



High-Quality Legal Services for Every Client, Every Time. 2023 Impact Report



A Letter from Executive Director Denise E. Conklin



Dear Friends of PSLS,

As I reflect on PSLS' life-changing legal services provided in 2023, I also reflect on the last two years as PSLS' Executive Director. It has been such an honor to lead our law firm and work with a team of caring individuals who wholeheartedly believe in PSLS' mission of providing equal access to justice for all. It is a mission that I feel just as passionate about today as I did 20 years ago when I began my involvement with PSLS as a volunteer attorney.

When I was appointed as Executive Director in March 2022, PSLS' Board of Directors tasked me with implementing a firmwide realignment. I am pleased to share that – with the help of a consulting firm selected by our dedicated Board – those realignment efforts have been successful. The restructuring of our teams and the redefining of job duties have helped PSLS more efficiently and effectively serve clients with high-quality legal services.

The realignment has allowed PSLS to both improve business processes and also expand client services. For example, PSLS' Fair Housing Project work has been integrated throughout all PSLS offices, allowing our firm to help more clients with housing issues across all 36 counties that PSLS serves. In 2023, PSLS closed nearly 7,000 housing cases or approximately 44% of all closed cases.

PSLS has an amazing executive team. The firm's leaders leaned into the strategic realignment, and today the firm is healthier for it. The stronger PSLS is internally, the more it can grow its funding and ultimately serve more clients with high-quality legal services for every client, every time.

As 2024 progresses, I am looking forward to seeing our internal business processes mature. PSLS will continue to build on the realignment work that it started in 2022. Here are just a few highlights:

- Thanks to funding from PSLS' federal funder, Legal Services Corporation (LSC), PSLS is embarking on an ambitious project to streamline client intake at PSLS. With the help of external consultants, PSLS Director of Intake Services, Melissa Fuechtmann, will lead PSLS in a client-centered project to more efficiently and expediently move clients from initial intake to the attorney who will provide the highest level of services.
- PSLS continues to look for new ways to recruit attorneys to PSLS. Through a new partnership, PSLS will welcome an additional six paid summer interns this year, for a total of 10 paid summer interns. PSLS summer interns work in partnership with a PSLS Staff Attorney in one of PSLS' 11 offices in all aspects of PSLS' legal work, including client interviews, research and drafting court documents, and attending court hearings. Our hope is that these interns will choose to continue their internship and eventually choose to join our team of dedicated PSLS staff.
- In our continued commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, PSLS has created a DEI Advisory Committee made up of PSLS staff. This year, the DEI Advisory Committee is working closely with PSLS' executive team to ensure that PSLS is looking at its operations, policies and processes from a DEI lens.

I am so proud of the high-quality legal services that PSLS provided in 2023. I am pleased to share that in 2023, PSLS closed nearly 16,000 cases across its 36-county service area in Northern and Central Illinois, each case helping one client at a time. In this annual Impact Report, you will view a snapshot of the positive impact that PSLS services have had on clients and meet a few of the many clients that PSLS has helped. Thank you for your partnership and care that you have for PSLS' clients. I look forward to continuing our work together.

Warm regards,

About PSLS

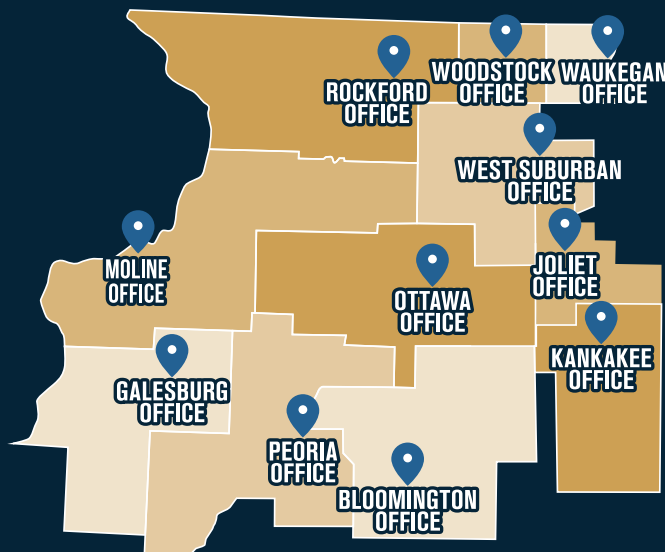
Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS) is a nonprofit law firm, serving 36 counties throughout Northern and Central Illinois. PSLS offers free legal services to low income persons and those older than 60 who have serious civil legal problems and need legal help to solve them. PSLS offers help with legal issues related to financial stability, housing and safety.



