



Caring For Our Communities.

Impact Report 2022

PURSUING JUSTICE.



PRAIRIE STATE
LEGAL SERVICES

RESTORING HOPE.

Justice Rising.

A Letter from Executive Director **Denise E. Conklin**

Dear Friends of PSLS,

For more than 45 years, PSLS has advanced equal access to justice to help build a more equitable society. As I reflect on the last year, I am grateful for what PSLS and our partners have accomplished.

I have a deep appreciation for the high-quality legal services that we offer within our three pillars – safety, financial stability and housing – to communities in 36 counties across Central and Northern Illinois. PSLS has been an important part of my life since 2004. Before I was named Executive Director in March 2022, I served our communities as a PSLS Volunteer Attorney, Staff Attorney and Managing Attorney.

PSLS has doubled in size over the last 10 years which has required our organization to realign to support our growth and increase our impact. In 2022, PSLS worked closely with a consulting firm to identify our needs and create strategic plans to fill gaps. We updated our compensation plan to assist with recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. The consultants helped us to strategically plan our realignment so that every staff member has a well-supported role with opportunities for growth and development. We know that the stronger we are from within, the more efficiently and successfully we can provide high-quality legal services to every client, every time.

Here is a glimpse of some changes that better support PSLS staff and our communities:

- PSLS combined our grants and fundraising teams into one Resource Development department to better manage all of PSLS' revenue.

- PSLS realigned the Director of Litigation responsibilities into a new Director of Legal Operations role that directly supports and supervises our Managing Attorneys. PSLS hired Sam DiGrino, former Managing Attorney of PSLS' Waukegan office, to fill this role.
- PSLS invested in a new Recruitment and Onboarding Specialist within our Human Resources Department in response to PSLS' growth and turnover of staff the past few years.
- PSLS embraced its commitment to our communities by creating a Community Engagement Department, staffed by non-attorney Community Resource Specialists, and led by Paris Brandy, a former Community Resource Specialist in our Rock Island (now Moline) office.



We recognize that pursuing a more just society is a collaborative effort, and we would not be where we are today without your support. Thank you to our funders, donors, staff, volunteers and community partners for supporting our critical efforts and the clients we serve.

I am proud to share a snapshot of our important work in this annual Impact Report. Please take a look at our success in numbers and life-changing stories from our amazing clients. We welcome your feedback, ideas and questions as you read through this report.

My very best to you all,

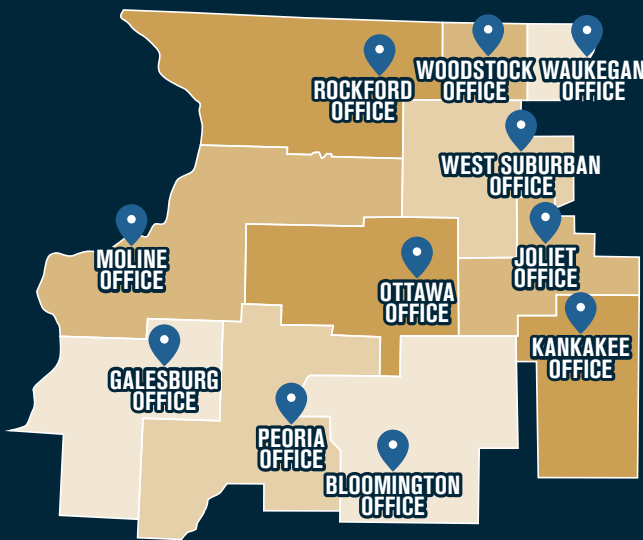
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise E. Conklin".

In the Pursuit of Justice

PSLS has provided dignity, hope, self-sufficiency, and justice through high-quality civil legal services for low-income Illinoisans for more than 45 years. We are headquartered in Rockford, IL, and have 11 office locations serving 36 counties in Northern and Central Illinois. More than 1 million people in our service area of all ages and ethnicities live in poverty. Every day, these same individuals are denied the basic rights to which they are entitled under the law simply because they cannot afford a lawyer. It's our mission to change that. The availability of civil legal aid can make all the difference to our neighbors who are fighting to stay in their homes, escape domestic violence, secure benefits for veterans or people with disabilities, or address many other legal challenges that go to the heart of their security and well-being. They live in the communities we call home. Our communities are a better place for all of us when help is available when it's needed.

