



2021
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



www.arlegalaid.com
1-800-9 LAW AID

LSC | America's Partner
for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION

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How You Can Help

Greetings friends and supporters,

We had a banner year at Legal Aid of Arkansas in 2021. Our staff closed a record 7,290 cases for clients, helping 18,507 people, including 8,510 children. We assisted over 1,000 clients impacted by or in recovery for Opioid Use/Substance Use disorder. We helped 2,081 survivors of domestic violence feel safe and supported while becoming self-sufficient. Our aid resulted in clients recovering or avoiding over \$4.5 million, money they were able to use to better care for their families and assure a brighter future.

All of this during the uncertainty of a worldwide pandemic. Our staff met and exceeded every expectation and overcame every challenge. When the public health conditions indicated we should work remotely, we worked remotely. When circumstances required us to be fully engaged in court or other public forums, we were there. Through it all, we never missed a beat. Our clients were often heroic in pursuing their legal remedies, putting themselves on the line with the knowledge that their efforts would help other similarly situated individuals in the community.

The importance of access to civil legal services is magnified during times of uncertainty. Our ability to help stabilize families and communities by working holistically with other providers from the non-profit and government world, gives individuals and communities hope and a path forward.



Lee Richardson,
Executive Director

This annual report provides a small snapshot of what we did, work that would not have been possible without the generosity of more than two dozen funders providing more than \$4 million support for our efforts. From the Legal Services Corporation grant of almost \$2 million to the \$10 donations received on Giving Tuesday, we were good stewards of every penny. In addition to monetary support, 163 attorneys volunteered time to provide pro bono services valued at over \$480,000.

This marks my 31st year at Legal Aid, and I continue to be amazed by the dedication and sacrifice of our staff, the generosity of those who provide us financial and volunteer support, and the resilience of our clients. Together, we make equal access to justice a reality.

The Advocacy Report

As the pandemic moves into its third year, our clients continue to drive our advocacy with their courage, strategic thinking, persistence, and sense of justice. Legal Aid's team of advocates remains devoted to supporting our clients' efforts to stay housed, be safe, make ends meet, and push for a more just world. Together, we make a formidable team.

The remarkable day-to-day work—marked by thousands of clients, millions of dollars put (or kept) in pockets, and countless community education sessions—is matched by increasingly frequent affirmative litigation and appellate advocacy at all levels of federal and state court systems. At the federal level, our case that put an end to Medicaid work requirements, which cost nearly 20,000 people health insurance, is still pending at the U.S. Supreme Court. But, there's no chance of such work requirements coming back anytime soon. Our advocates also just argued at the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals to ensure home-and-community-based services for Medicaid recipients who are elderly or have physical disabilities. And, we have several cases in federal district courts in both eastern and western Arkansas combatting discrimination by landlords and government agencies on the basis of sex, race, language, sexual orientation, and disability.

At the state level, the Arkansas Supreme Court is currently deciding a case led by five Legal Aid clients that will determine whether nearly 70,000 Arkansans receive federal pandemic unemployment benefits that the state prematurely terminated. And, we are leading the charge on a Freedom of Information Act case to ensure that the state can't use a black-box algorithm hidden from the public to mete out unemployment benefits.

We've also had at least six cases decided or pending before the Court of Appeals involving the denial of unemployment benefits to workers affected by the pandemic and denial of orders of protections to survivors of abuse. Just last week, the Court of Appeals ruled that an abuser was in contempt of court when he came to the survivor's home and caused over \$10,000 of damage. Although orders of protection don't guarantee safety for victims, rulings like this show that the justice system must be more active in deterring violence.

Of course, casework and lawsuits are only part of the picture. We've broken ground by being the first legal aid provider in the country to partner with federal healthcare authorities to fight the systemic barriers and stigma of substance use disorder for affected clients and families. We've held countless presentations to ensure clients know the latest about federal tax credits, disaster relief, rental assistance, and pandemic support programs. And, we've started monthly Spanish-language social media presentations to make sure this vital information reaches our Latinx client communities.

While we take pride in these accomplishments, we know there is so much more to do. Life before the pandemic was hard enough for our client communities. It is even harder now. We remain devoted to the cause and invite you to join our clients and our advocates to bring forth a more just world. Indeed, we can't do it without you.



