residence.

In 2025, ILAP also continued to provide representation to victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and other crimes. These cases have been a central part of our work since becoming a staffed organization in 2000 and utilize long-term partnerships with our peer civil legal aid providers and domestic and sexual violence prevention and response organizations across the state.

Innovating Projects to Reach Special Populations

While our core services remain the foundation of ILAP's legal work statewide, we have identified that some populations require tailored outreach and service models to effectively address their legal needs. In response, we have developed and continued to refine targeted projects serving newly arrived immigrants seeking asylum, immigrant children and youth, and immigrants living in rural Maine. These projects also respond to increased legal complexity, barriers to access, and the ongoing risk of harm associated with the unauthorized practice of immigration law.

The **Asylum Assistance and Legal Orientation Program (AALOP)** focuses on reaching individuals who have recently arrived in Maine and are navigating the asylum process amid shifting federal policies and heightened enforcement. The project provides group legal orientation, asylum application assistance, and individualized legal screenings through community-based outreach and a workshop model developed in partnership with the American Bar Association's Commission on Immigration, Maine Law's Refugee and Human Rights Clinic, and Catholic Charities Maine's Immigrant Legal Services. In 2025, AALOP held 30 legal education and outreach sessions for 533 asylum seekers, provided individualized screening and legal consultations to 588 individuals, and assisted 265 asylum applicants to prepare and file asylum applications for them and their families with help from immigration attorneys.

In 2025, ILAP expanded its capacity to address immigration detention through its **Detention Project** by hiring a dedicated attorney to focus on detention-related legal services. This work responded to increased immigration enforcement activity and the growing number of Maine residents detained. Through coordination with the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic at the University of Maine School of Law and ACLU Maine, ILAP monitored detention trends, conducted individualized legal screenings for detained individuals, and engaged in complex legal advocacy

involving prolonged detention, mental health concerns, and access to counsel. Detention-related matters included representation in removal proceedings as well as custody/bond matters.

Our **Immigrant Children's Project** seeks to increase legal representation for immigrant children and youth across Maine in their pursuit of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), a humanitarian form of immigration relief that provides a pathway to legal permanent residence. Over the last several years, we have significantly expanded our capacity, and the Project now assists more than 250 children and youth annually. In 2025, the Project focused significant efforts on assisting the many newly arrived unaccompanied and unhoused immigrant teens and young people in greater Portland. As part of this work, ILAP staff held twice monthly office hours at the Preble Street Teen Center, mentored and coached *pro bono* attorneys representing immigrant children and youth, and held regular trainings for schools, service providers, and others who work with vulnerable youth.

ILAP also continued to expand the capacity of our **Rural Maine Project** to improve access to immigration legal services for farmworkers and other immigrant community members living outside urban centers. Through affirmative outreach and collaboration with partner organizations, ILAP staff conducted legal education workshops, offered individualized legal screenings and consultations, and responded to situations involving labor exploitation and human trafficking. In 2025, the Rural Maine Project conducted 28 outreach events for immigrant community members and partner organizations, distributed outreach materials to 609 people, and completed individualized screenings and provided direct legal services for 277 people. Key partners in this work include Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Maine Mobile Health Program, Preble Street Anti-Trafficking Services, Mano en Mano, Capital Area New Mainers Project, and other immigrant groups.

Information regarding unmet and underserved needs

Over the past few years, we have seen record numbers of new arrivals, from countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, and Venezuela, arriving in Maine seeking safety and protection. ILAP has responded to the growing need by scaling up our core services and developing innovative projects to reach more people.

Despite these successes, we continue to be outpaced by the exponential increase in need for immigration legal services. In 2025, we were **forced to turn away nearly 550 people** who were eligible for ILAP services and needed legal assistance because we did not have the capacity to help them. We know that there are many more individuals who do not come to ILAP because they have heard that we are unable to help everyone.

When individuals are unable to access legal assistance, they must navigate complex immigration processes without representation, increasing the risk of missed deadlines, incomplete filings, and adverse outcomes. This is particularly concerning in a legal environment marked by narrowed pathways to relief, increased enforcement activity, and the loss of certain humanitarian protections, which have heightened legal risk for many immigrant community members.

ILAP also remains concerned about the continued presence of the unauthorized practice of immigration law in Maine. Low-income immigrants may seek assistance from individuals or organizations that are not qualified to provide immigration legal advice, often without realizing the risk. In some cases, individuals come to ILAP after applications have been incorrectly prepared or denied due to inaccurate guidance. While staff attempt to address these situations when possible,

errors made earlier in the process can limit available remedies and increase the likelihood of negative outcomes.

Conclusion

Throughout the reporting year, ILAP provided direct immigration legal services and community legal education in a legal environment marked by increased complexity, narrowed pathways to relief, and heightened enforcement of immigration laws. These conditions contributed to sustained demand for services that continued to exceed available capacity, underscoring the ongoing need for free, accurate, and accessible immigration legal assistance for low-income individuals and families across Maine.

In response, ILAP focused on sustaining core services, refining targeted projects, and adapting service delivery to evolving legal and policy conditions. This included prioritizing cases involving the greatest legal risk, expanding limited representation where appropriate, and investing in community legal education to help individuals and service providers navigate rapid legal changes. Across all areas of work, ILAP emphasized careful intake, supervision, and coordination to ensure that services were delivered responsibly and within organizational capacity.

At the same time, the reporting year highlighted the importance of stability and flexibility in the provision of immigration legal services. Ongoing federal policy changes, increased enforcement activity, and legal uncertainty reinforced the need for experienced legal providers with the ability to respond quickly and accurately as conditions change. ILAP's statewide presence, partnerships, and integrated service model remain central to meeting these challenges.

Funding from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (MCLSF) continues to be an important component of ILAP's financial support, accounting for approximately 7% **of total revenue** during the reporting year. Additional funding sources included state grants (9%), the Maine Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) program (8%), private and corporate grants (28%), individual donations and special events (46%), and interest and other revenue (2%). Because ILAP is ineligible for any federal funding, MCLSF remains a critical and reliable source of support for our direct legal services and community legal education work.

On behalf of ILAP's Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and clients, I would like to thank the Commission for their continued support of Maine's civil legal aid community. We very much appreciate your generous investment in ILAP's mission again in 2025. Our strong network of support, of which MCLSF is a vital part, makes our work possible and helps Mainers with low incomes navigate the immigration system we have now while we push for lasting structural change.

Respectfully submitted:



Susan Roche, Esq.
Executive Director

This page intentionally left blank



Legal Services for Maine Elders Annual Report to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission Calendar Year 2025

This is the Annual Report from Legal Services for Maine Elders (“LSE”) to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission (the “Commission”) regarding LSE’s services and accomplishments in 2025. The financial support provided to LSE by the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (“MCLSF” or the “Fund”) is used to provide free legal help to disadvantaged older adults when their basic human needs are at stake. This includes things like shelter, sustenance, income, safety, public benefits, health care, and self-determination.

This report describes only services that are supported by the Fund. See **Attachment A** for summary information about additional services provided by LSE that are not supported by the Fund.

During this reporting period, the Fund provided 34% of the funding required to deliver the legal services described in this report.

I. NARRATIVE REPORT ON LSE SERVICES 2025

A. Types of Cases Handled

The greatest overall demands for LSE services based upon the total number of legal matters handled (not necessarily time spent on the cases) were in the areas of housing (public and private rental housing issues, foreclosures, evictions), self-determination/aging preparedness (probate referrals, powers of attorney, advance directives, will referrals), consumer issues (debt collection, consumer fraud, creditor harassment), and access to health care (Medicare and MaineCare). This data is found in Table B2 which follows this narrative. A variety of additional data tables also appear in **Attachment B**.

B. Number of People Served and Legal Matters Handled

In 2025, LSE provided free legal help to 4,182 older Mainers in 5,079 cases involving a broad range of civil legal problems, including the following:

- Elder abuse and neglect;
- Financial exploitation;
- Debt collection and creditor harassment;
- Housing, including eviction and foreclosure defense;
- Nursing home eligibility and other long-term care matters;
- Medicare appeals;
- Social Security appeals;

- MaineCare, food stamp, heating assistance, General Assistance, and other public assistance program appeals;
- Guardianship limitation or revocation; and
- Financial and health care powers of attorney.

This was a 6% increase in legal matters handled over the prior year. LSE was able to help 187 more people in 2025 than we helped in 2024 and 490 more than 2023. Unfortunately, 366 callers were turned away at intake in 2025. These are callers who would have received Helpline services if LSE had not restricted intake to ensure we were able to serve all callers who were facing emergencies.

Emergency cases continue to trend higher. (2019-761; 2020-1,250; 2021-1,438; 2022-1,528; 2023-1,366; 2024-2,336; 2025-2,614). Emergency calls made up 51.5% of the total legal matters opened. Every caller with an emergency legal problem was served on the day they called or on the next business day. Cases that LSE defines as emergencies include eviction, foreclosure, public benefit denials and reductions, resident rights and elder abuse. The common thread is that an older person is facing a legal problem that puts their housing, health, and/or safety at imminent risk. These are cases where a person is living in an unsafe situation, is threatened with loss of housing, or is being denied critically needed care or public benefits. Legal problems that are emergencies are time sensitive and more resource-intensive to address.

LSE provided this level of service with a small staff. The direct legal services staffing in 2025 included: 0.80 full time equivalent (FTE) Litigation Director; 0.65 FTE Helpline Director; 2.0 FTE Intake Paralegal; 3.70 FTE Helpline Attorneys; 1.00 FTE Elder Abuse Paralegal; and 10.60 FTE Staff Attorneys. This is a total of only 18.75 FTEs of direct legal services staff (including supervisory staff). In 2024, LSE doubled intake capacity and added 1.00 FTE in Helpline Attorney capacity.

C. Demographic Information

Approximately 37% of our clients were male and 63% female. Less than 1% were transgender. Nearly every client served was sixty years of age or older, and 59% were 70 years of age or older. Eleven percent of those served were veterans. While LSE serves both socially and economically needy older adults, 88% of LSE's clients were below 250% of the federal poverty level and 42% were below 100% of the federal poverty level. Those clients who are not below 250% of the poverty level typically receive only basic information and a referral with the rare exception of a financial exploitation case that may be handled by LSE when a referral to the private bar is not possible due to the time sensitive nature of the case.

D. Geographic Area Actually Served

LSE provides services on a statewide basis. LSE's clients are distributed across the state approximately in proportion to the population of older people, with some variations. To the extent resources allow, LSE focuses customized outreach on

underserved parts of the state. Year after year, LSE serves clients in nearly every township in Maine. We attribute this to the strength of our statewide partner and referral relationships. **Table B6** shows the geographic distribution of LSE's clients in 2025 comparing LSE's service data to population.

E. Status of Matters Handled

The reported matters were all opened during 2025 and are reported regardless of whether they were closed in 2025; some cases do not close in the same year they opened. LSE consistently reports matters opened for the reporting period in question to all funders unless specifically asked for other data. This ensures data may be compared from year to year and does not include any duplicate information. Please note that some clients have more than one matter, so we track matters handled, not number of clients.

Table B4 reports data on level of service. The most common outcomes were counsel and advice (38.29%) and referral after legal assessment (37.45%). In 2.17% of our cases, we provided extensive services and secured a favorable outcome. This category is relatively small in number, but resource-intensive and highly consequential for the client.

F. Compliance with Proposal

Model. LSE's 2024–2025 funding proposal described a service model built around (1) a centralized statewide intake and Helpline, (2) staff attorney litigation services for a narrower set of higher-risk matters, and (3) outreach and referrals to other resources, including the private bar. LSE adhered to that model and achieved the expected outcomes, with some minor anomalies as mentioned below.

Statewide intake and Helpline services. LSE's 2025 operations remained consistent with the proposal's core intake model: a centralized Helpline serving older people statewide, staffed by two Intake Paralegals who answer calls in real time as they come in, return after-hours messages the next business day, and triage emergencies for immediate response. In 2025 the Helpline received 13,328 calls, a 21.2% increase over 2024.

Emergency response. The proposal emphasized LSE's commitment to respond to 100% of requests for help with emergency legal problems. In 2025, 2,614 matters were designated as emergencies (51.5% of all matters opened), and every caller with an emergency legal problem was served on the day they called or on the next business day.

Call-back timeframes and access. Consistent with the proposal's described triage approach, non-emergency callers received callbacks from a Helpline Attorney within four to six days on average.

Matter volume and level of service. The proposal projected that, if funded at the requested level, LSE would be able to handle at least 4,500 legal matters. In 2025, LSE opened 5,079 legal matters and served 4,182 clients. Of the 5,079 matters, 84% (4,276)

were assisted by Helpline Attorneys and 16% (803) were handled by staff attorneys as potential litigation matters. LSE occasionally restricted intake in order to preserve capacity for emergency service, resulting in 366 eligible callers turned away at intake in 2025, fewer than in 2024.

Staff attorney litigation model. The proposal described LSE’s plan to refer a smaller subset of matters (20%) to staff attorneys for extended representation and litigation when an older person is at immediate risk of harm and no other legal resource is available. In 2025, 16% of matters were handled by staff attorneys (803 matters). This reflects a slightly different balance allowing LSE to stretch limited resources while focusing staff attorney time on higher-risk, resource-intensive matters.

Referral panel and private bar referrals. At the close of 2025, LSE’s referral panel included 137 attorneys, falling short of the goal of 200. The panel continues to shrink, mostly due to attorney retirements. LSE made 17 pro bono and 99 reduced-fee referrals to panel members in 2025 but was unable to refer 28 cases. LSE is addressing this limitation through a variety of strategies, including outreach to new attorneys and a joint recruitment project with the Elder Law Section of the Maine State Bar Association.

Outreach and education. The proposal anticipated increasing outreach capacity, including more proactive contact with referral sources and additional presentations. In 2025, LSE continued statewide outreach through presentations, print materials, and its website, and distributed 10,249 brochures. This brochure distribution figure was slightly lower than 2024, reflecting the need to prioritize staffing and resources toward unusually high emergency demand.

Outcomes. LSE’s staff attorneys, helpline attorneys, intake specialists, paralegals and other staff continue to achieve very good results for the great majority of cases. Some of those outcomes are victories in contested proceedings. In other cases, the outcome is a negotiated solution that reduces risk and provides certainty in a confusing and stressful situation. In almost every case an intangible – but important – outcome is simply the comfort of knowing that an expert attorney is on their side to answer questions and provide information to make decisions.

For cases handled at the helpline level, LSE was able to achieve a favorable outcome 86 percent of the time. For emergency cases, we were able to achieve a favorable outcome 57 percent of the time. The weighted average covering both categories was 82 percent favorable outcomes. **Table B5.**

G. Outcome Measurements Used to Determine Compliance

Using electronic case management software called Legal Server, LSE can collect, maintain, and analyze comprehensive data regarding the demographics of those served and the scope and nature of its services. This includes things like the location of the individual served, the type of case, and the specific outcomes achieved. Outcomes are assigned to every case that is closed based upon the range of potential outcomes for the

given case type. Information from this database is used to monitor compliance with all funder requirements and commitments, including the MCLSF. In addition to monitoring outcomes achieved across all case types, LSE also conducts periodic client satisfaction surveys for our Helpline services. Most callers who are not satisfied with the services are unhappy because they face problems outside of LSE's scope of services.