Mission & Vision

The mission of PSLS is to ensure equal access to justice and fair treatment under the law by providing legal advice and representation, advocacy, education, and outreach that serve to protect basic human needs and enforce or uphold rights. PSLS envisions a community where vulnerable people have ready access to legal services to meet their basic needs and where everyone knows, understands, and can exercise their rights and be treated fairly in their pursuit of justice.



Office Locations

PEORIA

Serving Fulton, Marshall, Peoria, Stark, and Tazewell Counties
411 Hamilton Blvd., Ste. 1812
Peoria, IL 61602

ROCKFORD

Serving Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties
303 N. Main Street, Ste. 600
Rockford, IL 61101

WAUKEGAN

Serving Lake County
325 W. Washington St., Ste. 100
Waukegan, IL 60085

WEST SUBURBAN

Serving DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, and Kendall Counties
31W001 E North Avenue, Ste. 200
West Chicago, IL 60185

WOODSTOCK

Serving McHenry County
400 Russel Court
Woodstock, IL 60098

BLOOMINGTON

Serving Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties
201 W. Olive Street, Ste. 203
Bloomington, IL 61701

GALESBURG

Serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren Counties
311 E. Main Street, Ste. 302
Galesburg, IL 61401

JOLIET

Serving Will County
14A W. Cass Street, Third Floor
Joliet, IL 60432

KANKAKEE

Serving Iroquois and Kankakee Counties
187 S. Schuyler Avenue, Ste. 350
Kankakee, IL 60901

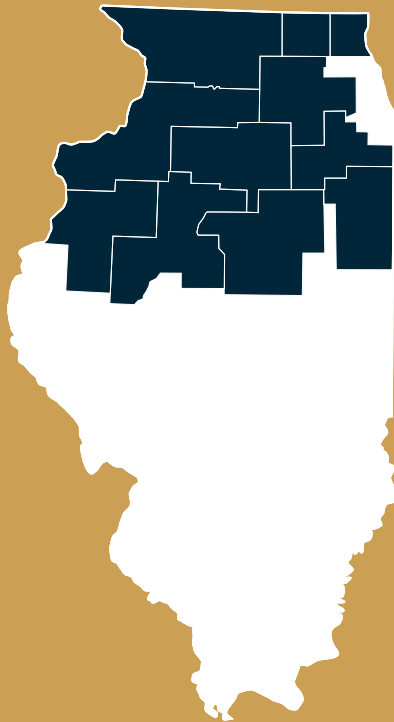
MOLINE

Serving Henry, Lee, Mercer, Rock Island, and Whiteside Counties
1515 5th Avenue
Suite 200
Moline, IL 61265

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Serving Bureau, Grundy, La Salle, and Putnam Counties
1021 Clinton Street
Ottawa, IL 61350

Our Impact at a Glance



Our Service Area

5.2 million people

More than **228,000** households with incomes under 125% of the poverty level

Approximately **169,000** households in our service area will experience a civil legal issue each year.

Twenty counties are considered urban, and **16** are considered rural.

PSLS served **6.6%** of low-income households in urban counties and **5.5%** of low-income families in rural counties.

Counties with Highest Poverty Rates*:

Rural: Knox (40%) and McDonough (40%)

Suburban: Kane (25%) and Lake (21%)

Urban: Peoria (33%) and Winnebago (35%)

*Based on the most recent census.

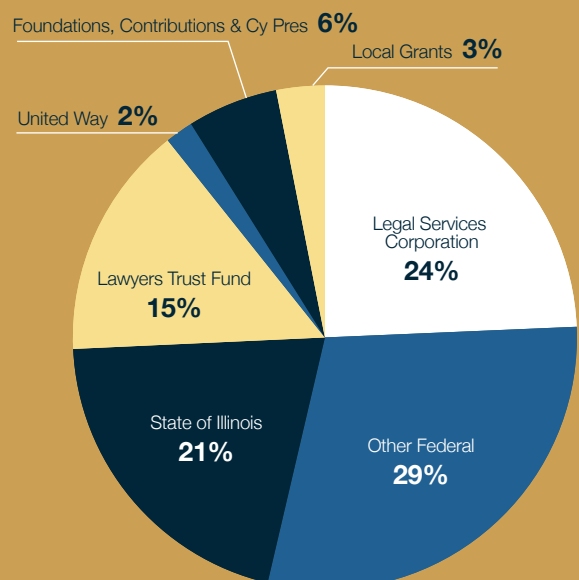
In 2022

PSLS staff and volunteers worked on **19,358** cases for **17,123** people.