Mission & Vision

PSLS' mission 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 all low-income, elderly and 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.



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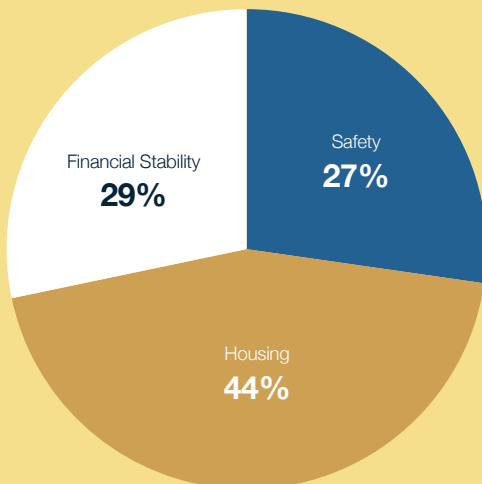
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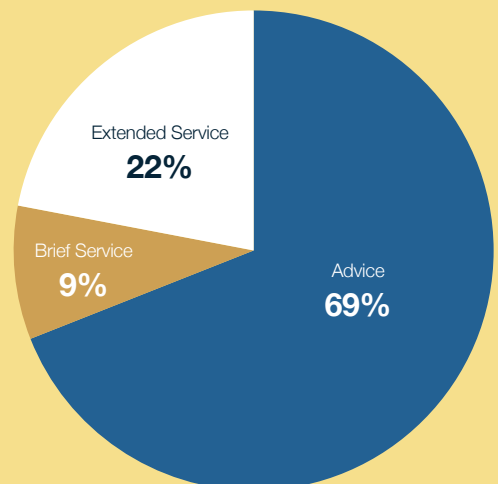
PSLS' Impact

In 2023, PSLS provided free legal services to more than **14,000 clients**, closing nearly **16,000 cases**. More than **145,000 hours** were spent on cases.

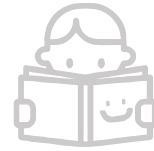
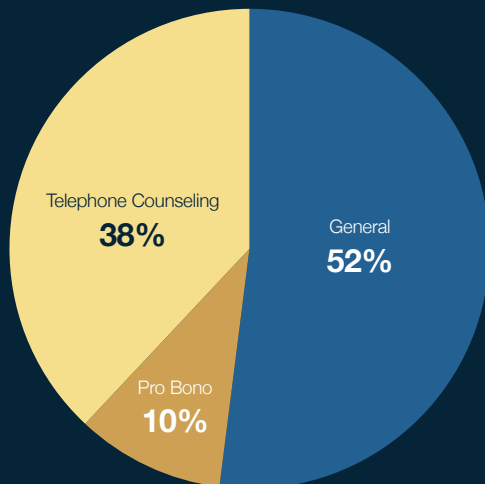
Percent of Closed Cases
by Priority Area



