# Doing what's legally possible to create a just world since 1966.



January 2023 - December 2023 Nassau Suffolk Law Services

# ANNUAL REPORT

Nassau Suffolk Law Services now known as Legal Services of Long Island



LSC America's Partner for Equal Justice

United Way of Long Island

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# **ABOUT**Message from our Executive**Director and Board ofDirector's Chair**

Nassau Suffolk Law Services (NSLS) is the largest provider of free legal assistance on Long Island and as we continue to grow, we extend our gratitude to our funders, sponsors, donors, and supporters for contributing to our efforts to do what is legally possible to create a just world. With the strength and dedication of our volunteers, attorneys, paralegals, social workers, and support staff this past year, NSLS has successfully been able to continue and expand our mission to protect the survival needs of our most vulnerable neighbors on Long Island.

In the past year, many new faces have been added to our team to help advance our work and protect our clients' rights under the law. Our goal has been to maintain an active presence in the community and meet our clients where it is most convenient, whether it is in our office, at the courthouse, in one of our library resource projects, or doing a home visit. We increased our services to meet the growing demand for vital legal resources to all members of our community, from those in need in eviction defense matters to outreach and representation of members of the LGBTQ community.

As the need for legal assistance grows, we want to continue to be accessible and visible in our communities. To meet this need, NSLS has undergone a transformation to **Legal Services of Long Island**. We continue to be the same organization, with the same mission, and with a new name that reflects our unwavering commitment to serve the entire island and remove any ambiguity about the services our organization provides and the area it serves.

Our efforts and dedication have not gone unnoticed as we were finalists for the Hauppauge Industrial Association's (HIA) 2023 Achievement Award. HIA advocates for Long Island businesses and is committed to the development of the region. Our organization stood out among the competition because of our dedication to changing the lives of indigent and disabled Long Islanders. Our consistent upward projection in productivity and effectiveness despite not ever charging a fee for our services secured our spot as a finalist.

As we reflect on 2023 and look forward as Legal Services of Long Island, we are confident that we will continue to utilize the resources available to us effectively, provide essential services to our clients, and meet any challenge that we face as a community. Thank you for your continued support.



VICTORIA OSK, ESQ. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



CHRISTINA ROSAS, ESQ. CHAIR, BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### **Our Board of Directors**

Chair: Christina Rosas, Esq. Vice-Chair: Scott M. Karson, Esq. Treasurer: Peter H. Levy, Esq. Secretary: Susan McParland-Leisen

> Robin S. Abramowitz, Esq. Arthur Brown Ricky Burnett Christopher J. Clarke, Esq. Kathleen Denezzo Douglas J. Good, Esq. Steven G. Leventhal, Esq. Roosevelt Morring, Jr. Mark A. Peterson, Esq. Debra L. Rubin, Esq. Cherice P. Vanderhall, Esq.

#### **Our Advisory Council**

The purpose of the Advisory Council is to develop community awareness of and support for the vital programs offered by Nassau Suffolk Law Services. Toward this end, the Council provides assistance in creating and implementing a development plan that will heighten the visibility of Law Services programs, identify funding sources and secure funding, promote fundraising activities, and recruit and involve community volunteers. Listed below are the members of our 2023 Advisory Council.

> Chair: Donna DeVita Vice-Chair: Shannon Quinn Secretary: Lidia Szczepanowski, Esq.

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# **2023 IN REVIEW**

We are humbled to recognize the dedication and contributions of our diligent staff, volunteer attorneys, Advisory Council, and Board of Directors.



Legal Services of Long Island Formerly Know As Nassau Suffolk Law Services

# **OUR VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS**

In 2023, 150 volunteers including attorneys, law students, and others, made a difference by providing pro bono legal services with our Nassau County Volunteer Lawyer's Project, Suffolk County Pro Bono Project, and Community Legal Help Project by providing legal information, advice and counsel, attorney for a day, or full representation for our clients in need. Our Volunteer Attorney for a Day Program in Nassau County Landlord/Tenant Court was replaced by full-time NSLS staff members due to increased funding. Volunteer attorneys can now assist pro se clients through our Nassau Community Legal Help Project which opened in September 2023.