LSE service and outcome data is reviewed on a regular basis by the LSE Executive Director and its Board of Directors, and this data analysis influences decisions regarding how to allocate resources across the state and how to focus ongoing outreach efforts. In addition to monitoring for compliance with MCLSF commitments, LSE routinely provides extensive statistical and narrative reports to other key funders, including the Maine Justice Foundation, United Way agencies, the Area Agencies on Aging, the Office of Aging and Disability Services, and the Administration for Community Living.

LSE operates under a strategic plan that includes measurable objectives in five areas. This includes increasing the number of older adults who seek and obtain help, helping older adults maintain safe and affordable housing, helping older adults access publicly funded health care services, increasing the financial security of Maine's older adults, and helping older adults to live their lives free from abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The LSE Board monitors progress under the plan.

LSE did not change its outcome measurement protocol or systems in 2025.

H. Unmet and Underserved Needs

The unmet need continues to grow. There are at least three major factors driving the demand for legal services among Maine's older population to new heights.

1. Maine is the oldest state in the nation, and the number of older people living in Maine is growing.

By 2030, it is expected that nearly one out of every three Maine residents will be over 60. That means there will be over 460,000 older people living in Maine. Many of these Mainers will continue working and will rarely require legal services or will be able to afford private counsel. The remainder represents a class of our friends, neighbors, and family who may require legal assistance for short-term emergencies or long-term planning.

2. There is a very high poverty rate among older Mainers, and older people face many other unique challenges.

In Maine, 18% of older people live below 150% of the poverty level, and nearly one third live below 300% of the poverty level. Seventy percent of low-income older people receive Social Security as their sole source of income compared to only half of older people who are above poverty levels. The high poverty rate among older people in Maine does not tell the whole story. Older Mainers with low incomes live on fixed incomes and face additional financial challenges, including a high tax rate, high medical

costs, high food costs, high electricity costs, and an aging housing stock heated with oil. Many older people in Maine are also extremely vulnerable in other ways. Under America's Health Rankings for Seniors, Maine ranks 28th for community support expenditures for those age 60 and older (with 1 being best) and 25th for housing cost burden of those 65 and older.

3. Older people who are low-income face frequent legal problems.

Older people face more frequent legal problems than the general low-income population and are at higher risk of harm when facing a legal problem. A legal needs study conducted in Maine in 2011 by the University of Maine Center on Aging revealed that 56% of Maine's older people with low incomes had experienced a legal problem in the past year (this went up to 67% for low income older people 70 years of age or older).¹ This is consistent with a more recent national study showing that 56% of low-income older people's households experienced a civil legal problem in the past year, and a stunning 10% experienced six or more legal problems per year.² With current resources, LSE is meeting at most 15% of the need for services.

Complicating the landscape is the fact that without ready access to free legal assistance, Maine elders who can't afford a lawyer are most likely to "do nothing" about their legal problem. A national survey that is consistent with prior Maine surveys showed that 87% of older people with low-incomes who experience legal problems receive inadequate or no help because they don't know where to seek help, decide to deal with the problem on their own, don't have time to deal with the problem, or aren't sure they have a legal problem.³ Doing nothing when facing a legal problem like abuse, foreclosure, eviction, or overwhelming medical debt quickly leads to a downward spiral in what had previously been a productive and independent person's life.

II. DESCRIPTION OF LSE'S SERVICES

Background

Since its establishment in 1974, LSE has been providing free, high quality legal services to socially and economically needy older adults who are 60 years of age or older when their basic human needs are at stake. This includes things like shelter, sustenance, income, safety, public benefits, health care, and self-determination. LSE offers several different types and levels of service to stretch limited resources as far as possible.

The services provided by LSE include the following: 1) brief services, advice, and counseling to clients throughout Maine by the LSE Helpline (2.0 FTE intake, 3.7 FTE

¹ Legal Needs Assessment of Older Adults in Maine: 2011 Survey Findings from Key Populations of Older Adults, University of Maine Center on Aging, December, 2011.

² Justice Gap Measurement Survey, The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low Income Americans, 2017.

³ Legal Services Corporation, The Justice Gap, June, 2017, page 47.

Helpline Attorney); 2) litigation services by eleven Staff Attorneys (10.60 FTEs) located across the state; and 3) outreach conducted throughout the state including via a website, direct mail, and presentations to referral sources. As noted in **Attachment A**, LSE also engages in public policy advocacy, but that work is not supported by the Fund.

The case types accepted by LSE, the level of service provided by LSE in each case type (information and referral only; telephone assistance only; or full representation), and the range of possible desired outcomes for each case type are governed by comprehensive written client service guidelines that are consistently applied on a statewide basis (“LSE Targeting Guidelines”). The LSE Targeting Guidelines ensure LSE is thoughtfully putting its limited resources to work where they will have the greatest impact. The Guidelines also ensure an equitable distribution of LSE’s resources and services across the entire state.

Most LSE clients receive help only via telephone. The most intensive level of service, providing a Staff Attorney to represent an elder in a court or administrative proceeding, is offered only where an elder is at risk of losing their home, can’t access essential health or other public benefits, or is a victim of abuse or exploitation, and there is no other legal resource available to help. Overall, LSE improved the situation of those who receive services 82% of the time.

The remainder of this report describes these three components in more detail and highlights accomplishments in the past year.

Statewide Helpline Services

LSE operates a statewide Helpline that provides all older people in Maine, regardless of where they live in the state, with direct and free access to an attorney toll-free over the telephone. The Helpline is the centralized point of intake for the vast majority of the legal services provided by LSE. LSE’s Helpline accepts calls Monday through Friday during regular business hours. Those calling after hours are able to leave a message, and calls are returned by an Intake Paralegal the next business day. Once an intake is complete, all eligible callers with legal problems with which LSE assists, except those calling about an emergency situation, receive a call back from a Helpline Attorney in the order the calls were received. All emergency calls are handled immediately. In 2025, all callers (2,614) with emergency legal problems received same day or next business day services. Other callers received a call back from a Helpline Attorney within four to six days on average

The Helpline Attorneys provide legal assistance to older people exclusively via telephone. This is the level of service received by 84% of the people receiving help from LSE though most desire and could benefit from more extensive help. Only a small subset of case types are referred to the nearest Staff Attorney for in-person representation. Because Helpline services are much less expensive to deliver than the Staff Attorney services, this overall approach stretches LSE’s limited resources as far as possible. In our

recent history, LSE's Helpline services are provided at an average cost per case of only approximately \$122.

Two paralegals answered all 13,328 calls received by the Helpline in 2025.

About 41% of those callers were referred to other resources because the callers were calling about a third party, did not have legal problems, or were not eligible for LSE's services. In addition to making social service referrals, referrals are made by the Helpline, when appropriate, to other legal services providers (in particular, for those under 60), private attorneys, and other existing resources (e.g., the Attorney General's Consumer Division or Adult Protective Services) to take advantage of and ensure there is not any duplication of other available resources.

LSE maintains a panel of referral attorneys who have agreed to provide reduced fee or *pro bono* services when a client is below 200% of the federal poverty level. As of the end of 2025, the panel includes 137 attorneys from across the state. The panel is shrinking as participating attorneys retire, and LSE struggles to replace them. LSE's panel includes lawyers who practice in substantive areas that are relevant for many of our callers, including MaineCare planning, real estate, probate and estate planning. LSE has a joint project with the Elder Law Section of the Maine State Bar Association to support LSE in recruiting referral attorneys to the panel. In addition to making full fee referrals, LSE made 17 *pro bono* and 99 reduced fee referrals to panel members in 2025. For 28 potential referrals in 2025, LSE was unable to identify any panel members able to take the case.

Statewide Litigation/Staff Attorney Services

The other primary component of LSE's service delivery system involves providing litigation services to older adults through Staff Attorneys who historically worked out of local Area Offices that were co-located at the local Area Agencies on Aging (except in Augusta) but are now working from home offices. This level of service was provided to 16% of those seeking help from LSE (803 cases). These more resource-intensive services are provided by eleven Staff Attorneys (one is part-time) who each cover assigned geographic areas of the state and also work together in regional teams.

The Staff Attorneys provide legal services for older people with legal problems that place them at immediate risk of harm and may require litigation to obtain a favorable resolution. This includes things like elder abuse/financial exploitation, MaineCare and other public benefit appeals, and evictions and foreclosures. LSE Staff Attorneys must be thoroughly familiar with District, Superior, and Probate Court procedures as well as with administrative hearing procedures.

LSE rigorously merit-assesses cases before committing these intensive resources to a case, but once cases are accepted for full representation, 56.9% close with an improved or favorable outcome, stopping abuse, recovering homes and assets that have been stolen, saving homes from foreclosure that families have lived in for decades, stopping evictions and/or preserving housing subsidies, and helping older people obtain

needed home care and other long-term care services that allow them to continue living in their own homes longer. 2.5% close with a non-improved or unfavorable outcome. The remainder were matters where outcome was not applicable or could not be evaluated.

Outreach and Education

LSE provides legal information to the public through public presentations, print material, and its website. LSE distributed over 10,000 LSE brochures in 2025. LSE information is posted at the courts, Community Action Programs, Social Security offices, congregate meal sites, Department of Health and Human Services offices, and Area Agencies on Aging. LSE materials are also distributed directly to homebound residents through the Meals on Wheels program and by direct mail to a broad range of referral sources including all town offices, food banks, homeless shelters, assisted living facilities, home health agencies, hospice programs, and nursing facilities. In addition to the distribution of print materials, LSE's Staff Attorneys do direct outreach with key referral sources based upon statewide and regional outreach plans. To magnify the impact of the direct outreach, LSE focuses on connecting with professionals who are potential referral sources rather than trying to directly reach older people. LSE also continued to focus in 2025 on reaching out to new and different referral sources in an effort to ensure services are reaching underserved populations and areas of the state.

The LSE website includes an extensive online elder rights handbook. The handbook includes information on elder abuse, powers of attorney, advance directives, housing rights, consumer debt problems, MaineCare estate recovery, MaineCare eligibility for nursing home coverage, Medicare Part D, and many other topics. The website provides a valuable resource not just to older people in Maine, but also to their family members and caregivers. The design of the online handbook meets all national standards for online materials for older users and is accessible on a wide range of devices. LSE also distributes hard copies of the handbook upon request.

Focus on Elder Abuse

Elder abuse continues to grow in Maine and remains a top priority systemic issue for LSE. In 2025 the volume of our elder abuse cases remained on an upward trend. In addition to providing legal representation to 568 victims of elder abuse, LSE is a leader in efforts to prevent elder abuse and improve community response when it does occur. LSE provides infrastructure support for the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention including maintaining the website and handling registration for two conferences that are held every year. The Council includes over 100 members from a broad range of public and private organizations as well as individuals. The Council focuses on raising awareness about elder abuse and improving the response by providing multi-disciplinary training for professionals who work with victims. In addition, LSE Staff Attorneys serve on local Elder Abuse Task Forces where they exist. These groups enable professionals from many different disciplines to work together to raise awareness of elder abuse and improve the local response.

LSE's Executive Director continues to Co-Chair the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership (EJCP), created by Executive Order in 2019, which includes 22 members from a broad range of public and private sector leaders. The EJCP published an Elder Justice Roadmap in January of 2022 that focuses on reducing elder abuse in Maine and improving the response to elder abuse. In 2025 the Roadmap was updated with new, re-focused objectives. LSE will be the lead organization for three of those updated objectives in 2026 and beyond. Since the fall of 2023, the EJCP has been Co-Chaired by Elizabeth Gattine, Senior Policy Analyst at the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future and Cabinet on Aging Coordinator. Maine is one of eight states to receive a grant from the National Center for State and Tribal Elder Justice Coalitions. This grant was awarded to the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. The grant supports a full-time staff person to support the work of the EJCP. Grant funding for this position will conclude in March 2026.

SUMMARY

With support from the Fund, LSE was able to assist 187 more people with 284 more legal problems in 2025 as compared to 2024. This included 2,614 emergency legal problems. LSE is pleased to report that every older person calling LSE with an emergency legal problem in 2025 received free legal help from LSE. At the same time, 366 people who sought help with less serious problems were turned away to ensure those with emergency needs could be served. We know that over 50% of older people in Maine with low incomes face at least one legal problem each year, and many face multiple legal problems in a year. Due to resource constraints, LSE is turning people away who could benefit from help. And there are many who could use our services but for various reasons do not reach out. We estimate we are meeting less than 15% of the actual need for free legal help. This leaves far too many older Mainers without access to an attorney when facing legal problems that will keep them from meeting their basic human needs.

In 2025, civil legal service providers across the United States operated in a national climate that was unusually challenging and uncertain. Political polarization and shifting policy priorities made funding conversations less predictable, while heightened scrutiny of publicly supported programs increased pressure to demonstrate measurable outcomes without sacrificing client-centered, trauma-informed service. At the same time, inflation and workforce competition drove up the actual cost of delivering legal help, even as community need remained high and, in many places, grew. The result was a year in which many providers had to plan for multiple budget and staffing scenarios, protect core capacity, and stay ready to respond quickly to sudden policy or funding changes, all while continuing to deliver timely, high-impact assistance to people who could not afford counsel.

We are pleased to report that LSE continues to deliver vital services even as we redouble our efforts to communicate the value of this service and secure the resources required to reduce unmet need.

ATTACHMENT A

Services not supported by the Fund

Medicare Advocacy Services

LSE is a vital part of Maine's legal services system as well as its eldercare network, which includes the Office of Aging and Disability Services, the Area Agencies on Aging, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, Adult Protective Services, Office of Securities, and the state's public guardianship program. Working closely with these partners, LSE provides comprehensive, statewide services to older people in Maine. This includes the provision of non-legal services that are complementary to LSE's core legal services.

LSE has three significant statewide Medicare advocacy programs that are funded entirely by restricted federal and/or state grants (and receive no support from the Fund). This includes: 1) services provided by LSE as a part of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program ("SHIP"); 2) services provided as a part of the Senior Medicare Patrol ("SMP") program, and 3) LSE's Medicare Part D Appeals Unit. The SHIP and SMP programs provide older and disabled Maine residents with information and assistance on health insurance matters, in particular Medicare and MaineCare. The Part D Appeals Unit assists people who are having trouble affording their prescription medications. In 2025, the LSE Medicare Part D Appeals Unit assisted 577 low-income Maine residents who were being denied access to needed prescription drugs under Medicare Part D.

Systemic Work and Public Policy Advocacy

Through its full-time Public Policy Advocate and the efforts of other LSE staff, LSE participates in two general areas of systemic advocacy: legislative work and administrative work, including task forces and work groups. This work enables LSE to have a much larger impact on the policies and systems affecting older people in Maine than would be possible if LSE were to limit its activities to individual representations. The LSE Board of Directors has adopted guidelines which govern the nature and scope of this systemic advocacy work. These legislative and systemic activities are not supported by the Fund.

ATTACHMENT B

Data Tables

These tables are drawn from LSE's case management system and are intended to give the Commission a clear, comparable snapshot of clients served, matters opened, priority matters, level of service, and outcomes. As in prior years, figures should be interpreted in light of LSE's service model, including the high volume of advice and brief services, the time-sensitive nature of priority matters, and the practical limits of evaluating outcomes in matters where the primary benefit is timely guidance or risk avoidance.