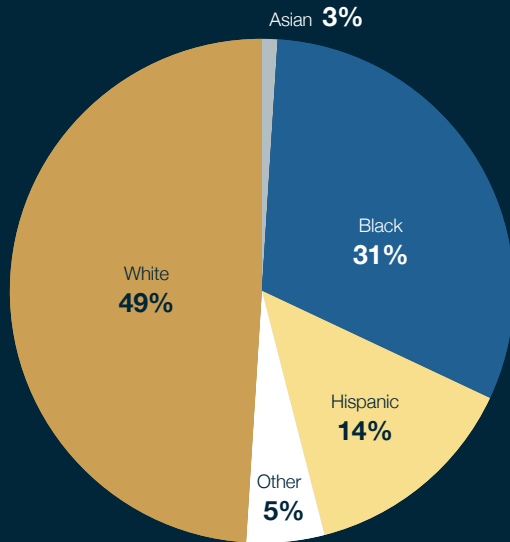
16,236 cases were closed for **14,811** people.

147,014 hours of legal services on cases were completed.

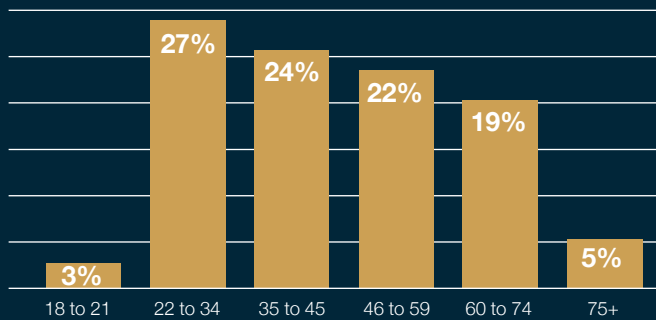
2022 Funding \$20 Million



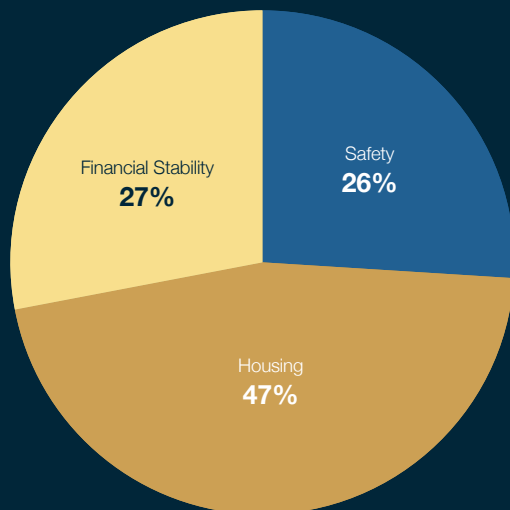
Percent of Clients by **Race**



Percent of Clients by **Age**



Percent of Cases by **Priority Area**



We provided legal assistance to more than **727** veterans, service members, and their families in important civil legal issues.



14,116 children 17 years old or younger impacted by our work.



We served **3,377** individuals 60 years old or older.



We served **5,429** people with disabilities.



Volunteer attorneys worked on **1,868** legal matters.

Safety

Everyone deserves to live free from abuse and violence.

Pursuing Justice for Karla*



Our staff helped Karla leave her abusive husband, Adam, who had been abusive since 2005. In late 2021, in front of their two young children, Adam threw Karla down the stairs. She lost consciousness and sustained significant injuries to her face and back. Karla's doctors later told her that they believed Adam stomped on her face repeatedly while she was unconscious, requiring reconstruction of her jaw. Adam was arrested and charged with aggravated domestic battery. Our staff helped Karla obtain an order of protection – a type of restraining order – that prevented Adam from coming near Karla or the children. After the court and State's Attorney heard the evidence during the order of protection hearing, the judge in the criminal case increased Adam's bail to \$500,000, ensuring he would not be released from jail prior to his criminal trial. This advocacy further ensured Karla's safety and the safety of her children and the broader community.