Robin Abramowitz Jennifer Abreu Jeffrey Alan Adolph Kevin Agoglia Taneisha Allen Rachel Jill Aloni Alfred Amadio Victor Ambrose Howard Arber **Carrie Arias** David Arpino **Richard Artura** Bethann Bark Wolfe Fredrica Berger Heath Berger Michael Berger Zachary Berger Dennis Biancanello **Richard Bongiorno** Debra A. Brown Dennis Buchanan Steven Cohen Kathryn Cole Dorothy Courten Mackenzie Crabbe Justin Danziger Omar Daza Dina De Giorgio Nancy Brennan Delea Jr. Divins, Byron Christopher W. Doelger Jodi Ann Donato Brian Doyle Laura Ann Ellis Kalenscher Evelyn Crysti D. Farra Michael Fedele **Richard Feinsilver** Lisa Fine Krystle Fitzpatrick Jeanne Ellen Forster Stephen Foutz Kamini/ Fox Ellen Frank Giuseppe Franzella William Friedman **Beth Gazes** Stuart Gelberg Michael George

Carl Grasso **Barry Gross** Alexandra Hakim Mary Beth Heiskell Stephen R. Hellman Jeannie Henry Fawwaz Hussain Marc J. lalenti Michael Impellizeri Richard Jacoby **Evelyn Kalenscher** Demitrios<sup>®</sup> "Jimmy" Kalomiris Bernadette Kasnicki Steven A. Kass Ellen Krakow Thomas Leddy John Lehr Sara Levine Paul Levy David Lira **Gregory Lisi** Michael Lo Russo Michelle Makowski **Jill M Marcus** James Markotsis Michael Markowitz Michael Mason Paul Mc Dougal John Mc Entee **Rivers Mcfadden** Melissa Medilien Gloria J. Medina Michael Mehary Jules Mencher **Brooke Merget** Francine Michel Jeremy M. Miller Kenneth Mock Andrew J. Mollica Rita Monahan Anitra Moore **Francine Moss** Philip Nash Catherine Papandrew John Patitucci Serena Paulose Anthony A. Pearl Nikki Prasad Ashley Prinz Jon M. Probstein

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# HONORING OUR PRO BONO ATTORNEYS

The Nassau Top Providers in 2023 are volunteer attorneys or law firms who were recognized by Nassau Suffolk Law Services' Volunteer Lawyer's Project and the Nassau County Bar Association at the Access to Justice's 7th Annual Pro Bono Recognition Dinner on March 5th, 2024. They were honored for providing the most hours or taking on the most clients on a pro bono basis.

# Nassau Top Providers in 2023

# Solo Practitioners

Dennis Buchanan, Esq. Stuart Gelberg, Esq. Evelyn Kalenscher, Esq. Harold M. Somer, Esq. Andrew Thaler, Esq.

### **Medium Firms**

Capetola & Divins, PC Vishnick McGovern Milizio LLP

# **Small Firms**

Schneider, Garrastegui, & Fedele, PLLC Taylor, Eldridge, & Endres, PC Walsh, Markus, McDougal, & DeBeellis, LLP

Large Firms

Bond, Schoeneck, & King, PLLC Rivkin Radler, LLP Stradley Ronon Stevens & Young LLP

# **Suffolk Top Providers in 2023**



The Suffolk Top Providers in 2023 are volunteer attorneys or law firms who were recognized by Nassau Suffolk Law Services' Suffolk Pro Bono Project, the Suffolk Pro Bono Foundation, and the Suffolk County Bar Association at the Suffolk Pro Bono Project Attorney Recognition Luncheon on May 13th, 2024. They were honored for providing the most hours or taking on the most clients on a pro bono basis.

# **OUR PROGRAMS**

#### Adult Care Facility Project

assists residents of adult care facilities in matters related to finances, facility conditions, and treatment of residents.

#### Child Support Defense Project

represents non-custodial parents in child support downward modifications and add-ons for arrears (Suffolk County only).