LSE endeavors to identify any demographic or geographic group that we may not be reaching in parity with other groups. To do that assessment, we collect information (voluntarily) on a variety of metrics. We do not attempt to collect information when doing so would hinder the attorney-client relationship.

Table B1. Volume and Access

Metric	2024	2025	Change	Percent Change
Brochures distributed	12,019	10,249	-1,770	-14.7%
Helpline calls received	11,000	13,328	+2,328	+21.2%
Legal matters opened	4,795	5,079	+284	+5.9%
Emergency matters	2,336	2,614	+278	+11.9%
Clients served	3,995	4,182	+187	+4.7%
Eligible clients turned away	505	366	-139	-27.5%
Veterans served	369	463	+94	+25.5%

Table B2. Case Categories

Category	2024	2025	Change	Share 2024	Share 2025
Benefits	227	257	+30	4.73%	5.06%
Consumer	874	870	-4	18.23%	17.13%
Employment	1	1	0	0.02%	0.02%
Family	241	239	-2	5.03%	4.71%
Health	751	748	-3	15.66%	14.73%
Housing	1,267	1,338	+71	26.42%	26.34%
Individual Rights	222	267	+45	4.63%	5.26%
Miscellaneous	50	53	+3	1.04%	1.04%
Self Determination	1,162	1,306	+144	24.23%	25.71%

Table B3. Selected Matter-Type Increases

Category	Matter Type	2024	2025	Change
Consumer	Repossession / Garnishment	50	109	+59
Self Determination	Durable Power of Attorney	274	330	+56
Self Determination	Will Referrals / Estate Planning	368	410	+42
Housing	Mortgage Foreclosure	63	95	+32
Self Determination	Estate Administration	433	461	+28

Table B4. Level of Service Distribution

The percentages do not total to 100% because 232 matters were not assigned a level-of-service code at the time of reporting.

Level of Service (selected)	2024	2025	% 2024	% 2025
Referred After Legal Assessment	1,834	1,815	40.80%	37.45%
Counsel and Advice Only	1,602	1,856	35.64%	38.29%
Brief Services Provided	130	180	2.89%	3.71%
Extensive Service – Favorable Outcome	69	105	1.54%	2.17%
Client Withdrew / Unable to Reach / No Service	413	426	9.19%	8.79%

Table B5. Outcome Summary

Program	n/a	Percent	Can't Evaluate	Percent	Improved/Favorable	Percent	Not Improved/Unfavorable	Percent	Total
Area Office	188	23.41%	138	17.19%	457	56.91%	20	2.49%	803
Helpline	27	0.63%	559	13.07%	3,685	86.18%	5	0.12%	4,276
Overall Total	215	4.23%	697	13.72%	4,142	81.55%	25	0.49%	5,079

Table B6. Distribution of Clients Served by County

Percentages for 2024 are rounded to whole numbers; percentages for 2025 are shown to two decimal places.

	Clients 2024	% of Total 2024	Clients 2025	% of Total 2025	State Population
Androscoggin	303	8%	373	8.92%	8.20%
Aroostook	176	4%	165	3.95%	4.75%
Cumberland	714	18%	759	18.15%	22.33%
Franklin	85	2%	87	2.08%	2.20%
Hancock	169	4%	183	4.38%	4.05%
Kennebec	474	12%	512	12.24%	9.14%
Knox	109	3%	110	2.63%	2.92%
Lincoln	100	2%	108	2.58%	2.60%
Oxford	184	5%	191	4.57%	4.27%
Penobscot	547	14%	534	12.77%	11.16%
Piscataquis	72	2%	71	1.70%	1.24%
Sagadahoc	105	3%	94	2.25%	2.67%
Somerset	167	4%	178	4.26%	3.65%
Waldo	122	3%	124	2.97%	2.89%
Washington	139	3%	127	3.04%	2.23%
York	529	13%	566	13.53%	15.67%

Table B7. Client Gender Distribution (CY 2025)

Gender	Clients	Percent
Female	2,625	62.79%
Male	1,551	37.09%
Transgender Female	2	0.05%
Transgender Male	1	0.02%
Decline to Answer	1	0.02%
Not Listed	2	0.05%
Total	4,182	100.00%

Table B8. Client Age Distribution (CY 2025)

Age Group	Clients	Percent
Under 60	3	0.07%
60–70	1,713	40.96%
71–80	1,599	38.24%
81 and older	867	20.73%
Total	4,182	100.00%

Table B9. Household Income Distribution (Federal Poverty Level, CY 2025)

Pursuant to the Older Americans Act, LSE does not employ a strict income screen. However, LSE obtains income information from many clients for analytical purposes and for referral assessment. Table B9 shows that 12.36% of callers had incomes over 250% of FPL. Those are primarily individuals who were counted at intake but then referred to panel attorneys or other resources.

Income Band (FPL)	Clients	Percent
Under 100% FPL	1,774	42.42%
100–150% FPL	860	20.56%
151–250% FPL	1,031	24.65%
Over 250% FPL	517	12.36%
Total	4,182	100.00%

Table B10. Client Race and Ethnicity (CY 2025)

Race and ethnicity information is reported where voluntarily provided or otherwise available.

Race / Ethnicity	Clients	Percent
White	3,929	93.94%
Black or African American	16	0.38%
Asian	11	0.26%
Native American (including Alaska Native)	20	0.48%
Pacific Islander	1	0.02%
Multiple	40	0.96%
Other	8	0.19%
Could Not Obtain	157	3.76%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0.00%
Total	4,182	100.00%

This page intentionally left blank



126 Sewall Street
Augusta, ME 04330
(207)626-7058

2025 Annual Report to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission January 2026

As Maine people face rising costs, an increasingly unaffordable housing market, and growing instability in access to food and health care, civil legal aid has become more essential than ever. This report describes how support from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (MCLSF) enabled Maine Equal Justice (MEJ) to protect families and individuals across all sixteen counties in 2025—preventing legal problems from escalating into homelessness, hunger, or loss of critical medical care. At a time when federal policy changes and program cuts are reducing access to essential supports, MEJ’s work ensures that low-income Mainers are not left to navigate complex systems alone or lose benefits because of red tape or wrongful denials.

In 2025, MCLSF provided 42% of the funding necessary to sustain MEJ’s legal representation, administrative advocacy, and statewide outreach, education, and training efforts. As MEJ’s largest source of stable, multi-year funding, MCLSF made it possible to respond to rising demand for legal assistance as more Mainers struggled to meet basic needs. Serving individuals and families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, MEJ met and exceeded the goals outlined in its 2024–2025 proposal by addressing urgent legal needs and strengthening systems through collaboration with community partners and state agencies. This support not only protected individual Mainers, but also helped stabilize communities, reduce strain on courts and service providers, and preserve access to justice when other elements of the safety net fell short.

BACKGROUND

In 1996, recognizing the limitations imposed by new federal restrictions on funding for legal representation in class-action litigation, administrative advocacy, and legislative advocacy, Maine’s legal community came together to ensure that the interests of people with low incomes would not be excluded from policy and systemic decision-making. That collaboration led to the creation of Maine Equal Justice Partners—now known as Maine Equal Justice (MEJ)—to fill a critical gap in statewide advocacy across all branches of government.

MEJ’s mission is to advance economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine with low incomes. To achieve this, MEJ employs a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach that includes: (1) public policy advocacy before the Legislature and state and federal agencies; (2) targeted legal representation and strategic litigation designed to address systemic barriers; and (3) statewide outreach, education, and training focused on the programs and protections that prevent poverty and help families achieve stability. Through this integrated use of legal advocacy, policy expertise, and

community engagement, MEJ works not only to resolve individual legal problems, but also to develop and advance solutions that reduce poverty and promote fairness on a broader scale.

MEJ's work focuses on the issues that most directly affect daily life and long-term stability, including access to health care, food and nutrition assistance, safe and affordable housing, income supports, employment protections, and education and training opportunities.

INFORMATION REQUESTED by the COMMISSION

Maine Equal Justice relies on funds from the MCLSF to support the services described below.

1. Direct Legal Representation (Advice, Referrals, Limited & Extended Representation, including Impact Litigation):

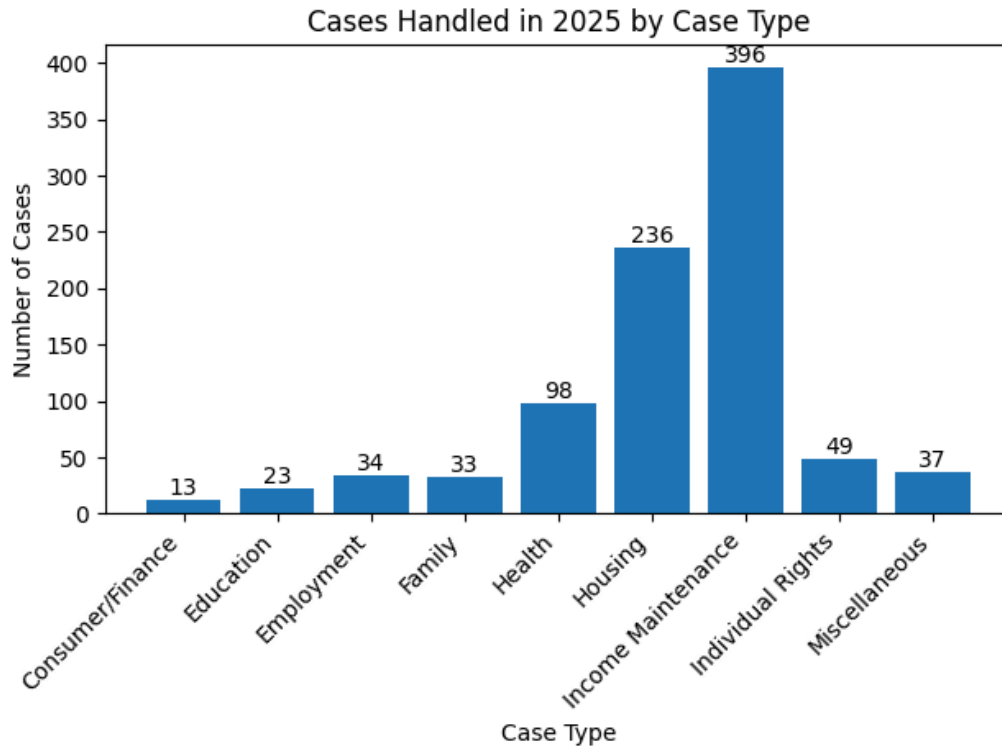
MEJ provides essential civil legal assistance through a statewide toll-free telephone and online intake system, helping individuals and families address urgent legal challenges related to public assistance, public health insurance, housing stability, and access to education and training supports. Drawing on deep expertise in state and federal law, MEJ attorneys and advocates navigate complex legal and administrative systems to secure timely and effective outcomes for people facing immediate threats to their basic needs.

MEJ fills critical gaps in Maine's civil legal aid system by providing assistance to immigrants who are ineligible for services from other providers due to federal funding restrictions. When these individuals face eviction or the loss of access to basic necessities and no other legal help is available, MEJ steps in to ensure access to justice.

In addition to representing individual clients, MEJ serves as a legal and policy resource for community organizations, service providers, state agencies, and municipalities. By offering specialized guidance on economic security programs and systemic legal issues, MEJ extends its impact beyond individual cases—supporting frontline providers and helping prevent legal problems from escalating.

MEJ also addresses broader systemic barriers through strategic litigation and targeted advocacy, working to improve policies, practices, and administrative systems so legal protections function as intended for the people they are meant to serve.

In 2025, MEJ handled **919 direct legal cases**, with the largest share involving income maintenance, followed by housing and then health care. Housing-related cases continued to rise in response to increasing instability and unaffordability statewide. A temporary increase in the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund allowed MEJ to expand capacity and respond to this growing need. In 2025, MEJ provided advice and referrals, as well as limited and full representation, in the following case categories:



Impact litigation in 2025:

Maine Equal Justice pursued impact litigation to address the needs of clients with low income while also shaping policy impacting thousands of similarly situated individuals across the state.

Here is a summary of our impact litigation in 2025:

Public Benefits:

Malloch v. DHHS (Maine Superior Court):

Challenges DHHS's decision regarding a town's compliance with the General Assistance statute, despite finding the town violated Ms. Malloch's rights by failing to record a fair hearing. Oral arguments were held in Superior Court on March 18, 2025. Awaiting a court decision.

In Her Presence v. DHHS (Maine Law Court):

Seeks to ensure recipients of state-funded TANF benefits receive the same transitional childcare and transportation benefits as federally funded TANF recipients. Although this case was argued in 2024, we are still awaiting a decision from the Maine Law Court.

Halsey, et al. v. FEDCAP (1st Circuit Court of Appeals):

Addresses TANF recipients' rights under the ASPIRE program administered by FEDCAP. The court ruled that plaintiffs must exhaust administrative remedies before suing, except for claims alleging an incident of racial discrimination directed at one of the clients. MEJ first requested administrative hearings on behalf of named parties and one other individual, but, after the third individual's hearing request was denied, withdrew the other requests to pursue the remaining tort claims. FEDCAP filed a new motion to dismiss those claims in U.S. District Court on December 19, 2025.

Housing:

Eviction Protection Project (Maine District Court):

Provides legal representation for individuals ineligible for other legal aid providers due to their immigration status. Currently representing individuals facing evictions who would otherwise go unprecedented based on their immigration status.

Marcello v. Burns Prop., LLC (Maine Superior Court):

Challenges unsafe housing conditions, including a bedbug infestation and water-damaged ceilings, under warranty of habitability, illegal eviction, and negligence claims. The plaintiff received a favorable settlement.

Brown v. Town of Scarborough, et al. (Maine Federal District Court):

Challenges town policies that restrict housing for low-income individuals because they disproportionately affect Black and African people, perpetuate segregation, and violate constitutional and fair housing obligations. The Court ruled largely in plaintiffs' favor, denying a motion to dismiss except for a single count asserting a novel Maine statutory claim. The case proceeded to discovery, but MEJ has withdrawn as co-counsel upon the retirement of its former legal director.

Foreclosure and Consumer Law:

Consumer Data Industry Assoc. v. Frey (1st Circuit Court of Appeals):

Defends a Maine law protecting victims of economic abuse from having debts reported on their credit. The Maine District Court initially upheld the law, but plaintiffs have moved to amend their complaint in light of 2025 amendments to Maine's medical debt consumer protection law. MEJ filed an amicus brief.

Fuller v. WVMF (Maine Federal District Court):

The court ruled that Finch v. U.S. Bank cannot be applied retroactively to judgments issued before the Finch decision. WVMF appealed to the First Circuit. That appeal remains pending, but MEJ has withdrawn as co-counsel upon the retirement of its former legal director.

2. Administrative Advocacy:

Maine Equal Justice's (MEJ) administrative advocacy is informed by issues identified through direct client representation, community engagement and coalition work, outreach and training activities, and participation in work groups, commissions, and advisory bodies. Together, these sources provide critical insight into how administrative policies and practices affect people with low incomes in real time.