Percent of Closed Cases
by Closing Reason



Percent of Closed Cases by Program



14,000+ Children 17
Years Old or Younger
Impacted by PSLs' Work



Nearly **4,000**
Adults Aged 60 and
Older Helped



Nearly **800**
Veterans Served



6,000+
with Disabilities Served

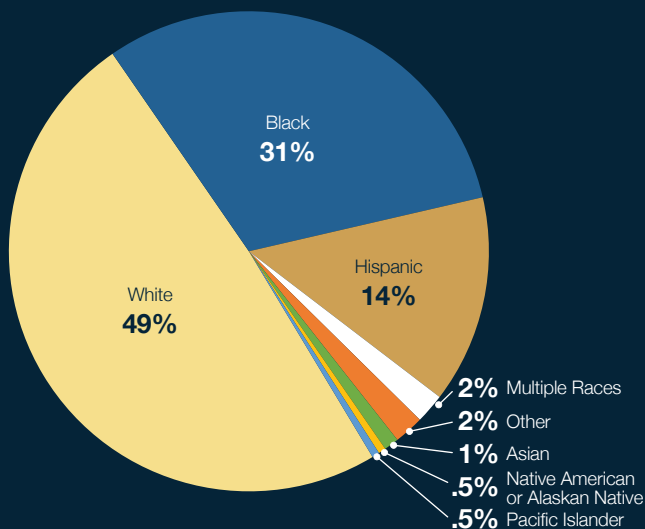


Nearly **4,000**
Victims of Domestic
Violence Served

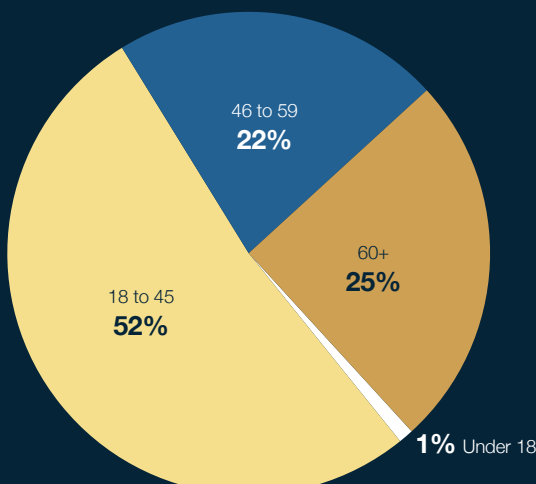


1,600+
Legal Matters Worked on
by Volunteer Attorneys

Percent of Clients by Race



Percent of Clients by Age



Meet PSLS Clients

Financial Stability

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

Opening the Doors for Zach

Meet Zach. When Zach was in his late teens, he made a mistake and ended up with a felony conviction for cannabis on his record. Zach shared that this happened during a challenging time in his life – both emotionally and mentally. Fast forward 10 years: Zach's personal life improved, but he was regularly turned away from job opportunities because of the felony. Zach turned to PSLS when a company that wanted to hire him told Zach that they couldn't hire him, because the felony prevented their insurance carrier from insuring him. PSLS went to work! PSLS staff successfully assisted Zach in vacating and expunging the felony from his record, opening the doors to employment for Zach.

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.



Safety

Everyone deserves to live free from abuse and violence.

A Fresh Start for Melissa

Meet Melissa, a newly divorced woman who recently obtained a green card! PSLS staff were key in helping Melissa get to this point in her life. Several years ago, PSLS helped Melissa obtain an order of protection against her then husband, a U.S. citizen. During that process, PSLS advised Melissa that she was eligible to adjust her immigration status. PSLS staff worked alongside Melissa to draft and file a VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) self-petition and green card application. PSLS provided high-quality legal services to Melissa every step of the way. As a result of PSLS' careful and caring work, today Melissa has a fresh start!

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.



Housing

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

A Home for Jefferson

Meet Jefferson, an older adult who has lived in his home for more than 20 years. A few years ago, Jefferson got sick and had to stop working. That's when he started to fall behind on his monthly mortgage payments. Jefferson fell so far behind on payments that recently his home fell into foreclosure and was facing an imminent foreclosure sale. He had money saved, but not the full amount that he was behind on the mortgage.

In his moment of need, Jefferson looked to PSLS for support. PSLS provided Jefferson with the high-quality legal services he needed. PSLS staff guided Jefferson through the

process of successfully obtaining aid from the Illinois Homeowner Assistance Fund. PSLS worked with Jefferson and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) on the overcap process, combining his savings with the IHDA grant to fully reinstate the mortgage.

Today, Jefferson's home is still his and he is up to date on his mortgage payments. The help PSLS staff gave to Jefferson is another important example of the positive impact PSLS makes each and every day. It is also an important reminder of how PSLS' relationships with social service agencies build trust and help our clients.

Name was changed to protect client confidentiality.



Testimonials



“I’d like to reach out and thank you personally from the bottom of my heart! You fought for both my husband and myself and accomplished the task! ... Thank you so much for carrying the torch when I could no longer!”