#### Community Legal Help Project

partnership of legal services providers to provide legal information, referrals, and limited-scope representation to Nassau and Suffolk County residents at public libraries or community centers.

#### Consumer Debt Legal Project

helps people with consumer debt legal issues, e.g. medical & credit card debt.

#### Disability Advocacy Project

assists with appealing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability (SSD) application denials.

## **Domestic Violence Project**

helps Suffolk County survivors of domestic violence in family law matters, including obtaining orders of protection and custody.



#### Education Debt Consumer Assistance Program

provides legal assistance to people who are experiencing student debt problems, including unpaid tuition bills, collection actions, and managing federal and private student loans.

#### Education and Disability Rights Project

provides legal assistance to students with disabilities and adults with developmental disabilities who are seeking eligibility and services from the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

#### **Foreclosure Prevention Unit**

works with homeowners to avoid foreclosure and preserve their homes.

## Human Rights Project

helps people reintegrate into the community after facing criminal charges by helping them to address criminal history-related civil legal issues. In addition, the project assists transgender, nonconforming, non-binary lowincome people overcome the hurdle or name/sex designation changes, housing and employment discrimination, or denial of benefits.

# **OUR PROGRAMS** (Continued)



# **HIV/AIDS Project**

assists people living with HIV and their families on issues affecting public benefits, housing and health care, and with planning for the future through wills, guardianships and advance directives.

#### Independent Consumer Advocacy Network (ICAN)

provides education, information, and advocacy for participants and caregivers in Medicaid managed care and Medicare long-term care programs.

#### Legal Support Center for Advocates

serves as a legal center for advocates from social service agencies, religious organizations, health care facilities, and other community-based agencies.

## **Mental Health Law Project**

provides legal assistance in civil matters to persons who are severely and persistently mentally ill. This project focuses primarily on issues such as housing, public benefits, health care, and child support.

#### **Public Benefits Unit**

supports the integrity, safety, and well-being of low-income families by maintaining economic stability.

### Senior Citizen Law Project

provides legal representation, advice, and referrals to residents of Nassau County aged 60+ in matters relating to health care, housing, Social Security, and future planning.

## **Social Work Unit**

helps our most vulnerable clients complete tasks necessary for successful outcomes to their legal cases and address social issues that may be impeding the resolution of their legal issues.

## **Tenant's Rights Project**

helps tenants with housing issues, including eviction proceedings and federal rent subsidy issues.

# Veterans' Rights Project

helps veterans with obtaining veterans' benefits, discharge upgrades, public benefits, landlord/tenant, and family law matters.

#### Volunteer Lawyers' Project/ Suffolk Pro Bono Project

recruits private attorneys to represent people with low incomes without charge. Our volunteer attorneys handle cases ranging from bankruptcies and guardianships, matrimonial matters and wills.

# **Committees Our Staff Participated In**



Suffolk County Women in the Court's Committee, Mental Health Subcommittee

Suffolk Cooperative Library System Outreach Services Advisory Council

Suffolk County Elder Abuse Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Team

Suffolk County Legislature's Welfare to Work Commission

Nassau Suffolk Care Coordination Committee

Housing Help, Inc., Board Member

Long Island Housing Services, Inc., Board Member

Nassau County Department of Social Services Advisory Council

Nassau County Elder Abuse Enhanced Multi-Disciplinary Team

New York State Court's Court Modernization Action Committee Nassau County Bar Association, Community Relations and Public Education Committee

Nassau County Bar Association District Court Committee

Nassau-Suffolk HIV Health Services Planning Council, Clinical Quality Management Committee

Nassau County Bar Association, Access to Justice

Suffolk County Bar Association, Pro Bono Foundation

Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, Board Member

Suffolk County Access to Justice, Landlord Tenant Committee

Suffolk County Women in the Court's Committee, Access to Justice Committee

Suffolk County Re-Entry Taskforce

New York State Bar Association, President's Committee on Access to Justice

# **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

# **Changing Lives**

Over **6,420 total cases** closed benefitting **13,818 people** during the period from April 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024.\*