Pursuing Justice for Robert*



PSLS represented Robert, a student victim of bullying in his middle school. His parents sought help convincing the school district to implement a safety plan that accommodated Robert's emotional and post-trauma disabilities. PSLS sought accommodations such as allowing a parent to be present during behavioral interviews and separating the bus and class assignments of the client and the bullying students. The school refused. PSLS then sought an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and represented Robert in an IEP domain meeting and initial review, which resulted in his being eligible for special education

services for an emotional and post-traumatic disability. The resulting comprehensive IEP included many very positive accommodations and classroom assignment changes. Also, during the domain meeting, PSLS pressed for the school to consider trauma-informed training for social work and counseling staff. The school agreed to provide such training to its staff. Robert has fewer behavioral incidents, loves school, and is doing well with much support from teachers and other school staff.

Housing

Everyone deserves a safe and decent place to call home

Pursuing Justice for Sally*



One of our housing attorneys represented a client who lives in a public housing complex scheduled to be demolished. The client already had an eviction order entered against her in public housing after a trial. There was no meritorious defense against the eviction. However, our attorney found another avenue for advocacy. Because of the planned demolition, the tenants were entitled to relocation assistance through a tenant protection voucher unless they were given a notice of ineligibility for relocation assistance. Sally had not received either the notice or the voucher. Our attorney contacted the local housing authority attorney to emphasize the need to either give Sally the relocation voucher or provide a notice of ineligibility with a chance for her to contest that notice. The housing authority ended up providing Sally with the voucher to move. This advocacy provided support for Sally, who was able to move to new housing and avoid homelessness.

Pursuing Justice for Danielle*



PSLS represented Danielle, a 75-year-old woman with a serious mental health diagnosis to avoid eviction from a special housing program. The housing provider alleged that Danielle was difficult to deal with, had canceled inspections, and did not keep her unit clean. One of the challenges our attorney faced was that she could not identify the nature of the housing program and whether any federal or state rules applied that offered special protections for Danielle and imposed procedural requirements on the housing provider as a precondition to any eviction. Based on PSLS' investigation and research, we were able to confirm that the housing provider and Danielle were participants in a special federal housing program for mentally ill persons to avoid homelessness. The program did, in fact, include special procedural protections for Danielle, which the housing provider had not followed and did not seem to be aware were required. PSLS was able to show both that these requirements had not been met and that the housing provider had not proved a material violation of any lease term. At the trial, the court granted Danielle's motion for a directed finding against the housing provider at the close of its case. Danielle remains housed in the unit.

Financial Stability

Everyone deserves an opportunity to provide for themselves and their family

Pursuing Justice for Ayesha*



Ayesha is an immigrant and single mother of three. Two of her children have severe illnesses, requiring Ayesha to work part-time to help care for her children. Ayesha relied on SNAP benefits. Years after paying her benefits, IDHS sent Ayesha a notice that she was responsible for an overpayment of more than \$21,000. This was based on information suggesting that Ayesha's ex-husband was living with her and receiving SNAP benefits on his own account. Ayesha had been divorced before receiving the SNAP benefits and had not resided with her ex-husband.

At the hearing, IDHS told Ayesha it was her burden to prove her ex-husband had not been living with her. IDHS then decided that Ayesha's evidence was insufficient to meet her burden.

The case went to the Illinois Supreme Court, and they agreed with the appellate court and trial court decisions that IDHS erred by placing the burden of proof on Ayesha. Several Illinois public interest agencies, including Shriver Center, Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance, Legal Council for Health Justice, Equip for Equality, and Legal Aid Chicago, filed an amicus brief that highlighted the vulnerability of the SNAP population, the rarity that counsel represents SNAP recipients and the devastating consequences for all of society when vulnerable people are not fed. The Supreme Court's decision recognized the reality of many SNAP recipients going into hearings without an attorney in its analysis of why the burden of proof should lie with the IDHS.

