



PRAIRIE STATE
LEGAL SERVICES

High-Quality Legal Services for Every Client, Every Time
2024 Impact Report



A Letter from Executive Director Denise E. Conklin

Dear PSLS Friends and Supporters,

I celebrate the life-changing work our dedicated team at Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS) has accomplished for the most vulnerable in our communities during 2024. Our caring team has improved lives and served when our neighbors needed us most. As a non-profit law firm, PSLS is often the last line of defense for our neighbors in need, and I am proud to be a part of an organization that provides this critical assistance.

In 2024, PSLS served 13,000 of our neighbors across communities in 36 counties in Northern and Central Illinois. PSLS staff and volunteers provided high-quality legal services to these 13,000 clients in nearly 15,000 civil legal matters. These matters span PSLS' three key impact areas: Housing, Financial Stability and Safety.

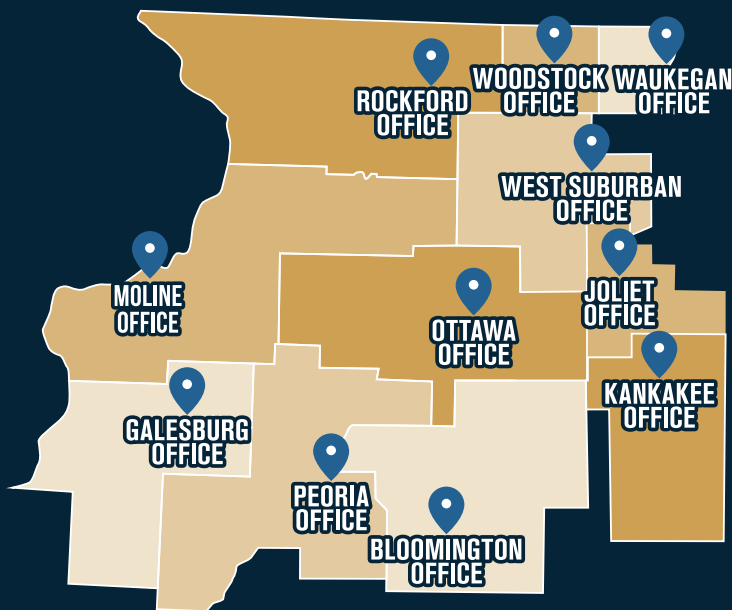
Together, we have accomplished so much in 2024. But, we know there is still so much more work to be done. According to LSC's latest Justice Gap Report: "Low-income Americans did not receive any or enough legal help for 92% of their civil legal problems." There is so much unmet need in our communities.

PSLS is committed to being a part of the solution. We must continue to be present in our communities and continue to drive forward our mission of equal access to justice for all. Our neighbors need us – and we need your help – to stay strong and continue to make access to justice across our communities a reality for all.

Thank you for your partnership and investment in this critical work.

My best to you all,

Denise E. Conklin
PSLS Executive Director



PSLS' Reach

PSLS is a non-profit law firm, serving community members across 36 counties at its 11 offices.

BLOOMINGTON

Serving Livingston, McLean and Woodford Counties

PEORIA

Serving Fulton, Marshall, Peoria, Stark and Tazewell Counties

GALESBURG

Serving Henderson, Knox, McDonough and Warren Counties

ROCKFORD

Serving Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Ogle, Stephenson and Winnebago Counties

JOLIET

Serving Will County

WAUKEGAN

Serving Lake County

KANKAKEE

Serving Iroquois and Kankakee Counties

WEST SUBURBAN

Serving DeKalb, DuPage, Kane and Kendall Counties

MOLINE

Serving Henry, Lee, Mercer, Rock Island and Whiteside Counties

WOODSTOCK

Serving McHenry County

OTTAWA

Serving Bureau, Grundy, LaSalle and Putnam Counties

Purpose of Impact Report

PSLS' annual Impact Report is a snapshot of the impact that PSLS staff, volunteers, donors and other supporters are making throughout Northern and Central Illinois. The Impact Report highlights:

Who PSLS Helps:

Low-income persons, including veterans, older adults and children

PSLS' Key Impact Areas:

Financial Stability, Housing and Safety

PSLS By the Numbers:

An overview of the services PSLS provided in 2024

PSLS Partners:

From those who give their time to those who fund our work, PSLS acknowledges its partners who help drive PSLS' mission forward.