MEJ engages in administrative advocacy primarily at the state level, focusing on programs that affect access to food, health care, income supports, and employment stability. Administrative agencies play a central role in interpreting and implementing statutes through rules, guidance, and operational decisions that often determine whether individuals can successfully access essential benefits. MEJ works to promote fairness, transparency, and due process by advocating for clear and consistent application of the law and by identifying practices that create barriers to access.

In 2025, MEJ handled **19 administrative advocacy matters**, including **15 income maintenance** cases and **4 employment-related cases**. This work focused largely on programs administered by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, including SNAP, TANF, General Assistance, and language access within DHHS systems, as well as workforce- and unemployment-related benefits administered by the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL).

MEJ submitted formal comments on proposed rules related to SNAP, TANF, and General Assistance. This included rulemaking to implement changes to SNAP work reporting requirements under H.R. 1, where MEJ's advocacy emphasized clear implementation and client education to mitigate harm and reduce the risk of improper benefit loss for approximately 40,000 Mainers. MEJ also commented on a TANF income exclusion rule that resulted in positive changes affecting 4,904 households, including 9,467 children, and engaged in administrative advocacy that led DHHS to share MEJ-developed "know your rights" materials on TANF support services statewide. Additional advocacy addressed guidance to General Assistance administrators regarding eligibility and application access.

MEJ's employment-related administrative advocacy centered on improving access to workforce and unemployment benefits administered by MDOL. MEJ worked with MDOL to improve both the application and overall process for the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, which supports individuals pursuing education and training to obtain gainful employment. MEJ also collaborated with MDOL to improve the clarity and accessibility of unemployment insurance communications, including revisions to the language used in monetary determination notices to better support understanding and due process.

In addition, MEJ advocated for increased outreach and education regarding partial unemployment benefits, an area where many eligible workers were unaware of their rights. As a result of this advocacy, MDOL expanded publicly available information on partial benefits and added a partial unemployment insurance benefits calculator to its website. MEJ also provided substantive input on MDOL's "How To" instructional videos after advocating for clearer, more accessible guidance for claimants; in 2025, MEJ contributed to improvements across ten such videos.

Through administrative advocacy and participation in the Electric Ratepayer Advisory Council, MEJ also contributed to changes to the Low-Income Assistance Program (LIAP) approved by the Public Utilities Commission, including increased program funding, improved benefit delivery, and enhanced coordination with DHHS. When implemented, these changes are expected to benefit more than 50,000 qualifying households.

MEJ also engaged in extensive administrative and executive advocacy during the 2025 state government shutdown, particularly around the risk of SNAP disruptions and benefit loss. MEJ worked to elevate concerns, clarify guidance, and support continuity of access to essential programs during a period of widespread uncertainty, even though the shutdown was ultimately resolved outside of MEJ's direct advocacy.

Although not all advocacy efforts resulted in finalized rule changes in 2025, MEJ's administrative advocacy helped clarify rights, improve agency guidance, and strengthen systems affecting employment and economic stability, laying the groundwork for continued progress in 2026 and ensuring that public benefit programs function more effectively for the people they are intended to serve.

3. Training, Education and Outreach

MEJ provides statewide outreach and training on public benefits and economic security programs for individuals with low incomes, as well as for the agencies and service providers who assist them. Through these efforts, MEJ delivers clear, practical information about available programs and how to access them—helping people secure essential supports such as health coverage, food assistance, income stability, and housing-related aid.

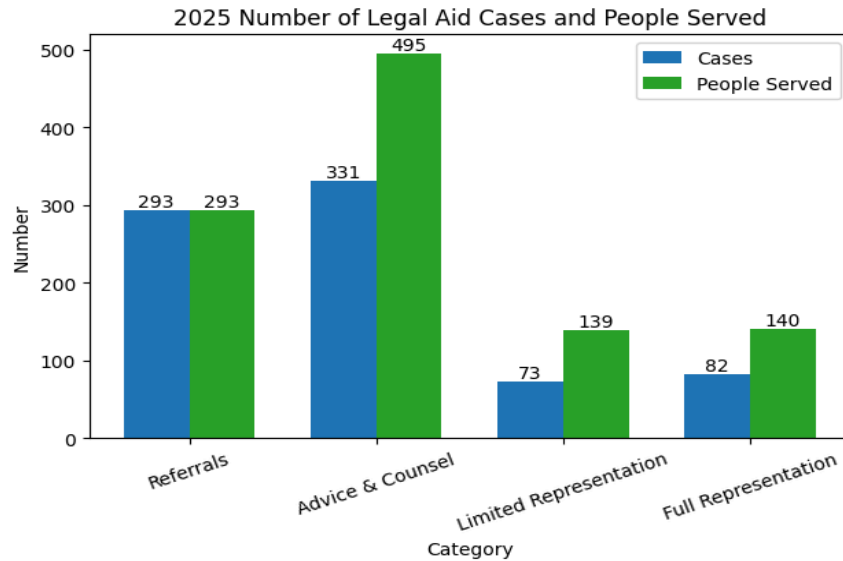
Outreach and training also serve as a critical feedback loop. By engaging directly with community members and frontline providers, MEJ identifies barriers to access, emerging trends, and systemic issues that prevent programs from functioning as intended. This on-the-ground insight informs MEJ's legal advocacy, administrative engagement, and policy work, ensuring that systemic solutions are grounded in lived experience.

In 2025, MEJ conducted 20 virtual and in-person training events across the state, reaching more than 289 participants, including staff from social service agencies, health centers, and individuals living with low incomes.

MEJ's direct outreach and training efforts are supplemented by its website, www.mejp.org, which serves as a statewide resource hub for client education materials and up-to-date information on public assistance programs, public health insurance, and education and workforce training opportunities. In 2025, MEJ developed and disseminated new resources focused on health coverage, food security, immigrant eligibility for public programs, and housing assistance—expanding access to accurate information at a time of increasing need.

Number of people served as a result of the award received from the MCLSF:

In 2025, Maine Equal Justice handled **919 cases**, impacting at least **1,271 individuals**. Of the 919 cases handled, **MEJ closed 850 cases**, and **69 cases are pending**. Seventy-one cases closed because the client withdrew or failed to return, or due to insufficient merit.



These figures do not reflect the broader impact of MEJ’s administrative advocacy or its training, education, and outreach efforts. In 2025, MEJ’s administrative advocacy affected **tens of thousands of individuals**, and MEJ reached an additional **289 individuals** through statewide training sessions.

Demographic information about people served as a result of money received from the Fund:

Maine Equal Justice represents the interests of all Maine residents living in or near poverty, which is defined as less than 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or \$51,640 in annual income for a family of three in 2026.¹ According to the most recent state data on the Kaiser Family Foundation website, there were **346,600 Maine people**, of all ages, living under 200% FPL in 2024.²

MEJ’s direct legal assistance targets people who are eligible for economic security programs. The following numbers provide a snapshot of the number of Maine people receiving public assistance from these programs as of September 2025:

- 14,547 people were enrolled in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that provides income support to families with children;
- 171,528 people were enrolled in the Food Assistance (SNAP) program that helps people with low income put food on the table; and
- 399,905 people were covered by MaineCare or CubCare, which provides public health insurance for people with low income who otherwise could not afford it.³

The geographical area served by the organization as a result of funds from the MCLSF:

¹ [2026 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States \(all states except Alaska and Hawaii\)](#)

² [KFF State Health Facts](#)

³ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/by-the-numbers/office-family-independence>

MEJ provided direct legal assistance to individuals residing in all sixteen Maine counties in 2025.

County	# of Cases	# People Served
Androscoggin	72	98
Aroostook	31	41
Cumberland	359	572
Franklin	8	8
Hancock	25	38
Kennebec	99	121
Knox	14	15
Lincoln	16	17
Oxford	34	39
Penobscot	77	82
Piscataquis	8	16
Sagadahoc	21	30
Somerset	39	52
Waldo	15	15
Washington	19	20
York	82	107
Total	919	1271

In 2025, Maine Equal Justice advanced two projects involving extensive outreach, education, and direct assistance to individuals and families pursuing greater economic stability. While these projects were not funded by the MCLSF, they were closely coordinated with MEJ's legal services, administrative advocacy, and outreach efforts described above. As rising costs of living and increasing threats to critical public benefits placed additional strain on families statewide, demand for this work grew significantly.

1) Build HOPE Project: The Higher Opportunity for Pathways to Employment (HOPE) program, enacted by the Maine Legislature in 2018, expands access to higher education and training for low-income parents and caregivers. While HOPE provides critical support for enrollment and completion, many participants continue to struggle to meet basic needs amid rising housing and utility costs and increasing instability in food and health care access.

The Build HOPE Project at Maine Equal Justice was created to address these gaps by providing targeted, flexible financial assistance to participants in the HOPE and Parents as Scholars (PaS) programs. In 2025, as economic pressures intensified, demand for this support increased, and MEJ provided **562 student parents** with income support to help them remain enrolled and on track to complete their education or training.

MEJ's legal services team worked closely with Build HOPE participants to address legal barriers and ensure access to public benefits and supports, helping stabilize families at moments when the loss of housing, health coverage, or income could have derailed educational progress.

In 2025, MEJ planned for the conclusion of the Build HOPE Fund, which was wound down at the end of the year. To carry this work forward, MEJ transitioned the project's leadership role into an Opportunity & Impact Director position, ensuring continued support for individuals pursuing education and training as a pathway to economic stability.

The Build HOPE Project also produced a comprehensive research report published in early 2024, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers and stakeholders on how to better support parents and caregivers working toward economic mobility.⁴ Even as the fund concluded, the strategies and lessons from Build HOPE remain integrated into MEJ's broader mission to advance opportunity and economic security.

2) Peer Workforce Navigator (PWN) Project: MEJ is a founding partner of Maine's PWN Project, a collaborative initiative that helps individuals navigate complex systems and overcome barriers to economic stability. The project is a partnership among the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL), MEJ, and four other community-based organizations.

Through individualized consultations and regular clinics in Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor, the PWN Project connects participants to employment opportunities, education and training programs, Unemployment Insurance (UI), and other economic supports. The project also identifies systemic barriers to workforce participation and works with MDOL to advance improvements that benefit workers statewide.

A key strength of the PWN Project is the close coordination between Peer Workforce Navigators and MEJ's legal services team, ensuring that participants' legal needs are addressed effectively. The Volunteer Lawyers Project further supports this work by providing representation to individuals improperly denied UI benefits.

In 2025, the PWN Project achieved the following outcomes:

- 140 participants secured gainful employment.
- 135 participants accessed Unemployment Insurance benefits for which they were eligible.
- 91 participants obtained health insurance coverage.
- 139 participants improved their food security.
- 130 participants gained access to additional income support programs.

By combining peer support, legal advocacy, and agency partnerships, the PWN Project advances economic stability for individuals while strengthening systems that support Maine's workforce.

Outcome measurements used to determine compliance:

The proposal submitted for 2024-2025 is based upon the core legal representation and substantive work that MEJ pursues; therefore, we evaluate our work using outcome measurements that reflect our ability to achieve systemic reform.

⁴ [Butler & Deprez, Post-Secondary Support for Parents with Low Incomes in Maine Charting Success, Bridging Gaps, and Illuminating Pathways for Economic Mobility. February 2024.](#)

Success Metrics for Brief Services, Advice, Referrals, and Extended Representation:

- Favorable case resolutions and negotiated settlements; and
- Comprehensive survey upon case closure, capturing client feedback.

Success Metrics for Administrative Advocacy:

- Acceptance of rulemaking comments;
- Implementation of administrative policy changes benefiting low-income individuals;
- Appointments to task forces, workgroups, and commissions, showcasing expertise recognition; and
- State requests for MEJ's analysis and assistance in meeting federal requirements.

Success Metrics for Training, Outreach, and Education:

- Extent of statewide outreach and training activities;
- Number of individuals trained, reflecting our impactful educational reach;
- Positive feedback from diverse organizations, including social service providers, family practice residency programs, associations, shelters, and community coalitions.

Information particular to each recipient organization regarding unmet and underserved needs:

MEJ sustains its work through a combination of public and private funding, including the MCLSF, the Maine Justice Foundation, the Campaign for Justice, foundation grants, and individual donors. Core funding sources such as MCLSF and Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts (IOLTA) are essential to maintaining MEJ's legal services and statewide capacity.

Rising costs of living have significantly increased unmet basic needs across Maine, driving higher demand for civil legal assistance. The ongoing housing crisis—marked by a severe shortage of affordable housing and increasing instability for renters—has led to growing numbers of Mainers at risk of eviction and homelessness. These conditions have resulted in increased requests for legal assistance related to housing, income maintenance, and access to essential public benefits.

Additional one-time funding from the MCLSF allowed MEJ to sustain expanded staffing capacity in 2025 to respond to this growing demand. However, if the Legislature does not sustain this one-time funding in 2026, MEJ will face staffing reductions that would limit its ability to provide critical services at a time when need is rising due to higher living costs and increasing instability in public benefit programs.

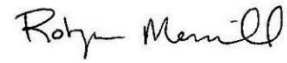
Sustaining and strengthening MEJ's capacity is essential to meeting current demand and advancing solutions that address systemic barriers to economic stability. Continued investment ensures that MEJ can protect access to housing, health care, food, and income supports—helping prevent legal crises and promote long-term economic stability for Maine people with low incomes.

CONCLUSION

Maine Equal Justice relies on the critical support of the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund to provide both direct legal assistance and systemic advocacy for Maine people with low incomes. Without this funding, MEJ's ability to respond to growing need and advance effective solutions would be

significantly diminished, leaving many individuals and families without access to essential legal protections. On behalf of MEJ's Board and staff, and the people we serve across the state, we thank the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund for its continued investment in access to justice and economic stability for Maine communities.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robyn Merrill". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Robyn" and last name "Merrill" clearly distinguishable.

Robyn Merrill
Executive Director

This page intentionally left blank



PINE TREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE, INC.

P.O. Box 547
Portland, ME 04112-0547
(207) 774-4753
<https://ptla.org>

Report to the Maine Civil Legal Services Commission January 2026

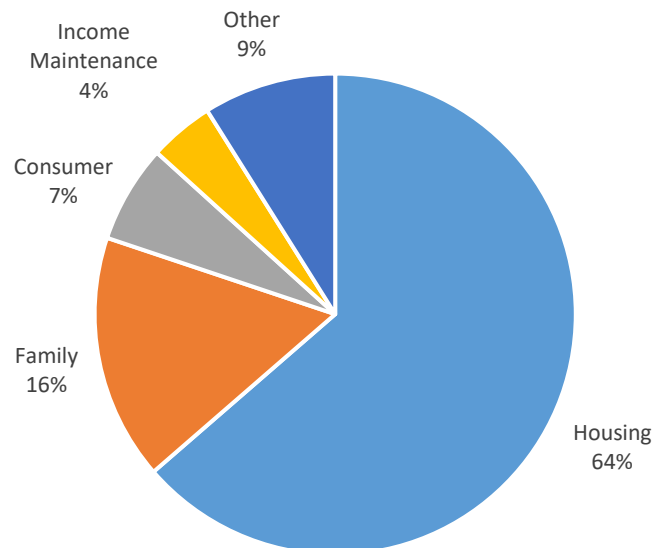
On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of Pine Tree Legal Assistance, I would like to thank the Commission for their continued support of equal access to civil justice in Maine. We are pleased to submit this report on Pine Tree's work supported by the Fund in 2025.