Pursuing Justice for Leah*



Leah, a minor with a criminal record, wanted her record sealed or expunged. She is a high school dropout with a single charge on her record that was holding her back from finding a job. However, after caring for an ailing grandmother, she became interested in healthcare work. Our attorney advised Leah to apply for a healthcare worker waiver as she's currently ineligible to seal or expunge her record. PSLS investigated the details of Leah's disqualifying conviction. We then worked with Leah to write an accurate but sympathetic explanation of her case for the Illinois Department of Public Health to show that she was not the same person. We also worked with Leah to obtain written letters of support from members of her community who have witnessed her personal growth. Finally, we helped Leah draft a resume that she could use to find new job opportunities. Our efforts were successful, and Leah obtained the healthcare worker waiver. Leah is working on her GED now and will soon be eligible to seal her record.

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of our clients and maintain confidentiality.

Testimonials

They helped expunge my criminal record so I could find a job. Thank God for all you good people and for providing me with a second chance.

Prairie State helped obtain an Order of Protection against my son. They were very understanding and concerned about our situation.

PSLS helped settle my eviction case. Thanks to Emily, Erin, and Matthew, I don't have to be homeless!

Prairie State helped me make out my will. Friendly and nice people!

Prairie State will be highly recommended by me. I was helped with legal guardianship. My attorney explained everything well and was excellent!

PSLS staff truly heard every word I said. They cared about my emotional state and ensured I was physically okay after court. They are a wonderful organization that is making a difference in this world, helping mothers who are struggling and in need. Thank you so much.

Prairie State helped me with my mother's account at a nursing home. They are very nice and helpful.

I received help to change the guardianship of my handicapped daughter. I'm relieved because I know that my daughter will be safe and cared for after I'm gone. Thank you, Prairie State!

The best place to get legal help; wished all lawyers cared for your well-being.

PSLS' Legal Help for Homeowners Program did an excellent job assisting me in the completion and submission of my answer to the Foreclosure Summons I received from the lawyer of my mortgagor. They helped me clearly understand the legal terms in the Foreclosure Summons. I'm so grateful for all the help, guidance, and assistance. I will reach out to PSLS in the future if I have any legal-related matters.

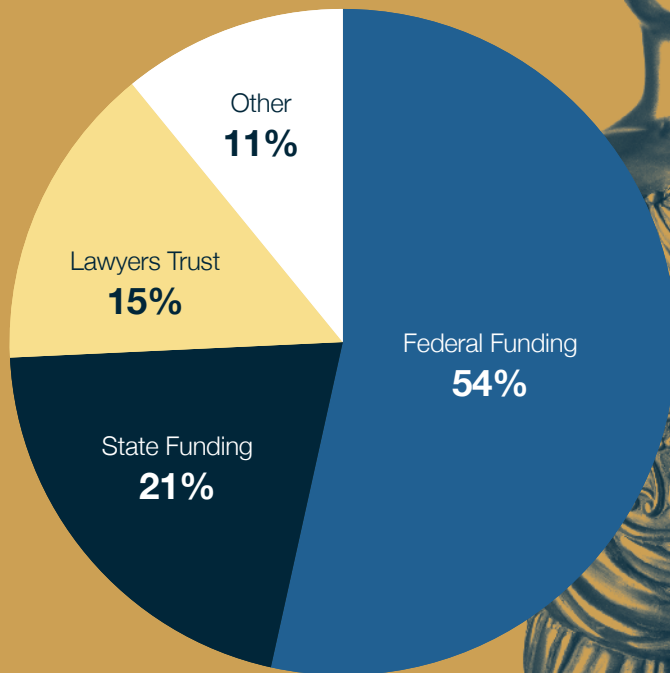
I am an advocate for a private social work agency. Prairie State Legal Services has provided expert legal aid to so many needy families who would not have received justice without their representation. I have been in court and watched as PSLS attorneys fought for the rights of parents seeking to keep their children safe from abusive paramours. I have seen the disabled gain Social Security benefits because the attorney fought for their rights under the law. Parents who would have been homeless were allowed to remain in their apartments because an attorney from Prairie State knew the statutes and presented a powerful argument to the judge. These individuals could not have navigated the legal system without the advocacy of an attorney from PSLS.