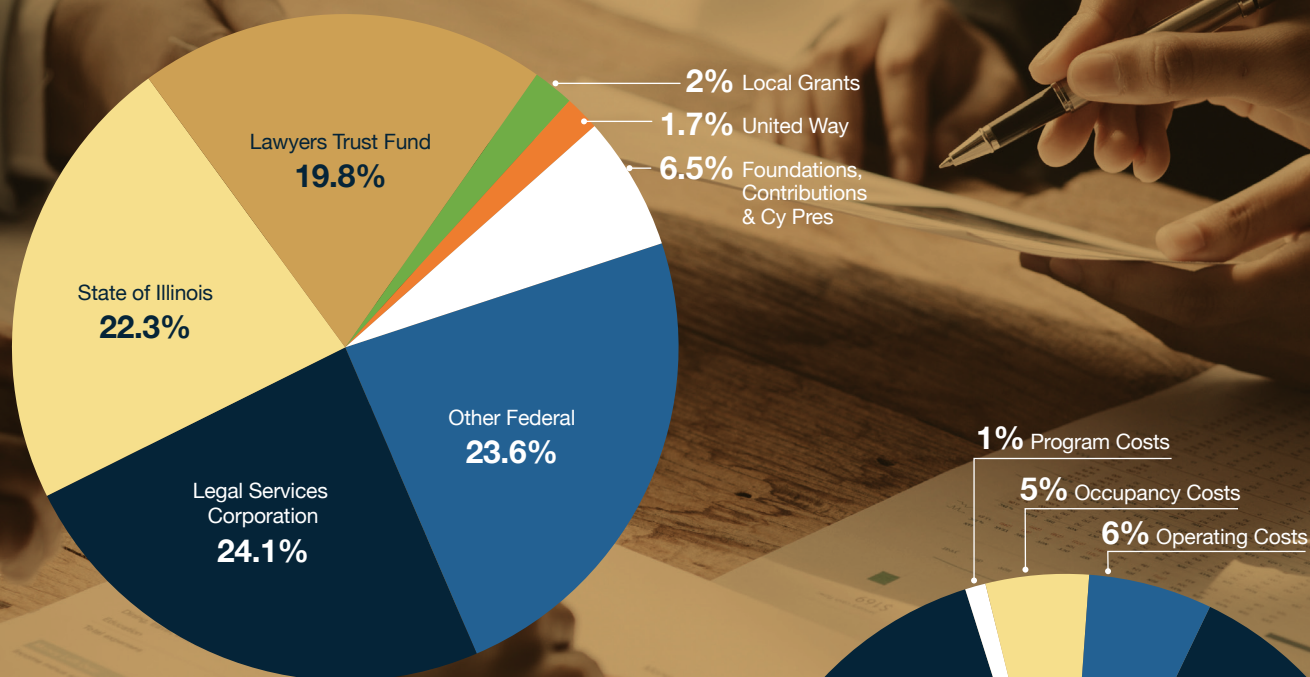
“In a time when I needed help and couldn’t afford a lawyer, PSLS was referred to me by the court to go through my custody case. Ryan helped me the best he could, and I’m grateful for their services.”

“Such a great, supportive community of lawyers.”

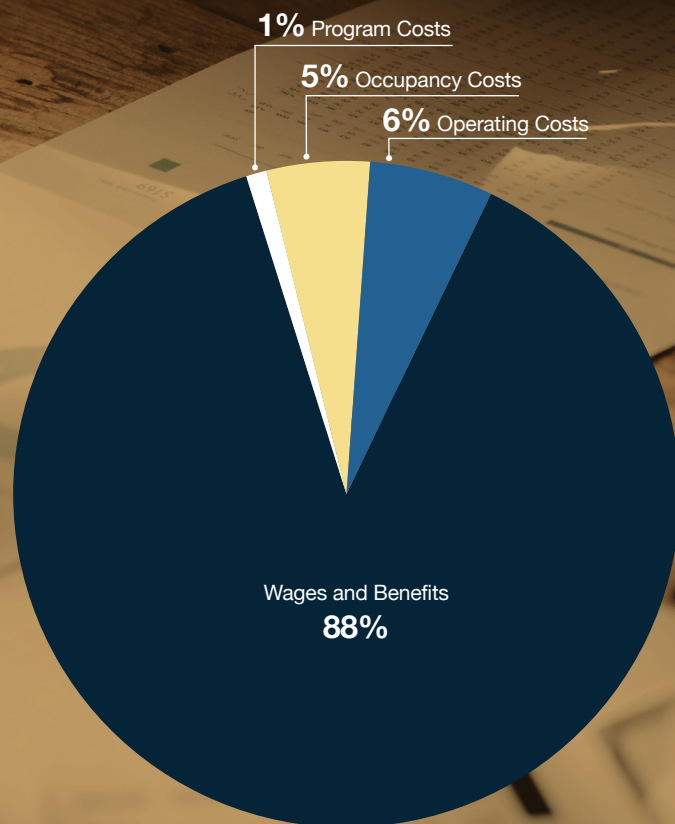
“I was helped with the school district not wanting to place my son in the right program. I’m thankful for the help.”

“I’d give 10 stars if I could. They helped me out with an old tax case and needless to say I can now put that behind me. Molly Recar – you’re amazing and you and your team did an amazing job. Thank you so much.”

2023 Funding and Expenses



Total 2023 Funding
\$22,454,000



Total 2023 Expenses
\$19,659,000

* 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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