Types of cases handled

In 2025, Pine Tree Legal Assistance worked on a total of 7,858 cases. MCLSF provided partial funding support for all cases, augmenting and leveraging funding from other sources in a very important way that has ensured greater access to justice for thousands of Mainers.

Almost 64 percent of Pine Tree cases involved housing issues, including preventing evictions and foreclosures, enforcing safe housing and anti-discrimination laws, and others. Our housing advocacy addressed issues arising in homeownership, federally subsidized housing, public housing, private rental housing, and mobile homes.

Sixteen percent of Pine Tree cases involved family law, primarily working with survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and the non-offending caregivers of child sex abuse victims.



Additionally, seven percent of Pine Tree cases involved consumer protections, such as access to utilities, automobile issues, and debt; four percent of Pine Tree cases involved income maintenance, including helping people access benefits, such as General Assistance; and other cases handled involved education, employment, tribal, health, juvenile, and other issues. The following chart shows the number of cases handled in 2025 by area of law.

Law Category	Cases Handled
Consumer	517
Education	225
Employment (including tax)	214
Family Law (including PFAs)	1,299
Juvenile	18

Health	50
Housing	4,999
Income	341
Individual Rights	42
Miscellaneous (including Tribal law)	153
Total	7,858

Number of people served

Pine Tree reached more than **27,000 people** in 2025 through our direct legal services and outreach.

- Pine Tree served 18,157 people through individual cases, including 6,311 children.
- Pine Tree served 9,013 people through community education activities including consultations, meetings, presentations, and trainings.

MCLSF funding is crucial for the maintenance and development of website resources and self-help tools. Pine Tree maintains three websites: ptla.org, kidslegal.org, and statesidelegal.org. All three websites are freely available to any individual and remain an important way of increasing access to the justice system, especially for unrepresented individuals. Pine Tree's websites are nationally recognized for their accessibility and successful provision of tools for unrepresented people to navigate the legal system when they need to do so. In 2025, Pine Tree's websites were utilized by 2,047,482 unique users in 2025, accessing Pine Tree's websites for a total of 2,691,154 page views. These statistics include users who accessed our chatbot in 2025. [Ptla.org](https://ptla.org) alone recorded 1,773,645 users and 2,170,277 page views. The following table highlights the most frequently viewed pages on ptla.org.

Rank	Page	2025 Pageviews
1	Self Help: Health & Public Benefits	463,441
2	Self Help: Homeownership & Foreclosure	396,991
3	Self Help: Farmworkers, Work, & School	161,767
4	Self Help Landing Page	149,733
5	Search	95,445
6	Homepage	89,678
7	Contact Us	59,294
8	Rights of Maine Renters: Eviction (Spanish language version)	40,910
9	Self Help: Money, Taxes, & Debt	35,114
10	Self Help: Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, & Abuse	28,871

Demographic information about people served

Pine Tree's clients in 2025 are representative of the broad demographic diversity seen throughout the state:

- Two out of three are women.
- Two out of five have a disability and more than half have someone in the household with a disability.

- One in five is aged 60 or older.
- One in eight is Black, Indigenous, or another person of color.
- One in ten households includes a veteran or current member of the military.

To make the most of its limited resources, Pine Tree prioritizes services to individuals and families with a household annual adjusted gross income that is at or below 125% of the federal poverty guidelines, though some of our projects will also serve households with higher incomes. The chart below shows the breakdown of households served in 2025 by poverty level.

Below 100% poverty	49%
100% – 199% poverty	34%
Over 200% poverty	17%

Geographic area actually served

Pine Tree provides legal services to low-income residents in all sixteen counties. Our six neighborhood offices are strategically located around the state to be close to Maine courts. Our statewide phone intake system provides further access for all Mainers. We conduct outreach at several additional community locations, such as public libraries and town offices, and accept walk-in inquiries from prospective clients at our office locations. Pine Tree also participates in several referral partnerships to receive client referrals directly from other service providers. The chart below shows the geographical distribution of Pine Tree’s cases and clients in 2025.

County	Cases Handled	All People Served
Androscoggin	1,072	2,588
Aroostook	463	1,070
Cumberland	1,742	3,656
Franklin	162	426
Hancock	204	522
Kennebec	759	1,755
Knox	180	400
Lincoln	120	285
Oxford	382	1,009
Penobscot	939	2,117
Piscataquis	65	173
Sagadahoc	161	400
Somerset	260	670
Waldo	185	420
Washington	176	432
York	925	2,024
Out of State	60	201
Unknown	3	9
Total	7,858	18,157

Status of matters handled, including whether they are complete or open

In 2025, Pine Tree staff and volunteers worked on 7,858 cases for individuals and families. Pine Tree's advocacy ranged from the provision of legal information, advice, and brief service to negotiations and full legal representation in court and administrative hearings and in litigation. Pine Tree prioritizes providing full legal representation to our clients when possible. Of the 6,588 cases closed in 2025, clients in **38%** (2,485 cases) received legal representation in a court or administrative hearing. Of cases receiving representation, **96% were resolved in favor** of the Pine Tree client, highlighting the impact of legal services in ensuring that legal rights are properly investigated and heard in the appropriate tribunal. The following chart shows the status of matters handled in 2025.

Status	# of Cases	%
Resolved in favor of the client after full legal representation	2,378	30%
Resolved in favor of the opposing party after full legal representation	107	1%
Resolved after Pine Tree provided information, advice, or limited assistance	4,103	52%
Cases still open as of 12/31/2025	1,270	16%
Total cases worked on in 2025	7,858	

Whether and to what extent the organization has complied with its proposal to the Commission

The activities supported with MCLSF funding in 2025 are consistent with the activities proposed in Pine Tree's 2024-25 application to the Commission. In the application, Pine Tree sought funding to support its three key strategies:

- direct civil legal advocacy for individuals and families who are unable to afford private counsel.
- maintenance and development of program website resources and self-help and other community-facing educational tools.
- training events and presentations to client groups, social service providers, members of the private bar, and others.

Outcome measurements used to determine compliance

Using case management software, Pine Tree tracks both the number of cases opened and closed within a given period and the extent to which the client's objectives were achieved. Specific case closing codes are used to track the results of closed cases and to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful outcomes. Additionally, Pine Tree records data on more than 50 potential case outcomes. With Pine Tree's unique emphasis on full legal representation throughout Maine, the outcomes of our 2025 advocacy are extensive.

The following data highlights some of Pine Tree's most significant outcomes. In 2025, Pine Tree's advocacy:

- Resulted in \$4,176,970 in income, savings, and benefits to our clients.
- Prevented homelessness for 2,060 households by preventing or delaying an eviction.

- Preserved housing subsidies for eligible tenant families worth more than \$225,000 annually.
- Secured more than 368 new or extended protection orders for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence.

The data collected on outcomes provides only a glimpse into the impact of Pine Tree's advocacy. The impact of direct legal services can be profound. The following thank you note, which was received after we represented a family, further illustrates how funding from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund is used to stabilize the lives of Mainers with low incomes.

"Our family was represented in court, yesterday, by Annie Guare and we just wanted to share how grateful we are. The whole team was absolutely incredible - Annie was slick, fierce, and everything you would hope for in an attorney. The paralegals she had with her were so sweet, so fantastic - they were right there ready to help. They gave our kiddos fruit snacks, helped with all kinds of intakes for other folks going through evictions, and were right there with a pack of tissues when we got the very emotional news Annie had reached an agreement with our landlord. We were so afraid this case would impact our record negatively, as a family with no prior evictions, and she truly saved us from that.

The genuine, caring nature of the folks working for Pine Tree is not only apparent, but overwhelming in the best way possible. As we prepared for this case, Annie was so reassuring and enabled us to feel a sense of confidence we would never have had without her. She is very knowledgeable, and we left every conversation feeling better than we did before. She is very good at reading people and situations, and she knew exactly what to do, to say, and when - exhibiting skill and knowledge that makes it seem as though she's been doing this for decades. She is a wonderful person, an extremely talented attorney, and we are so grateful she was the one to represent us.

From the deepest part of our hearts, thank you. Thank you for the incredible service you provide at Pine Tree, you folks are such a blessing to so many Mainers and that is truly amazing."

Information regarding unmet and underserved needs

In 2025, Pine Tree Legal Assistance recorded 10,282 requests for legal help. Just under 65% of the requests for assistance resulted in a new case. The remaining 36% were addressed with general legal information and/or referrals to other resources. The most common reasons Pine Tree is unable to provide legal help in those situations is insufficient staffing or conflicts.

Of the requests that Pine Tree Legal Assistance was able to open as cases, we provided clients with the level of service they requested in 64% of cases. Because of our limited staff capacity, a lesser degree of assistance than clients requested (such as advice rather than full representation) was provided in the remaining 36% of cases.

This data documents only a fraction of the actual unmet and underserved civil legal needs in Maine since it only includes requests received by staff. Despite our outreach efforts, many Mainers remain unaware of legal aid programs or even that their problem is one for which legal services would be appropriate. A national study has shown that most people with civil legal problems do not identify them in that way and do nothing in response, enabling bad actors to continue operating outside the legal system.

In rural areas, data demonstrates an even higher unmet need. For example, Aroostook and Washington counties make up one-third of the entire state of Maine but have fewer than 100 working attorneys – less than 3 percent of all working attorneys in Maine. While these counties may have low population densities, their need for legal assistance remains high. A 2022 national survey conducted by the Legal Services Corporation found that 77 percent of low-income rural households experienced at least one civil legal problem in the previous year. Despite the great need for legal aid in Maine’s rural regions, recruiting and retaining attorneys in these remote areas has proven challenging.

Funding from the Maine Civil Legal Service Fund, and other sources, allowed us to launch a new program aimed at serving rural Mainers while attracting new lawyers to the region. We created the Elinor and Charles Miller Rural Justice Fellowship in 2024. The fellowship, based out of our Machias and Presque Isle offices, offers recent law school graduates the opportunity to make a difference in rural communities while also gaining valuable early-career legal experience.

The Miller Fellowship will rotate between Machias and Presque Isle each year, with each fellow serving two years. Our inaugural Fellow began in our Machias Office in September 2024, and our second Fellow started in our Presque Isle Office in September 2025. In 2025, the Miller Fellows handled 155 cases, serving 325 individuals living in the easternmost and northernmost stretches of Maine.

Conclusion

Thanks to the funding provided through the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund and other sources, our team continues to strive to meet the needs of our clients all over Maine. Every Pine Tree office – from Presque Isle to Portland – was supported with MCLSF funding in the past year. That funding also assured Pine Tree’s presence online, allowing individuals all over the state to access information about legal rights and responsibilities. MCLSF funding will remain very important to our work in 2026. We are very grateful to the Maine Legislature and State leadership for their continuing support of the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund.

Respectfully submitted,



Tom Fritzsche
Executive Director

This page intentionally left blank



Clinics at Maine Law

2025 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE MAINE CIVIL LEGAL SERVICES FUND COMMISSION AND THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Clinics at Maine Law at the University of Maine School of Law ("the Clinics") is pleased to submit this report on its use of the funds it received in 2025 from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund ("the Fund" or "MCLSF").

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Fund has greatly assisted the Clinics at Maine Law, and in so doing, has helped thousands of Maine people in need of access to justice while preparing hundreds of aspiring attorneys for the workforce.

In 2025, across all clinics, Maine Law student attorneys provided nearly 18,000 hours of pro bono legal services to 600 low-income clients in 683 cases and supported over 1,200 individuals through outreach. The Fund provides 18.4% of the Clinics' total funding. The Clinics focus primarily on civil cases, which make up 85% of our casework and 100% of our outreach. MCLSF helped support all of this work.

A. OVERVIEW OF THE CLINICS' PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

The Clinics at Maine Law (formerly known as the Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic), was established in 1970 and is now celebrating its 56th year. The Clinics is a program in which second and third-year law students, specially licensed to practice under court and agency rules as "student attorneys," provide free legal services to low-income individuals in Maine.

The Clinics' mission is to train the next generation of lawyers by promoting access to justice while meeting the acute needs of vulnerable communities. At a time when Maine faces a growing need for lawyers, the Clinics continue to directly address this workforce challenge.

The name change in 2025 reflects the expansive reach of the Clinics. Student attorneys at the Clinics work under the close supervision of Maine Law faculty, who are experienced practitioners and members of the Maine Bar. As the only legal aid provider in Maine focused on both serving the community and training the next generation of lawyers, our impact extends far beyond immediate client needs.

The magnitude of the impact of the Clinics is demonstrated not only in the number of clients and cases that we report - just under 18,000 hours of pro bono legal services to 600 low-income clients in 683 cases, but in the number of law students that are graduating law school with essential training in core lawyering skills and an understanding of the importance of access to justice for all. Through this multiplier effect, our student attorneys make a difference for clients today and also carry the skills and experience they gain in the Clinics into their future legal careers and civic life, amplifying their impact over time.

A total of 70 positions in the Clinics were filled by students in 2025, and over 40% of Maine Law students who graduated benefited from a clinical experience.

The Clinics serve clients with a range of legal matters pending in state, probate, immigration, and federal courts and agencies throughout Maine. Services are provided through seven distinct clinical programs, five of which receive support through the Fund: (1) General Practice; (2) Prisoner Assistance; (3) Youth Justice; (4) Refugee and Human Rights; (5) Protection from Abuse; (6) Rural Practice (supported by other funding); and (7) Center for Youth Policy and Law (supported by other funding). Clients qualify for the Clinics' services when (a) their household gross income falls within our financial guidelines, (b) the court or agency is within our geographic service area, and (c) we have openings for new clients.

The Clinics are run by seven full-time faculty, two part-time faculty, two teaching fellows, three full-time staff, and one part-time staff. Sixty students enrolled in clinical courses during the spring and fall semesters in 2025 and ten were hired as summer interns. In addition, all students participating in the Clinics during the academic year are required to enroll in a separate Lawyering Skills for Clinical Practice course. This course provides an in-depth classroom learning experience focusing on core lawyering skills including client-centered lawyering, interviewing, counseling, trauma-informed lawyering, cultural humility, case theory, and negotiation, among others.

Individual Clinics

The **General Practice Clinic** provides full representation to low-income individuals in a broad range of litigation-related matters at administrative, trial, and appellate levels. The majority of cases involve family law and domestic matters, but student attorneys also work on state and federal cases involving consumer, criminal, housing, probate, administrative, and miscellaneous civil issues. Students in the General Practice Clinic also provided pro bono assistance through the Volunteer Lawyers Project by providing limited representation and counseling to clients with pending

family court matters through the Courthouse Assistance Project. This experience allows students to improve their understanding of family law and to practice client counseling in one of the greatest areas of unmet legal need in Maine. The General Practice Clinic provided representation to 53 clients in 68 matters in 2025.