# 2,451 people

prevented from being evicted

## **344 people**

affected positively on consumer debt matters

## 319 victims

of domestic violence or elder abuse received legal services

# 9920 people

affected positively on a housing matter

## 544 people

affected positively on healthcare matters

## 781 people

affected positively on family law matters

## 146 veterans

received legal services

# 109 people

affected positively on education disability rights matters

## 68,532 people

received community legal education (via website, email, community trainings, social media)

# **Financial Impact**

## \$2,401,647

Obtained in back awards and settlements for our clients

# \$11,340,525

Obtained in savings for our Housing Clients

Protected clients from the imposition of judgments, recoupments and other losses that would have cost them a total of **\$570,069**.

\*These numbers are from New York State Interest On Lawyers Account (IOLA) funds fiscal year 04/01/23 to 03/31/24 report which represents all Nassau Suffolk Law Services cases.

# **PERSONAL STORIES**

Our legal services directly and positively impact the lives of those in need daily. Learn more about how your support helps our community.



In 2021, Elmer Dockery was sent an offer by his mortgage company to modify his loan. He received it after the deadline passed and the company did not uphold the opportunity. Dockery was then assisted by NSLS Foreclosure Unit Staff Attorney Christopher Santoro on his foreclosure and wanted to seek modification again to get back on track with his loan.

The mortgage company once again denied him and referenced the 2021 offer despite his inability to accept it because he received it after the deadline. Attorney Santoro raised a lack of good faith, and the court granted a hearing on June 7, 2024.

The bank quickly changed its stance once Attorney Santoro made his opening statement; Dockery was offered a loan modification with a waiver of late fees and legal fees. The hearing was discontinued after the settlement was made. Through Attorney Santoro's successful advocacy, Dockery was finally able to enter into a loan modification agreement after being denied for many years.

In expressing his gratitude towards Attorney Santoro, Mr. Dockery exclaimed "Mr. Santoro helped my mortgage problem by [obtaining] a modification in court which I [have] been fighting for three years."

Also assisting the client was Naldine Philistin from Community Development of Long Island (CDLI), who exclaimed, "Wow!!!! I'm so happy to hear that the parties reached a mutually favorable agreement. Putting a star next to this file too\*\*\*\*\*\* Your advocacy is beyond words. Thank you so much for your assistance on this file. Again, this outcome could not have been achieved without your expertise and assistance."



Foreclosure Attorney Christopher Santoro



Client Elmer Dockery

# **TESTIMONIALS**

# **ICAN Unit**

#### Former client of Jenni Rivera, Paralegal

"I am a retired pharmacist who struggles to manage several chronic conditions. I worked full-time at CVS for 10 years until I left in 2017, where I was determined to be permanently disabled and was granted Social Security at the age of 51. Sadly, on top of all this, I experienced an adverse drug reaction which put me in a wheelchair. Today, I cannot walk and need home care to be addressed by personal hygiene and daily routines. I had a hospital stay for cellulitis and upon discharge, my request was denied. I appealed and it was denied again, and then I met Jenni at ICAN and I truly believe that she saved my life. I am writing this to raise awareness to the great life-saving work that Jenni and her team provide."

#### Family member of former client of Amanda Davis, Esq.

"My dad has been an enrollee of VNS (Visiting Nursing Services of New York) since September 2022. He is 89 years old and suffers from Parkinson's dementia, which is a degenerative disease. In other words, he won't improve and will require more care. His steady decline made it necessary to ask for assessments to gain more care hours from VNS. But upon submission of letters from the doctor stating that he required assistance 24 hours a day to prevent "death," plus medical notes from his office visits, VNS continued to deny increased hours, even after appeals were submitted. We decided to request an external appeal. It is a dounting task, but thank goodness we were referred to ICAN. I submitted every form, doctors' notes and night time logs, as requested, to the agency. The assisting attorney, Amanda Davis, used this information to prove my dad's needs for a split 24 hour shift, as requested by his primary care doctor and neurologist, and get him the care he needed. It is such a relief that his needs will finally be met and he will be safe and able to live in his own environment, at home, where he belongs. We would never have been able to approach by ourselves and we are ever grateful for all of the assistance."