Meet PSLS Clients



Financial Stability

Everyone deserves an opportunity to provide for themselves and their family.

PSLS can:

- Help individuals get a fresh start by sealing/expunging their criminal records
- Help people get and keep utility services and public benefits, including veterans benefits, Social Security, food stamps and medical assistance
- Help kids with education and special education issues to access appropriate school services
- Help protect older adults from financial abuse, help them with debt/consumer-related issues, as well as future planning and advance directives

Meet Victoria, a domestic violence survivor who served time in jail after being convicted of a serious crime when, as a teenager, Victoria was involved in an incident involving her abusive boyfriend. Victoria was released from jail early and successfully completed her sentence without any issues. With her second chance underway, Victoria was in pursuit of a better life. Victoria started working again, earned her GED and stepped up to adopt nieces and nephews after losing a sibling to a crime of violence. Although Victoria had paid her debt to society and was actively creating a better life for herself and her family, her criminal conviction remained as a life sentence.

That was when Victoria reached out to PSLS to be her voice to request that her criminal record be sealed. PSLS staff stood beside Victoria in court and advocated for the sealing of her criminal record. During the hearing with the judge, PSLS presented evidence regarding the nature of the crime, Victoria's successful completion of her sentence and the many things Victoria had done to improve her life since then. After hearing the evidence, the judge agreed to seal Victoria's criminal record. While the record is still available to the courts and law enforcement, it is no longer a barrier to Victoria and moving forward with her life. Today, thanks to the high-quality legal services provided by PSLS staff, Victoria's criminal record is sealed and the doors to opportunities are open wider!

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.





Housing

Everyone deserves a safe space and a decent place to call home.

PSLS can:

- Help people with disabilities get and keep appropriate housing
- Help individuals access fair housing
- Help homeowners and renters with evictions, mortgage foreclosures, utility shutoffs and other housing matters

Meet Bobby, a man in his 30s living at a care facility. It's an ideal location for Bobby – a wheelchair user with a developmental disability – because his family lives close by and can visit him often. Sometimes when he's upset, Bobby acts aggressively because of his disability. That behavior caused the facility to issue an involuntary discharge notice requiring Bobby to move out. That's when Bobby turned to PSLS for help appealing the discharge.

PSLS found that the facility had not been following Bobby's care plan, which could have prevented those behavior-related incidents. PSLS supported Bobby and represented him at an administrative hearing where the involuntary discharge was denied. Thanks to the high-quality legal services provided by PSLS staff, Bobby still lives at the facility close to his family and is now receiving proper care under his care plan!

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.



Safety

Everyone deserves to live free from abuse and violence.

PSLS can:

- Help protect survivors of domestic violence, assisting with divorce and orders of protection
- Help protect older adults from elder abuse
- Help people with issues affecting personal safety, including financial exploitation

Meet Tara, a young mother who divorced her abusive husband several years ago. The parenting plan from the divorce allowed her ex-husband to visit their child. Tara turned to PSLS for help when she began to fear for their child's safety during those visits. PSLS staff worked to understand Tara's story and provided her with high-quality legal services. PSLS stood beside Tara in court to present the information about the abuse to the judge. As a result, the parenting plan was updated to protect the child. Today, Tara and her child are living safer lives!

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.

Visit pslegal.org/Our-Stories to meet more PSLS clients and learn how PSLS helped them.

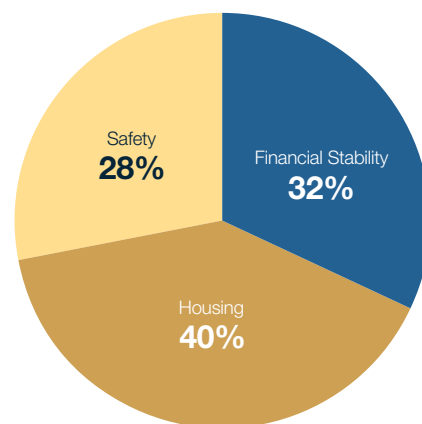
PSLS' Impact



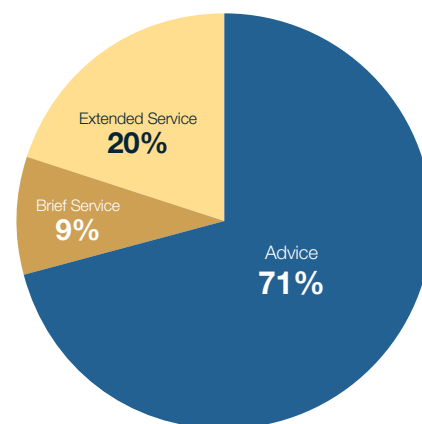
In 2024, PSLS provided free, high-quality legal services to **13,000 clients**, closing nearly **15,000 cases**. Close to **135,000 hours** were spent on cases.