The **Prisoner Assistance Clinic** (PA) provides civil legal services to incarcerated individuals throughout Maine. This program emphasizes the development of interviewing and counseling skills by delivering “unbundled” legal services on a wide range of issues. To most effectively serve clients, students in the PA Clinic visit the Maine Correctional Center (MCC) and the Southern Maine Women’s Re-Entry Center (SMWRC) weekly. The PA Clinic also serves clients in other correctional facilities through written correspondence, video conferencing, and telephone calls. In 2025, the PA Clinic expanded its reach through targeted outreach and Know Your Rights trainings presented at MCC and SMWRC on a range of family law topics. The PA Clinic provided assistance to 97 clients in 110 civil legal matters in 2025 and trained 48 residents.

The **Refugee and Human Rights Clinic** (RHRC) provides an opportunity for students to represent low-income immigrants in a broad range of cases and projects. Those served include asylum applicants who have fled human rights abuses in their home countries and are seeking refuge in the United States, immigrant survivors of domestic violence, immigrant victims of certain crimes, and abandoned, neglected or abused children seeking legal status in the United States. In collaboration with a number of community partners locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, RHRC students also engage in a number of impact and outreach projects. In January 2025, the RHRC designed and launched the New England Immigration Detention Project, an initiative that works closely with the ACLU of Maine and the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project. As part of their work, RHRC student attorneys and faculty conduct one-time consultations with individuals detained in civil immigration custody in Maine by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. In 2025, RHRC students provided legal assistance, consultations, or full representation to 197 clients in 210 legal matters and assisted over 1,000 immigrants, recent immigrants and refugees through public education and outreach work. The RHRC also reached over 250 community members and professionals who work with asylum seekers, including teachers, housing coordinators, and medical professionals. Among these public education and outreach initiatives were training sessions in area hotels, schools, and community centers to Maine’s immigrant populations on how to apply for asylum and on a range of other topics involving immigration law and policy.

The **Youth Justice Clinic** serves as the front line of defense for Maine's children and emerging adults facing the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Student attorneys act as lead counsel for clients up to age 25, mastering the art of litigation as they navigate every stage of a case—from initial detention hearings and complex investigations to negotiations and trials and even post-adjudication representation. Beyond the courtroom, the Clinic takes a holistic approach to defense, ensuring that their clients' rights are protected in schools and across the various state agencies that impact their lives. In 2025, the Youth Justice Clinic provided representation to 25 clients in 43 matters, meeting a critical need for specialized, youth-centered advocacy in our communities.

Law students in the Youth Justice Clinic also work with the **Center for Youth Policy & Law** to benefit Maine children and youth statewide through policy projects that have included juvenile record sealing, alternatives to incarceration, and cross-system collaboration to support youth transitioning out of the justice system.

Maine Law students enrolled in the above Clinics or hired as summer interns also participate in the **Protection from Abuse Project** (PFA Project). Student attorneys attend the weekly Protection from Abuse docket call each week in the Lewiston District Court and represent victim-survivors of domestic or dating violence, sexual abuse, or stalking who need legal assistance. In 2025, the Fund supported a majority of the PFA Project because the U.S. Department of Justice grant previously supporting the PFA Project ended in the fall of 2023. As a direct result of the Fund's support, in 2025 the program provided representation to 165 victim-survivors in 185 cases.

The **Rural Practice Clinic** (RPC) was launched in Aroostook County as a pilot in 2023. This project is currently fully funded by a grant from the Office of the Maine Attorney General, though funding has not been identified to continue this successful clinic after the pilot period ends next year. Each semester and summer, two student attorneys live and work at the University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) on a full-time basis and are supervised on site by a full-time professor. There is already a full roster of students prepared to live in Fort Kent and work at the RPC for all of 2026. In addition to their clinical duties, the supervising professor teaches law-related undergraduate classes in order to strengthen our partnership with the UMFK and create new pathways from the County to Maine Law. Given that the essence of much small town and rural practice is working with a wide range of legal issues, RPC takes a very broad view of potential clients and case types. Our student attorneys have handled debt collection defense, a variety of family law issues, delinquency defense, criminal defense, advised on estate questions, and represented victims in Protection from Abuse proceedings. To meet this high demand, the

clinic launched several new initiatives addressing civil legal needs in 2025, including Community Legal Advice Wednesdays, which allows community members to "drop in" weekly for advice, referrals, and potential representation. Additionally, the RPC is now an official partner with the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, providing pre-petition legal representation to domestic violence victims to help avoid child removal and promote family wellbeing. In 2025, the RPC represented 63 clients in 67 legal matters and since its inception in 2023, the RPC has represented 166 individuals in 186 legal matters. The RPC is not funded by MCLSF and therefore the cases are not reported below, although it should be noted that much of the RPC caseload is civil matters.

B. SPECIFIC INFORMATION REQUESTED BY THE FUND COMMISSION

The Fund is a critical source of external funding for the Clinics. In 2025, the Fund covered over 18.4% of the total costs of running the Clinics. While the Clinics relies on money received from the Fund for nearly all the programs described above, it depends on that funding especially for the Prisoner Assistance Clinic, the Protection from Abuse Project, the General Practice Clinic, the part-time outreach and advocacy attorney in the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic, and the Summer Internship Program.

In 2025, resources provided by the Fund enabled the Clinics to support our ongoing civil legal advocacy by partially funding one full time teaching fellow, two part time adjunct faculty, an administrative coordinator for the Clinics, and three summer interns whose coverage of ongoing cases made it possible for us to operate throughout the year. MCLSF monies also enabled us to cover expenses directly related to providing legal services, such as travel to court, hiring interpreters and translators, printing, telephone, and mail. Through its funding of the Clinics, the Fund has supported the training of a significant cohort of new lawyers in Maine and enabled thousands of Maine's low-income and vulnerable residents to have access to justice.

1. The types of cases handled by the organization as a result of money received from the Fund

The majority of cases handled by the Clinics are civil legal matters supported substantially by the Fund.

Of the civil legal matters supported by the Fund, 54% are family law and include, but were not limited to, protection from abuse, parental rights and responsibilities, child protection, de facto parentage, child support, divorce, and minor guardianship.

The remaining 46% of cases supported by the Fund in 2025 are other civil legal cases and include, but were not limited to, special immigrant juvenile, small claims, employment, taxes, education, public benefits, warranty of habitability, illegal evictions, bankruptcy, small claims, landlord tenant, trusts and wills, adult guardianship, and powers of attorney. In addition, the Clinics handled a wide range of immigration matters including asylum, work permits, Freedom of Information Act requests, naturalization, and legal consultations provided to individuals through the RHRC New England Detention Project.

2. The number of people served by the organization as a result of money received from the Fund

In 2025, with money received by the Fund, the Clinics provided civil legal assistance to a total of 510 individuals in 571 civil legal matters. The Clinics also assisted more than 1,200 additional individuals through various civil legal outreach and advocacy projects. As a result, the Clinics served 42% more clients in civil legal matters and reached 58% more people through outreach and advocacy projects over the previous year. The significant increase is due in part to the launch of the New England Detention Project and the number of individuals who received consultations on their legal rights related to immigration-related detention.

3. Demographic information about the people served as a result of money received from the Fund

The primary demographic information tracked by the Clinics is the client's county of residence. The county-by-county breakdown of our clients' places of residence in 2025 for civil casework funded by MCLSF is as follows: Androscoggin 162; Cumberland 281; Franklin 4; Kennebec 7; Knox 17; Lincoln 4; Oxford 5; Penobscot 3; Sagadahoc 3; York County 15; Out of State 9. These numbers include clients in our Prisoner Assistance Clinic, who are incarcerated in several locations throughout the state. In some instances, the prisoners do not have an identifiable "home" county, in which case we list the county of their correctional facility.

The Clinics assisted a large number of clients with Limited English Proficiency or who were born outside of the United States. During 2025, our clients' came from 50 countries of origin including Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bolivia, Brazil, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chad, Chile, China, Cocos (Keeling) Island, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Finland, Gabon, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian

Federation, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, St. Lucia, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United States, Venezuela, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe.

The Clinic also assisted clients from Maine's tribes.

4. The geographical area served by the organization because of money received from the Fund

In 2025, the Clinics at Maine Law represented clients residing in or with matters pending in 14 of the 16 counties with representation in 12 counties supported by the Fund. In 2025, the Clinics provided legal assistance to clients with cases pending in Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc, Somerset, and York counties, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, tribal court, as well as the Department of Justice Immigration Court in Boston and Chelmsford (which have jurisdiction of Maine's immigration cases). Although not funded by MCLSF, Somerset and Aroostook County cases were served through the Rural Practice Clinic.

5. The status of the matters handled, including whether they are complete or open

The Clinics handled 571 civil legal matters in 2025 supported by the Fund. The Clinics had 89 civil cases open at the start of 2025. During the year, the Clinics opened 483 new cases and closed 514. Currently, at the end of the year, the Clinics had 58 civil cases open. We were able to wrap up a number of cases in anticipation of the start of the new semester in January 2026, when we expect to take on new clients.

6. Whether and to what extent the recipient organization complied with the proposal submitted to the Commission at the time of the application for funds

The Clinics is complying in all key respects with the proposal submitted in September 2025. As indicated in the overview provided in this report, the Clinic has maintained all the programs described in that proposal and significantly increased the number of people served through legal assistance and outreach in 2025. This is primarily as a result of the supplemental funding that supports the teaching fellow position, the RHRC part time attorney position, and staffing of the PFA program. Our central focus, providing high-quality full representation to low-income individuals while educating future attorneys, has remained unchanged.

The Clinics most recent application included a proposal to maintain the funding for a full time Civil Advocacy Teaching Fellow to support the civil legal

work provided by our Clinics and in particular, to support the PA Clinic. Since its launch in 2003, the PA Clinic has provided a unique and essential service to people who are incarcerated in Maine with access to civil legal aid. While most of the state's other legal aid providers are limited in their ability to provide civil legal assistance within Maine's prisons and jails, student attorneys enrolled in Maine Law's PA Clinic are able to meet a significant percentage of that need by providing people who are incarcerated with legal assistance and counsel. While serving time, individuals frequently find themselves needing legal help concerning their family, consumer, and other civil legal matters, some of which arise from the circumstances of their incarceration. When student attorneys work with clients who are incarcerated, they are not only helping those particular individuals but their work also has positive effects on their clients' family members and communities. Without this funding, which makes the work of the student attorneys possible, these needs simply would not be met. In 2025, students in the PA Clinic doubled the number of individuals reached through Know-Your-Rights presentations and increased the number of individuals who received legal assistance by 28%.

7. Outcomes measurements used to determine compliance

The Clinics track data regarding its cases through the same case management system (LegalServer) used by many other legal services providers. This software enables us to review the type and volume of cases handled each year. Caseload volume usually depends on the complexity of the individual cases being handled as well as student enrollment. The latter can depend in turn on the number of clinic faculty supervisors available, the degree of student interest, and overall enrollment in Maine Law. Faculty supervisor approval is required for every case acceptance, ensuring that the case falls within the Clinics' relevant parameters, which include measurements set to ensure compliance with our 2025 proposal to the Commission.

The Clinics employ specific evaluation mechanisms to ensure both the high quality of the representation we provide to our clients as well as the benefit our students receive from their experience working in the Clinics. Faculty supervisors accompany students to every court appearance. All incoming mail and every phone message is routed to the student's faculty supervisor, and no written communication (e.g., letter, e-mail, or court filing) can be printed, faxed, or mailed without the supervisor's approval. Since the students are participating in an academic program for which they receive a final grade, every aspect of their work is subject to university evaluation, as well as supervision by faculty.

As an educational program, each clinical program is subject to ongoing evaluations conducted by the university, including extensive evaluations of members of our faculty. In addition, faculty regularly contact judges, clerks, and social service providers who work with our program to solicit their feedback. Clients receive a questionnaire when their case is closed, and completed questionnaires are reviewed by the relevant student attorneys, faculty supervisors, and the Clinics Director. While response rates to these exit questionnaires vary, those clients who do respond nearly always give warm praise to the work performed by students and express deep appreciation for the assistance they received from the Clinics. Also, all students enrolled in clinic courses are asked to complete detailed evaluations of their clinic program and of their experiences working there.

An important measure of the success of the Clinics is our students' career choices after they graduate. Recent Maine Law graduates who participated in clinical programs have taken positions with Disability Rights Maine, the Maine Legislature, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, Legal Services for Maine Elders, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Maine Equal Justice Projects, Volunteer Lawyers Project, Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, county prosecutors' offices, public defenders' offices, the Office of the Attorney General, as well as positions in the state and federal courts as clerks and fellows. Other recent Maine Law graduates associated with the Clinics have joined or opened small firm practices in rural Maine, including counties with underserved populations. Two recent grads who participated in the Rural Practice Clinic have taken positions and are working in Aroostook County. A number of our graduates tell us that, as a direct result of their experiences working in the Clinics, they have decided to become rostered guardians *ad litem* or to accept court appointments in the areas of child protection, juvenile defense, or criminal defense. Several graduates of the Clinics who work in mid-size and large firms have signed on with the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project and the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project to accept pro bono cases.

8. Information regarding unmet and underserved needs

The Clinics receive hundreds of calls from individuals seeking legal assistance every year and also receive many referrals from courts and agencies. In 2025, 1,699 individuals contacted the Clinics for legal assistance and were provided with referrals to other agencies due to their ineligibility for our assistance or a lack of available openings at the Clinics. The Clinics front desk is staffed exclusively by law student volunteers and work study law students. The phone line is staffed during business hours and provides live, personalized referral services to every individual that calls for assistance.

Since the number of low-income Maine residents who need our help greatly exceeds our program's capacity, the Clinics designates certain priorities for case acceptance. Thus, in assessing eligibility, we give priority to those potential clients who would otherwise have particular difficulty representing themselves due, for example, to geographic isolation, language barriers, mental illness or other disability, a history of domestic violence, youth, sexual orientation. We also provide legal representation in those areas of the law where there is a particularly acute need, such as complex family law matters with issues of family violence, substance abuse, mental illness, or conflicting jurisdiction. The Clinics makes every effort to accommodate referrals from courts and other organizations that have identified specific individuals who would benefit from our assistance, particularly where this is due to the limitations of other legal aid programs.

C. CONCLUSION

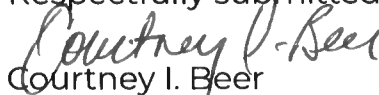
The support provided by the Fund remains indispensable to the operations and mission of the Clinics. Despite contributions from State appropriations to the University of Maine System, various grants, and private philanthropy, significant resource gaps persist. The Fund stands out as a particularly vital partner, enabling the Clinics not only to maintain current operations of training emerging legal professionals and delivering critical legal aid, but also to innovate and expand our approach to serving Maine communities.

Throughout 2025, the Fund's financial support proved instrumental in advancing our dual objectives: addressing urgent legal needs among Maine's most underserved populations while simultaneously preparing the next generation of skilled, service-oriented attorneys. Notably, the supplemental allocation allowed us to broaden our client services through enhanced representation and expanded community outreach initiatives. The connection between this increased investment and our measurable impact across the state has been both direct and substantial.

On behalf of the President/Dean Leigh Saufley, faculty, staff, students of the Clinics at Maine Law, and our hundreds of clients, we extend our sincere gratitude to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund for its ongoing commitment to our programs.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or requests for additional information.