I want you to know how much I appreciated your legal help and how you save peoples' lives by being there.

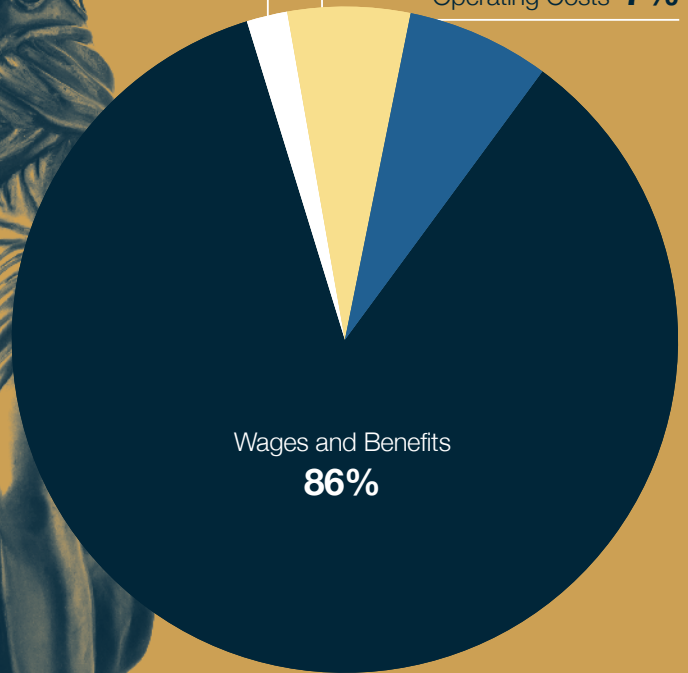
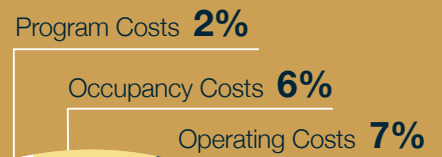
They treated my case as if it was their own, and that made me feel like they genuinely cared and wanted success.

I was unable to take care of this on my own and didn't have the money to hire an attorney.