Volunteer attorneys partnered with PSLS to work on **1,400** legal matters.

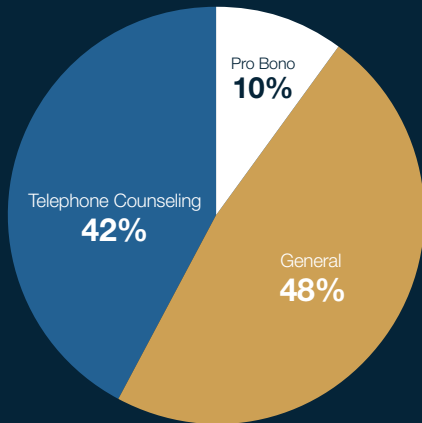
Percent of Closed Cases by Key Impact Area



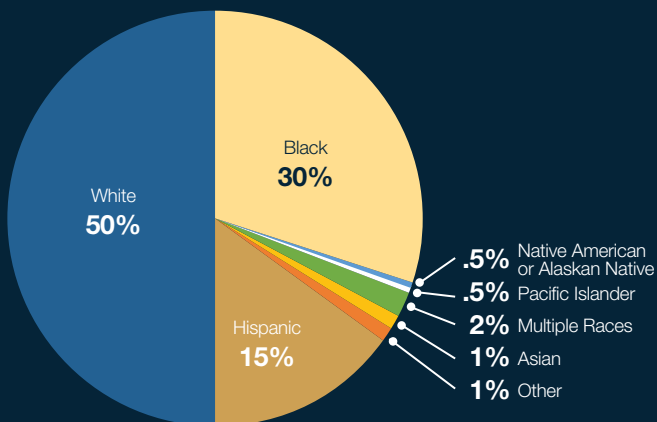
Percent of Closed Cases by Closing Reason