Respectfully submitted,



Courtney I. Beer

Director of the Clinics at Maine Law

courtney.beer@maine.edu

This page intentionally left blank



Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project Report to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission January - December 2025

A. Overview of Applicant Organization

The Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP) is Maine’s statewide pro bono provider, mobilizing the private bar to address critical gaps in access to civil legal justice. Founded in 1983 by the Maine Justice Foundation and Pine Tree Legal Assistance and established as an independent nonprofit organization in 2017, VLP has spent more than four decades building the systems, partnerships, and professional support necessary to deliver high-quality pro bono legal assistance at scale.

VLP connects individuals facing urgent civil legal problems with volunteer attorneys prepared to provide meaningful legal help. Operating at the intersection of unmet legal need and attorney capacity, VLP recruits, trains, and supports lawyers and community volunteers while ensuring that low-income Mainers can access timely, appropriate legal assistance statewide. Through this work, VLP strengthens the pro bono infrastructure of Maine’s legal community, expands access to justice where traditional legal aid cannot meet demand, and enables attorneys to fulfill their professional responsibility in ways that align with their expertise, availability, and commitment to public service.

VLP advances these goals through a small staff of eleven (six full-time and five part-time) who provide administrative, programmatic, and operational support to the volunteer efforts of the Maine legal community¹. VLP staff oversee client intake and screening, coordinate pro bono referrals and clinics, and provide training, supervision, and ongoing support to volunteer attorneys, student interns, and community volunteers. VLP recruits attorneys through its website, targeted outreach, and engagement with newly admitted lawyers to encourage pro bono service as a routine part of legal practice. The organization works closely with courts and community partners to

¹ This includes a Staff Attorney position and Intake Paralegal position which we expect to fill in 2026. To help meet the need for extended representation pro bono legal services, the Staff Attorney will carry a caseload in addition to providing other support for VLP’s pro bono programs and volunteer attorneys.

increase awareness of available services, reduce barriers to volunteer participation, and strengthen access to civil legal assistance statewide. VLP also collaborates with other legal aid providers, the Maine State Bar Association, the Maine Justice Foundation, the Maine Justice Action Group, and community organizations to expand the availability and effectiveness of pro bono legal services for low-income Mainers.

VLP provides civil legal assistance statewide, with volunteer attorneys serving clients in all sixteen Maine counties. Clients seek help with a wide range of civil legal issues, including family law, protection from abuse, workers' rights, probate, small claims, property matters, bankruptcy, and unemployment and disability benefits appeals. Services are delivered through in-person programs, virtual clinics, and online platforms, allowing VLP to reach individuals regardless of geography or transportation barriers. Through this flexible service model, VLP ensures that people across Maine can access legal assistance in formats that meet their needs.

VLP staff manage client intake, eligibility screening, and case placement. To qualify for services, individuals must have a civil legal issue in Maine and an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines, with assets not exceeding \$10,000, unless exceptional circumstances are identified on a case-by-case basis. After screening, staff assess the client's legal needs and determine the most appropriate form of assistance, including referral to a volunteer attorney or placement in a clinic. VLP staff also collect relevant documents and information to support attorney volunteers and provide ongoing assistance by matching volunteers with opportunities that align with their interests and availability. In addition, VLP offers mentoring, free training for volunteer attorneys including CLEs, and malpractice insurance for work performed on VLP cases.

B. Information Requested by the Commission

Types of Cases Handled

VLP coordinates pro bono civil legal services provided by volunteer attorneys through three primary service models: attorney referrals, limited representation clinics, and online legal advice.

Attorney referrals involve recruiting a volunteer attorney to accept a client for consultation with the possibility of full pro bono representation in a civil legal matter. Attorneys who accept these referrals provide the same level of service they would offer a paying client. In 2025, VLP referred clients for pro bono assistance in matters including bankruptcy, benefits appeals and overpayments, family law, employment, end-of-life issues such as wills and probate, and real estate. VLP recruits attorneys and other community members to conduct outreach to members of the bar regarding specific cases for consultation and potential extended representation through its “Lawyer to Lawyer” referral program.

Limited representation clinics are designed to address high-volume needs and to serve populations requiring timely, focused legal guidance. In these clinics, eligible individuals meet with an attorney for advice and limited representation and may have multiple clinic appointments if needed. In 2025, VLP’s clinic programs included virtual and in-person Courthouse Assistance Programs (CHAPs) for family law; the Family Law Helpline for matters involving domestic violence; the Workers’ Rights Legal Clinic for employment-related concerns; the Small Claims Clinic to assist people with small claims matters; the Maine Homeless Legal Project to assist clients referred by Preble Street; and the Bankruptcy Clinic to assist people who have significant debt. In some instances, clinic consultations led to referrals for extended representation.

VLP also organizes and manages volunteer attorneys to provide limited representation in protection from abuse (PFA) matters, in partnership and coordination with domestic violence resource centers around the state. VLP’s volunteer attorneys provide virtual consultations and in-person representation in Biddeford, Portland, and Lewiston, which may include representation through the conclusion of the PFA matter. Volunteer attorneys also provide consultations and occasional in-court representation to survivors of domestic violence in other parts of Maine.

In addition, VLP administers **Free Legal Answers Maine (FLAME)**, an online legal advice platform operated in partnership with the American Bar Association. Through FLAME, eligible

Mainers with low incomes can submit questions about civil legal issues, and volunteer attorneys recruited, trained, and supported by VLP provide written answers. VLP staff serve as site administrators, screening and monitoring questions and providing referrals to other resources where appropriate.

VLP has developed partnerships with a variety of community organizations to facilitate referrals of their clients for help with civil legal matters. In addition to Maine's domestic violence resource centers and Preble Street, community partners include Acadia Hospital, Wabanaki Health and Wellness, Groups Recover Together, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, the Peer Workforce Navigator Project, AmeriCorps Legal Access Navigators, and the Maine Access Immigrant Network. Maine's other civil legal aid programs also regularly refer clients to VLP. VLP further flexes to engage volunteer attorneys in different ways to meet emerging needs, typically in partnership with other organizations such as the University of Maine School of Law.

Number of People Served

In 2025, 1,614 individuals received legal assistance through VLP programs, and an additional 265 individuals received assistance through the Free Legal Answers Maine (FLAME) online portal, for a total of 1,879 people served.² Each individual is counted once in VLP's case-based reporting, and FLAME users are tracked separately. Of the individuals with VLP cases, 1,278 were new cases opened during 2025.

The services provided through VLP programs included referrals for full pro bono representation as well as limited representation and legal information services delivered through clinics and other programs. The level of service is determined when a case is closed. Of the matters closed during 2025, 1,302 individuals received limited representation or legal information services, while 23 individuals received extended pro bono representation. The remaining cases were still open at year-end and therefore not yet categorized by level of service.

A substantial portion of VLP's work in 2025 focused on assisting survivors of domestic violence. During the year, VLP provided legal assistance in 312 family law matters involving

² In 2025, VLP's volunteer attorneys answered 284 questions asked by 265 individuals through FLAME.

domestic violence, including 134 Protection From Abuse (PFA) cases, the majority of which were referred by Maine’s domestic violence resource centers. This represents a decrease from the 184 PFA cases assisted in 2024, reflecting fewer requests for assistance early in 2025 as well as reduced volunteer attorney availability for in-person PFA representation in Lewiston. VLP continues to prioritize domestic violence–related matters as a core component of its mission and service delivery.

As of December 31, 2025, 289 cases remained open, and the level of service for those matters had not yet been determined. Of those open cases, 52 had been referred to a volunteer attorney, and 4 were awaiting placement with an attorney. The remaining 233 cases were pending clinic scheduling or further review, such as awaiting client documentation prior to referral or appointment.

These figures do not capture the full number of individuals who contacted VLP seeking assistance. Individuals who were not eligible for services or whose legal needs could not be met were provided with information about other resources, including referrals to other legal aid providers and community organizations. In 2025, approximately 1,475 individuals received such referrals. VLP tracks this activity to document the broader scope of assistance provided beyond formal case representation.

The cases that were open during 2025 reflected a wide range of civil legal matters. As in prior years, family law and related matters comprised the largest share of VLP’s caseload, with 1,032 family law cases open during the year, compared to 1,135 in 2024. VLP also provided legal assistance in 312 family law matters involving domestic violence, including 134 Protection from Abuse (PFA) cases, the majority of which were referred by domestic violence resource centers. This represents a decrease from the 184 PFA cases assisted in 2024, reflecting fewer requests for assistance early in 2025 and reduced volunteer attorney availability for the Lewiston PFA program.

The case-type data below provides a detailed breakdown of the civil legal issues addressed by VLP during the year:

Case Type	Number of Cases
Benefits	63
Bankruptcy	83
Employment	127
End of Life/Wills/Estates	27
Small Claims	140
Foreclosure and Housing	21
Miscellaneous (including tort claims, education, and other)	16

Demographic Information about People Served

VLP collects various forms of demographic information about the people we serve. The age groups of our clients in 2025 were as follows:

Age Group	Number	Percentage
Under age 25	104	6.4%
Age 25-34	510	32%
Age 35-44	508	31%
Age 45-60	349	22%
Over age 60	142	9%
Unknown	1	0.06%

Additional demographic information for our clients includes the following:

- 84.4% of clients identified as White, 6.3% as Black, 3.2% as Hispanic, 1.8% as Native American, 1.2% as Asian, and 32% as other or were unknown.
- 4.10% of clients did not speak English as a first language.
- 33.6% of clients identified as having a disability.
- 69.9% of clients identified as female, 29.2% as male, and 0.9% were other/no answer.

Geographic Areas Served

VLP provides civil legal assistance statewide through a combination of in-person and virtual programs. Four programs are location-specific: the in-person Protection From Abuse (PFA) programs in Portland, Biddeford, and Lewiston, and the Courthouse Assistance Program (CHAP) in Lewiston. All other services are available to eligible clients regardless of where they reside in Maine, including Free Legal Answers Maine (FLAME) for individuals with internet access.

In 2025, VLP provided assistance to individuals in all sixteen counties of Maine, as illustrated in the table below.

2025 Distribution of VLP Clients by County

<u>County</u>	VLP cases	FLAME	Total	% of Total
Androscoggin	237	28	265	14%
Aroostook	34	11	45	2 %
Cumberland	411	40	451	24%
Franklin	32	10	42	2%
Hancock	41	12	53	3%
Kennebec	122	27	149	8%
Knox	26	3	29	2%
Lincoln	27	8	35	2%
Oxford	87	16	103	6%
Penobscot	186	43	229	12%
Piscataquis	15	5	20	1%
Sagadahoc	25	8	33	2%
Somerset	60	11	71	4%
Waldo	45	7	52	3%

Washington	24	9	33	2%
York	204	46	250	13%

(Out of state / Unknown: 38)

VLP receives requests for assistance from individuals throughout Maine through multiple access points designed to reduce barriers to seeking help. The VLP website (www.vlp.org) allows potential clients to submit intake requests online or to request assistance by email. For individuals who are unable to use online forms or email, VLP operates an Intake Line that is largely staffed by trained community and student volunteers. Individuals in Northern Maine—specifically Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, and Washington counties—may also leave messages on a dedicated intake line to request assistance.

VLP additionally receives referrals through established warm referral channels with community partners and other legal aid programs. Requests for family law matters involving domestic violence and for Protection From Abuse (PFA) legal assistance are referred through a specialized process coordinated with Maine’s regional domestic violence agencies. VLP also accepts requests for assistance from incarcerated individuals via regular mail.

When a client is determined to be eligible for services, VLP staff assess the client’s legal needs and identify the most appropriate form of assistance, taking into account factors such as the client’s location and the nature of the legal issue. Assistance may include placement in a virtual or in-person clinic with a trained attorney or referral to a volunteer attorney for consultation and potential full representation. VLP’s virtual clinics are conducted by video conference or telephone, ensuring that individuals across Maine can access attorney assistance regardless of geography.

VLP continues to prioritize expanding access to services in Northern Maine. In 2025, VLP replaced a part-time Staff Attorney position with a full-time Justice Referral Coordinator, whose responsibilities include expanding outreach to attorney volunteers, strengthening partnerships, and increasing engagement with communities in Northern Maine, as well as supporting clinic and extended referral programs. Building on this work, VLP’s 2026 plans include piloting an in-person PFA representation clinic in Bangor, to be managed by the Justice Referral Coordinator.

Compliance with Proposal to Commission

In its September 2023 application to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund Commission, VLP articulated its overarching goal as providing pro bono representation to as many low-income Mainers as possible in civil legal matters. Where full representation is not available, VLP committed to providing litigants with advice and guidance to support effective self-representation in the Maine courts. The application also identified a related goal of using pro bono legal assistance to promote physical and economic safety, security, and stability for individuals and families facing legal problems, while supporting the prompt and effective resolution of those matters.

Throughout 2025, VLP's staff and volunteers carried out their work in alignment with these goals. The 2023 application further outlined a series of objectives and action steps intended to advance them. As described below, VLP made meaningful progress on these objectives during the year, while also undertaking a review and alignment of its organizational structure to ensure that staffing roles, reporting relationships, and operational processes were well positioned to support service delivery.

As part of this organizational structure review and alignment, VLP implemented targeted organizational and role changes in 2025. These changes included the creation of two manager roles to provide greater focus and oversight for client intakes, clinics and programs, and volunteer recruiting and engagement, as well as the hiring of a Clinic Coordinator to support the scheduling and operation of clinics. VLP also adjusted reporting relationships to organize staff into teams reporting to the two managers, with the aim of fostering collaboration, promoting consistent approaches to service delivery, leveraging technology more effectively, and strengthening volunteer recruitment, training, and support. In addition, VLP converted a part-time, Bangor-based Staff Attorney position into a full-time Justice Referral Coordinator role, expanding capacity to coordinate referrals and programs, recruit and support volunteer attorneys, and build and sustain relationships with regional partner organizations and courts.

Building on these changes, VLP plans to hire a Staff Attorney and an Intake Paralegal in 2026. The Staff Attorney will increase service capacity by providing direct representation in court and at clinics and by supporting volunteer recruitment, training, and assistance. VLP is managing these staffing investments to minimize net increases in expenses while making the structural

shifts necessary to strengthen organizational capacity, serve more people effectively, enhance volunteer engagement, and improve employee retention.

Improving Intake and Referral Processes

The first objective identified in VLP's 2023 application was to strengthen internal processes for client intake, screening, case preparation, and referrals. These functions are essential to ensuring timely access to legal assistance for individuals with urgent civil legal needs. Delays at the intake stage can result in loss of contact with clients or render assistance ineffective. Similarly, client no-shows for clinic appointments can disrupt service delivery and negatively affect volunteer attorney engagement.

In support of this objective, VLP adjusted its staffing model in 2025 to provide greater focus and oversight for intake operations and community volunteer engagement. These changes included the creation of a Client Intakes and Community Volunteers Manager position and plans to add a part-time Intake Paralegal in 2026 to further support intake capacity. The Client Intakes and Community Volunteers Manager renewed and expanded VLP's relationships with local undergraduate institutions and the University of Maine School of Law and implemented updated recruiting, training, and support strategies for community volunteers and student interns who provide essential assistance with intakes. The Intake Manual was also updated to reflect the new intake systems described below.