2022 Revenue and Expenses

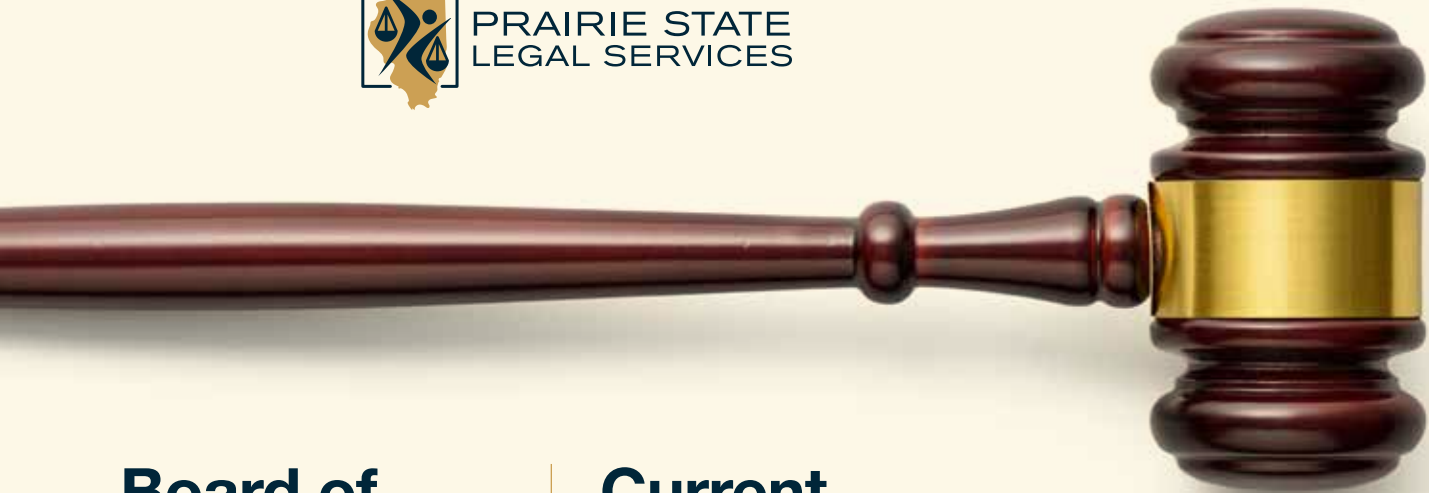


Total 2022 Revenue
\$20,028,000



Total 2022 Expenses
\$18,353,000

* Sometimes, grant timelines do not correspond with our fiscal year. This income includes funds awarded for expenses to be paid at a later date. When we have income exceeding expenses, we place such funds in reserve to help us through challenging times, such as when government agencies delay payments or when we face funding reductions. This plan provides continuity in services for our existing clients.



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Prairie State Legal Services relies on the support of individuals, foundations, corporations, and the local community to fulfill its mission. We are deeply grateful for every contribution. Due to space constraints, this report lists all donors who gave \$500 or more in 2022. Thank You!

\$1,000,000+

Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Legal Services Corporation

\$500,000+

AgeGuide
Illinois Criminal Justice
Information Authority
Westside Justice Center

\$250,000+

Illinois Department of Human Services
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban
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\$100,000+

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Will County Community Development

\$50,000+

Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court

\$25,000+

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United Way Quad Cities

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amazing
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godsend
hope
listen

record time
teamwork
understanding
commitment

dedication

inspiration



PRAIRIE STATE
LEGAL SERVICES

In Memoriam

Remembering Founding Executive Director **Joseph A. Dailing** Leaving a legacy of promoting access to justice for all

Joe A. Dailing passed away on June 9, 2022, leaving an incredible legacy of promoting access to justice for all. He was 78.

Joe was the founding Executive Director of Prairie State Legal Services, bringing together several single-county bar association legal aid programs in McLean, Peoria, Winnebago, Kane, and Lake Counties to form Prairie State Legal Services. The original formulation expanded services to cover 11 counties and improved efficiency by consolidating administrative functions in one central office.

Under Joe's leadership, Prairie State grew to serve 30 counties, served tens of thousands of people in need, and addressed inequities in how government agencies treated people who relied upon services.

Joe led Prairie State through national attacks on funding for legal aid services, which resulted in cuts of 25 to 30 percent of the organization's funding. He was known for promoting the involvement of staff in making decisions on the reconfiguration of the organization. Upon notice of his passing, many former and current staff remarked on how much they learned from him and what a privilege it was to work for him. As one former staff member who is now a judge told us: "He always believed in me more than I believed in myself." As noted by others, Joe always communicated so clearly and had a strong vision for our firm and how to get things done. Joe inspired people and created a sense of a caring community within Prairie State.

Joe retired from Prairie State Legal Services in 2006 but continued his work in advocating for access to justice. He became the first Executive Director of the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice, an access-to-justice entity created by the Illinois State Bar Association and the Chicago Bar Association. In this role, he led Illinois' efforts to open 98 legal self-help centers throughout the state.

Joe continued his work promoting access to justice nationally and internationally. He traveled to the Republic of Georgia to assist the country's Department of Justice in creating a legal aid system. He also consulted nationally to help improve several other legal aid programs. In 2017, Joe developed and implemented a leadership training program for PSLS staff to help the organization build future leaders.

Joe was recognized in 1992 by the Winnebago County Bar Foundation with the Seeley P. Forbes Memorial Award and by the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois, Board of Directors' Award. In 2013 the Illinois Supreme Court Commission on Access to Justice awarded Joe its Lifetime Achievement Award for his work promoting access to justice. In 2014, Joe received the Illinois Bar Foundation, Leadership and Dedication to the Law Award.

Joe was active in many community improvement efforts within the City of Rockford, including historic preservation and serving on a Fair Housing Commission as well as on the board of several organizations. He published many articles to share his expertise and perspectives. He was our beloved leader, an exuberant and caring person whom many loved and respected.



Our Volunteers

Each year, hundreds of lawyers, law students, and other professionals volunteer their time serving as board members, taking pro bono cases, and interning with us. Thank you to all our volunteers! To learn more about volunteering, visit pslegal.org/volunteer.

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