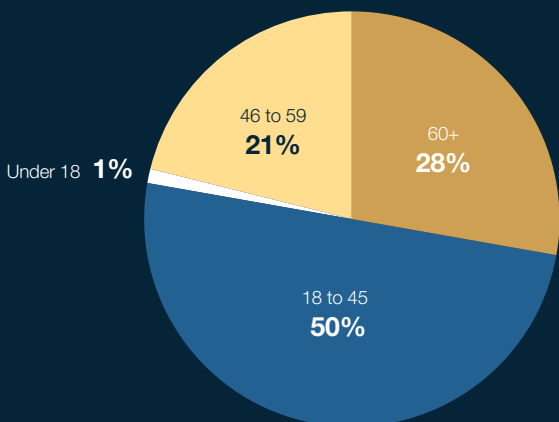
Percent of Closed Cases by Program



Percent of Clients by Race



Percent of Clients by Age



12,000+

Children 17 Years Old or Younger
Impacted by PSLS' Work



4,000+

Adults Aged 60 and
Older Helped



700+

Veterans Served



5,500+

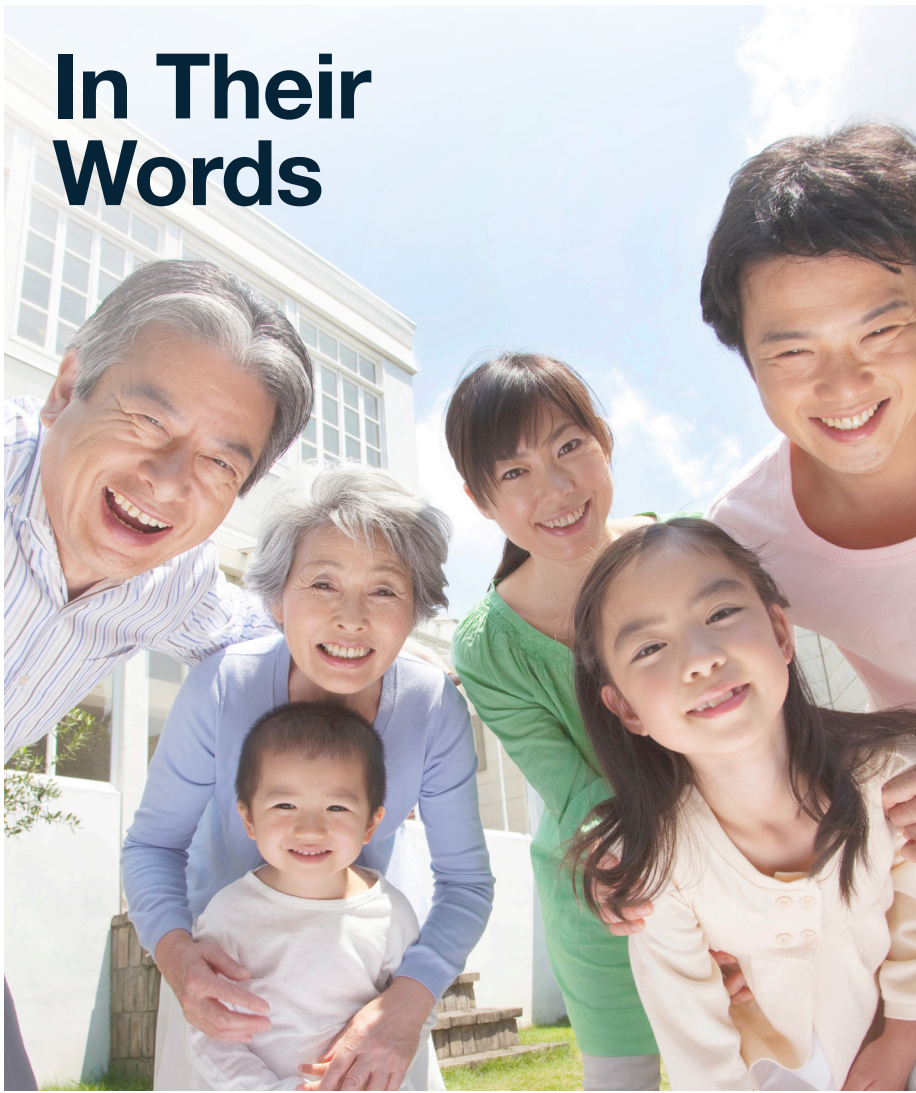
with Disabilities Served



3,400+

Domestic Violence
Survivors Served

In Their Words



“I cannot express my gratitude enough to Heather Skrip and Prairie State Legal Services in Rockford. I really don’t know what I would have done without Heather’s compassionate legal assistance to help me resolve an error Social Security had made that was negatively impacting my life and financial situation in a major way. Prior to contacting PSLS, I was unable to gain any traction with the Social Security Administration (SSA) despite months of letters and phone calls to the agency. Once Heather got involved that all changed. After following an additional step Heather recommended, she contacted my local SSA office with my supporting documentation of the error and quickly resolved the issue. I was amazed! It is clear to me that Heather’s intervention and expert legal support made all the difference. As a self-employed Vietnam-era veteran with limited income, I could not afford to hire an attorney outright, but that didn’t matter to Heather and PSLS. They treated me with respect and courtesy. So, thank you Heather and thank you PSLS for your generous assistance and the wonderful work you are doing on behalf of people who really need legal help!”