# **Consumer Debt Legal Project**

#### Former client of Helen Wrobel, Esq.

"Thank you so much for everything you've done to help me with my debts. Your professional manner and diligence to my cases resulted in an outcome that I could not have gotten on my own. Your work is greatly appreciated!"

#### Former client of Maria DeGennaro, Esq.

"I am writing this message to express my deepest thanks in handling my case. I could never ask for a better outcome. I have dealt with many attorneys over the past. Not one comes close to you regarding professionalism and advice, which was spot on. Also the compassion, kindness was above and beyond what one could expect. I appreciate the job you performed regarding my case. You are a life saver."

#### Former client of Sharon Campo, Esq.

"Thank you so much for never giving up on me."

# **COLLABORATIONS**



# Tenant's Rights Project and Statewide Collaboration

NSLS is working with the Empire Justice Center to provide eviction prevention services to all of Long Island. We are working together to provide legal representation and conduct trainings. We are also working with legal services organizations across all of New York to create a statewide coordinated intake portal for organizations outside of New York City to ensure that anyone who needs service is connected to the correct organization in their region.

# Human Rights Project Collaboration

NSLS's Human Rights Rights Project (HRP) works with organizations on state and local levels to advocate for the people of Long Island. We are part of the Coalition of Re-Entry Advocates (CORA) which works to coordinate Re-Entry advocates across the state and provide education and training to the community. We are also part of the Nassau County Re-Entry Taskforce which is run by the Leadership Training Institute (LTI). LTI works with our client base to help provide education and job training programs. We receive referrals from both programs.

# Community Legal Help Project Collaborations

NSLS' Community Legal Help Project (CLHP) partners with Touro Law Center's clinics to have professors and law students providing legal information at local Suffolk County libraries the regarding immigration, bankruptcy, and elder law. In 2023, CLHP partnered with CARECEN to provide much-needed legal advice to our immigrant communities. In addition, we partnered with multiple Suffolk County libraries including Brentwood Public Library, Middle Country Public Library (Centereach), Half Hollow Hills Public Library (Dix Hills), and Patchogue-Medford Library (Patchogue) to provide space to meet with clients and additional outreach for the program.

# **Community Legal Help Project**

# 1,833 people

Total CLHP clients provided with legal information or consultations from a volunteer attorney partner

# 943 referrals

Total referrals provided through CLHP



# **Legal Support Center for Advocates**

# 366 calls

# 1,035 people

Total calls taken through LSCA Total people educated through in-person legal trainings

# 588 people

Total people educated through virtual legal education trainings

# **Online Presence**

# 93,708 sessions

Total number of sessions on our website

# 330,115 pageviews

Total number of pageviews on our website

# **General Outreach**

# 2,908 people

Total people educated about our services through community outreach events

# 27,436 people

Total people educated through our monthly advocacy tips emails

# FINANCIALS

# Revenue



Legal Services Corporation (LSC) Interest on Lawyers Account Funding (IOLA) Judiciary Civil Legal Services (Judiciary CLS) Other Federal Funding (Federal) Other New York State Funding (NYS) Local County Funding (County) Private Programs/Grants General Donations/Unrestricted Funds Donated Services

\$1,892,567 \$1,726,571 \$4,610,263 \$2,590,763 \$4,800,183 \$748,223 \$36,096 \$108,139 \$1,239,706

### TOTAL \$17,752,511

# FINANCIALS

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# **Donors (Continued)**

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Have loved ones leave a donation to us in lieu of flowers for a funeral



Leave us in your will



https://legalservicesli.org/donate



# WHERE DIGNITY MEETS JUSTICE



Join Nassau Suffolk Law Services as we continue to illuminate pathways to justice under our new name, **Legal Services of Long Island (LSLI)**. Help us guide our communities and neighbors in need toward accessible free legal services for all.

LEGALSERVICESLI.ORG

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Doing what's legally possible to create a just world since 1966.

# Contact us

# 9

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