In 2025, VLP launched a new online intake process that enables individuals to submit detailed requests for assistance through a simple, mobile-friendly platform. This system replaced prior online forms, reducing barriers to requesting help and improving usability for clients. Increased automation eliminated inefficiencies associated with the prior manual process of entering requests into VLP's case management system.

Together, these changes enabled VLP to respond to most initial requests for assistance within less than two weeks during much of the year. The improvements also allowed staff who previously conducted intakes to redirect time toward scheduling clinic appointments and facilitating referrals to volunteer attorneys.

VLP continued to enhance its website to improve clarity for individuals seeking legal help, including clearer descriptions of the types of matters VLP can assist with, guidance on how to request help, and links to educational resources and other potential sources of assistance. In addition, VLP refined its warm referral processes to make it faster and easier for community partners to refer clients for legal assistance.

VLP worked closely with partners including Preble Street, Maine’s domestic violence resource centers, and the Maine Peer Workforce Navigator Project to maintain and strengthen warm referral procedures, ensuring that intakes can be conducted promptly and eligible cases referred efficiently for pro bono assistance.

Updating Attorney Database

An additional objective identified in VLP’s 2023 application was to maintain and regularly update its database of volunteer attorneys, a critical component of ensuring timely and appropriate placement of cases following intake. Accurate, current attorney profiles—including contact information and areas of interest—are essential given the frequent changes within the Maine bar, such as attorneys changing firms, shifting practice areas, or retiring.

During 2025, VLP’s programs team conducted outreach to volunteer attorneys to confirm and update profile information, including contact details and pro bono interests. Student volunteers from the University of Maine School of Law also assisted with this work by periodically contacting attorneys to help ensure that database information remains current and reliable.

Improvements to Family Law and Domestic Violence Programs

Strengthening family law and domestic violence services, while continuing to refine the use of technology, was a core objective of VLP’s 2023 MCLSFC application. In 2025, VLP built on prior enhancements by clarifying leadership roles and aligning program oversight with clinic operations, supporting more consistent and effective service delivery across these programs.

This structure enabled the adoption of uniform practices across family law and domestic violence clinics, including standardized scheduling, automated reminders for clients and volunteer attorneys, and improved tracking and follow-up on client no-shows. These changes improved

reliability for clients, reduced administrative burden for volunteers, and strengthened overall clinic operations.

Expanding in-person services remains an important goal, though the availability of volunteer attorneys for in-person family law consultations continues to be limited. In 2025, VLP successfully re-launched walk-in family law Courthouse Assistance Program (CHAP) clinics in Lewiston and continued its collaboration with the Clinics at Maine Law, through which student attorneys, under faculty supervision, provide virtual CHAP consultations. This partnership expanded service capacity while supporting the development of future pro bono attorneys. Building on this work, VLP plans to pilot an in-person Protection From Abuse (PFA) representation clinic in Bangor in 2026.

Partnerships with domestic violence resource centers across Maine remain central to VLP's domestic violence work. Through the Family Law Helpline and a streamlined warm referral process, VLP connects volunteer attorneys with survivors seeking legal assistance. In 2025, volunteer attorneys provided virtual consultations and in-person representation in Biddeford, Portland, and Lewiston, including representation through the conclusion of PFA matters when appropriate, as well as consultations and limited in-court representation in other regions of Maine. In January 2025, VLP launched a new PFA panel in Biddeford in partnership with Caring Unlimited, the York County domestic violence resource center, which served approximately 25 individuals during the year.

Throughout 2025, VLP continued to recruit, support, and retain volunteer attorneys for its family law and PFA programs. Quarterly check-in meetings for CHAP, Helpline, and Portland PFA Panel volunteers, along with regular family law and PFA-focused newsletters, provided ongoing opportunities for information-sharing, professional support, and engagement.

Expanding Limited Representation Clinics

Limited representation clinics are a central component of VLP's service model and a primary means by which the organization delivers pro bono assistance statewide. Many clinics operate virtually, allowing clients in every Maine county to access legal assistance by video conference or telephone and eliminating travel barriers that would otherwise prevent participation.

Through these clinics, volunteer attorneys provide targeted legal guidance to individuals who must represent themselves in civil matters. Attorneys help clients understand court procedures and applicable rules, identify the legal issues that must be addressed to advance their claims or defenses, and prepare necessary documents or filings. When appropriate, attorneys also assist clients in preparing for hearings or mediation. This assistance enables clients to engage more effectively with the court system while reducing avoidable delays that can arise when litigants lack basic legal information. By addressing questions and procedural issues before cases reach the courtroom, limited representation clinics support more efficient court operations and improve access to justice for all court users.

Limited representation also helps individuals assess whether pursuing a legal claim is appropriate and what outcomes they can reasonably expect from the court process. This guidance reduces unnecessary filings and untenable claims, promotes informed decision-making, and increases litigant confidence in the legal system. Clients are better equipped to navigate their legal issues, and courts benefit from better-prepared parties.

These clinics also provide an accessible entry point for attorneys who may be unable to commit to extended or in-person representation. VLP has developed a dedicated pool of volunteer attorneys who participate in clinics on a regular basis, including weekly and biweekly schedules, and who play an important role in mentoring and training new volunteers.

In addition to the family law and domestic violence clinics described above, VLP continued to operate its virtual Bankruptcy Clinic, launched in 2024. The clinic remained successful in 2025, serving more than 60 clients. Clients reported high levels of satisfaction with the guidance they received, and participating attorneys described the clinic as a meaningful and manageable pro bono opportunity.

During the second half of 2025, VLP also partnered with Preble Street and an experienced pro bono attorney to pilot a return to in-person limited representation clinics for the Maine Homeless Legal Project (MHLF). To reduce access barriers, the volunteer attorney met clients in person at locations identified in advance with support from Preble Street caseworkers. The pilot served approximately nine individuals in 2025 and will continue in 2026 as VLP works with Preble

Street to expand in-person access for clients who lack reliable transportation and to recruit additional attorneys with relevant expertise.

Building on these efforts, and in response to community need, VLP plans to pilot an in-person Protection From Abuse limited representation clinic in Bangor in 2026.

Enhancing Pro Bono Engagement Efforts and Increasing Attorney Recruitment

VLP's service model depends on sustained attorney recruitment and meaningful volunteer engagement, and these efforts continued throughout 2025. During the year, VLP employed multiple strategies to expand its pool of volunteer attorneys and to encourage deeper and more consistent participation. To better align recruitment with program needs, oversight of attorney recruitment and engagement was centralized within the Clinics, Referrals, and Attorney Engagement Manager role, allowing for more responsive matching of attorneys to pro bono opportunities based on subject-matter expertise, interests, and availability.

Mentoring and education remain core components of VLP's attorney engagement strategy. Because of organizational changes underway in 2025, VLP offered fewer continuing legal education programs than in prior years. During the year, VLP hosted one free continuing legal education program focused on employment law and workers' rights, which was attended by approximately 20 attorneys and helped increase awareness of pro bono opportunities through VLP's Workers' Rights Clinic. Beginning in 2026, VLP will host a free monthly continuing legal education series focused on poverty law and access-to-justice issues, aimed at equipping attorneys with substantive knowledge while strengthening the bar's engagement in closing gaps in civil legal services statewide.

The Justice Andrew M. Mead Fellowship for Pro Bono Service is designed to support attorneys who are new to the Maine bar in developing sustained pro bono practices. The 2025 cohort included seven Fellows who participated in trainings and events addressing appellate practice, federal court practice, and ethical considerations in pro bono representation. Several Fellows also engaged directly in pro bono service and shadowed experienced volunteers. While the Fellowship has been successful, VLP identified opportunities for refinement and growth.

Accordingly, the Fellowship will be paused in 2026 to allow for evaluation and restructuring, with the goal of strengthening the program and increasing participation in future cohorts.

VLP staff also conducted outreach to raise awareness of pro bono opportunities across the legal community. These efforts included participation in events hosted by the Maine State Bar Association, including the New Lawyers Section Pro Bono Fair and Bridging the Gap program, as well as bar admission ceremonies, county bar meetings, and law student events.

In addition, VLP staff participate in the Justice Action Group Pro Bono Committee. A significant focus of the committee's work in 2024 was advocacy before the Maine Supreme Judicial Court for an amendment to Maine Bar Rule 5 to permit attorneys to earn continuing legal education credit for pro bono service. That advocacy was successful, and the Court announced the rule amendment at the end of 2024, with a pilot program implemented in 2025. During the year, VLP conducted outreach to volunteer attorneys regarding the process for obtaining CLE credit under the amended rule and anticipates that the availability of CLE credit will further incentivize attorney participation in VLP's pro bono programs.

Outcome Measures Used to Determine Compliance

As described in its 2023 application, VLP evaluates program effectiveness using multiple outcome measures, including service volume, attorney participation, and organizational capacity.

One key measure is the number of individuals served through VLP programs. In 2025, VLP served 1,879 people, a decrease from 2,280 people served in 2024. This reduction reflects several factors, including fewer requests for assistance, reduced volunteer attorney availability, and organizational changes that affected service delivery during the year.

Attorney participation and service hours are another important measure of program impact. In 2025, at least 119 Maine attorneys volunteering through VLP provided more than 1,973 hours of pro bono legal services. Using an estimated average rate of \$200 per hour, this represents over \$394,600 in donated legal services provided to low-income Mainers.

These figures do not capture the full scope of pro bono hours contributed through VLP programs. Attorneys who accept full-representation referrals self-report their hours, often only upon case closure, and some do not report hours at all. VLP continues to strengthen data collection by improving case reporting forms, increasing follow-up with volunteer attorneys, and emphasizing the importance of accurate time reporting.

To expand outcome measurements beyond service volume, VLP has developed client questionnaires to collect both quantitative and qualitative feedback regarding clients' experiences working with VLP staff and volunteer attorneys. These tools will be implemented in 2026 to incorporate client-centered outcomes into program evaluation.

Staff retention is an additional indicator of organizational health and program sustainability. Recognizing prior retention challenges, VLP implemented structural and role changes in 2025 aimed at strengthening internal support, improving service delivery, and increasing long-term organizational capacity.

In the final quarter of 2025 under new executive leadership, VLP undertook a focused period of organizational assessment and systems refinement. This work included a comprehensive review of internal processes, data and reporting systems, and program operations; evaluation of existing service models; and strengthened engagement with partners and professional networks. This period of audit and alignment informs VLP's strategic priorities for 2026 and positions the organization to strengthen service delivery, volunteer engagement, and institutional capacity.

Unmet and Underserved Needs

VLP operates as the sole statewide pro bono provider within Maine's broader civil legal services ecosystem. Rather than duplicating the work of other legal aid providers, VLP functions as an overlay—mobilizing, training, and organizing volunteer attorneys to respond to unmet legal needs that cannot be fully addressed through existing legal aid capacity. This role requires ongoing responsiveness both to community-identified needs and to gaps identified by partner organizations, courts, and other legal service providers.

Despite these efforts, many individuals with civil legal problems remain unable to access legal assistance. Some unmet needs involve case types for which there is an insufficient pool of volunteer attorneys with the necessary expertise or capacity to provide pro bono services. These unmet and underserved areas include the following:

- **Administrative Law:** VLP receives requests involving disputes with government agencies, municipalities, health insurers, or medical providers. In most cases, VLP does not accept these matters for referral due to limited availability of volunteer attorneys with administrative law expertise.
- **Cases Involving the Department of Health and Human Services:** Individuals regularly seek assistance related to DHHS matters, including child protection and elder abuse concerns. While parents are entitled to court-appointed counsel once a child protection case is filed, access to legal guidance during the pre-filing phase remains limited. Attorneys with the necessary training are typically engaged through court-appointed systems and are not generally available for volunteer placement.
- **Family Matters:** Family law remains one of the largest areas of unmet legal need in Maine. While VLP's Courthouse Assistance Program clinics and Family Law Helpline provide essential guidance, many individuals—particularly survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities or mental health challenges, individuals with language or literacy barriers, and immigrant families navigating unfamiliar legal systems—require full representation. Few attorneys are willing to accept extended pro bono family law matters, and recruiting volunteers for in-person services continues to be challenging.
- **Foreclosure:** Although foreclosure-related requests are less frequent than during prior housing crises, VLP continues to receive inquiries from individuals at risk of losing their homes. Limited assistance may be available through VLP's bankruptcy clinic, but VLP lacks sufficient volunteer attorney capacity to place foreclosure matters for full representation.
- **Guardianship (Minor and Adult):** Guardianship matters involve complex legal and procedural requirements and often include sensitive family dynamics. These cases typically require sustained engagement and specialized knowledge of probate court

processes. Limited volunteer attorney availability restricts VLP's ability to place these matters for pro bono representation.

- **Immigration-Related Matters:** Maine has a growing immigrant population, and VLP increasingly hears from individuals and families seeking legal assistance related to both immigration status and the intersection of immigration issues with civil legal matters, including family preparedness, housing stability, and access to benefits. Expanded outreach, volunteer recruitment, and partnerships are needed to better serve immigrant communities and to support attorneys interested in providing pro bono assistance in immigration-related and adjacent civil matters.
- **Probate and Estate Planning:** VLP regularly receives requests for assistance with probate administration, estate disputes, and end-of-life planning. Even individuals with modest assets may face significant housing or financial risks without legal guidance. While VLP attempts to place cases involving heightened vulnerability, the available pool of volunteer attorneys remains insufficient to meet demand.
- **Protection From Harassment:** VLP receives many requests for assistance from litigants involved in Protection from Harassment cases. While VLP provides extensive support to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault seeking PFA orders, it does not currently have sufficient volunteer capacity to assist with Protection from Harassment matters.
- **Rental Housing:** Requests related to eviction and unsafe housing conditions remain common. VLP routinely refers eviction matters to Pine Tree Legal Assistance, but capacity limitations mean not all eligible clients can be served. VLP often cannot secure timely volunteer placement for other landlord-tenant disputes, particularly when court deadlines are imminent.
- **Special Education:** A legal services partner has identified special education matters as an area of growing unmet need. Families seeking assistance with special education evaluations, services, or disputes with school districts often face complex legal and procedural barriers. At present, VLP lacks sufficient volunteer attorney capacity with specialized knowledge of special education law to meet this demand.

C. Conclusion

By organizing donated services of private attorneys and community volunteers and by implementing new services and programs, VLP provides high-quality legal assistance for Maine people who would otherwise go without such help. VLP continues to develop opportunities for pro bono service for attorneys at all stages of their careers and in all areas of practice while innovating new ways for Maine people to access these services. In the final quarter of 2025, following the transition to new executive leadership, VLP undertook a focused period of organizational review and systems alignment. This work informed strategic priorities for 2026 and positioned the organization to strengthen service delivery, volunteer engagement, and institutional capacity.

The funds received by VLP from the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund in 2025 were critical to our organization and supported our work in all programs described in this report. We deeply appreciate the financial support from the Fund and look forward to continuing to enhance and expand our services over the next year.

Respectfully submitted,

Nell Brimmer, Esq.
Executive Director
Volunteer Lawyers Project
nbrimmer@vlp.org

Kathryn A. Reid, Esq.
Assistant Executive Director
Volunteer Lawyers Project
kreid@vlp.org