— “ —

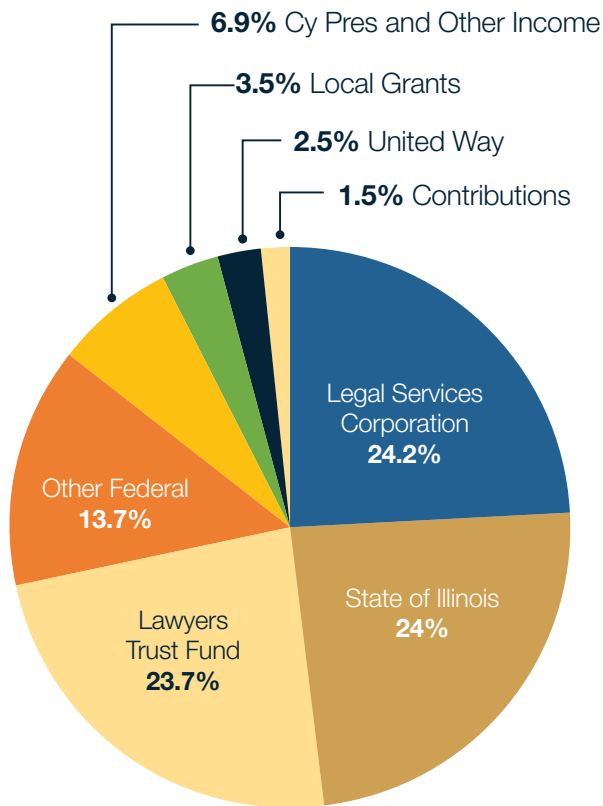
“I spoke with one of the lawyers yesterday and was very impressed with the help and knowledge she had about the issue I have! This service is wonderful and helpful! Thank you so much! Very professional!”

— ” —

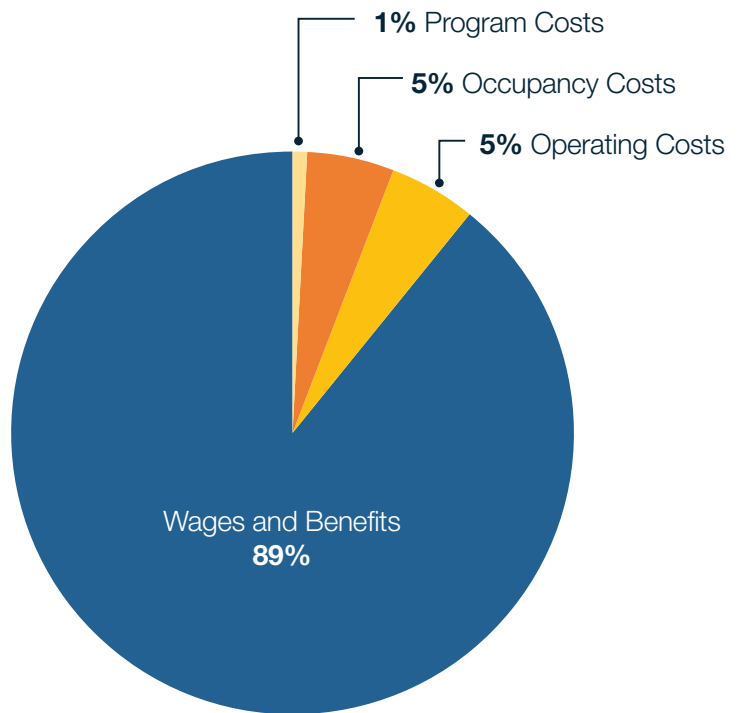
2024 Funding and Expenses

A Donor's Difference

With the help of generous and passionate donors, PSLS is able to continue to help clients successfully navigate through and resolve their serious civil legal issues.



Total Funding
\$23,210,000



Total Expenses
\$21,524,000

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.

Our Supporters

Donors

PSLS' impact is possible because of the commitment of its incredible donors. Thank you to all PSLs supporters. Your donations are appreciated. Each contribution – no matter how small – helps PSLs continue its important work. Here is a list of our donors who contributed in 2024:

\$1,000,000+

Illinois Criminal Justice
Information Authority
Illinois Dept. of Human Services
Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Legal Services Corporation

\$500,000+

AgeGuide
Westside Justice Center

\$250,000+

Office of the Illinois Attorney General

\$100,000+

Chicago Dept. of Public Health
City of Aurora
DuPage County
Heart of Illinois United Way
Illinois Dept. of Children &
Family Services
Internal Revenue Service
Lake County
U.S. Dept. of Health and
Human Services
U.S. Dept. of Housing &
Urban Development
U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs

\$50,000+

Central Illinois Agency on Aging
East Central Illinois Area Agency
on Aging
Nineteenth Judicial Circuit Court
Northwestern Illinois Area Agency
on Aging
Twelfth Judicial Circuit Court

\$25,000+

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois
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Community Memorial Foundation
Jerome Mirza Foundation
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Rock Island County (708) Mental
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State Farm Companies Foundation
United Way of Metropolitan Chicago
United Way Quad Cities
Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Winnebago County

\$10,000+

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