Kevin De Liban,
Director of Advocacy

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. De Liban', written in a cursive style.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS*

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THANK YOU DONORS!

Circle of Friends for Equal Justice

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THANK YOU DONORS!

Supporters for Equal Justice

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In Honor of Equal Justice

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Crusaders for Equal Justice

Rose Law Firm
Tyson Foods

Defenders for Equal Justice

Arkansas Access to Justice Foundation



Thank you to all the shoppers who used our link on Amazon Smile, Kroger Reward Card donors, and the generous donors at the Fayetteville Farmers Market!



UNMET LEGAL NEEDS



1 in 4 Arkansans qualify for civil legal aid.
[American Community Survey, 2019]



taxes



domestic violence



housing



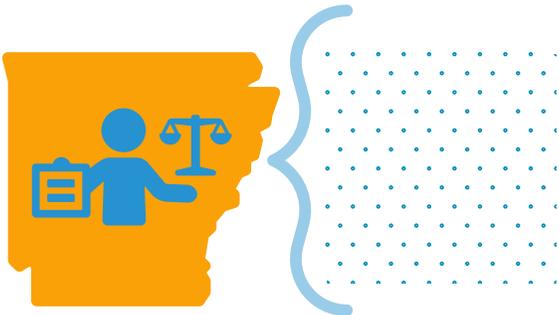
71% of low-income households experienced at least **1 civil legal problem**. [Access to Justice, 2019]



86% of civil legal problems report receiving **inadequate** or **no legal help**.
[Access to Justice, 2019]



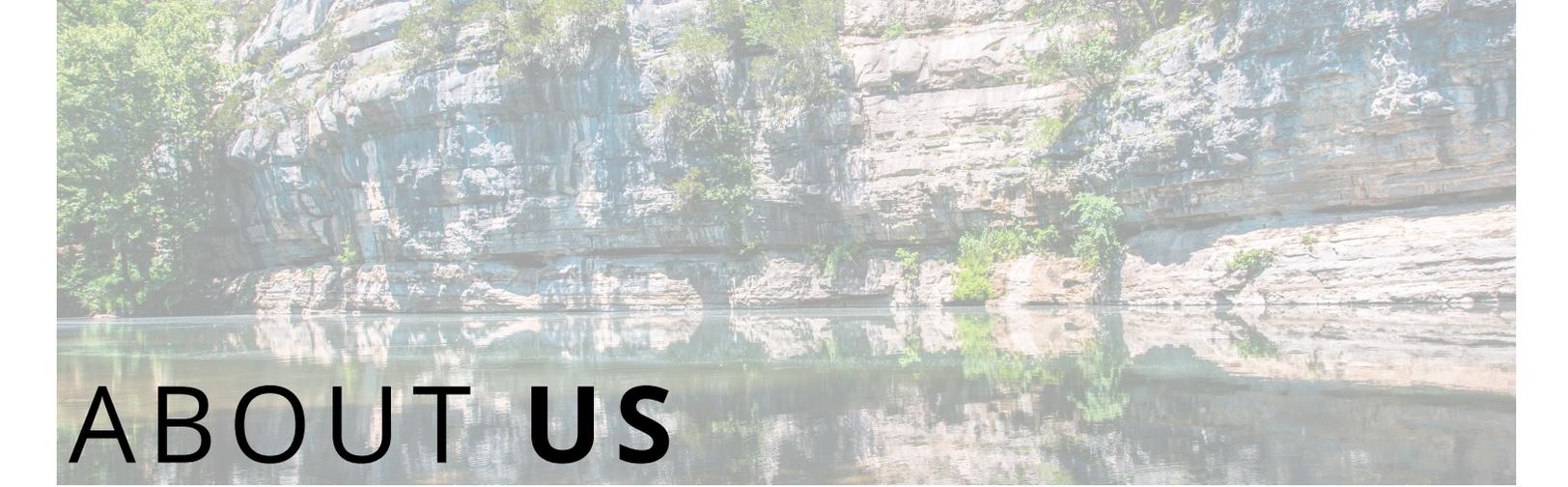
There is **one legal aid attorney** for every **10,253 eligible** Arkansans.



Arkansas has the fewest attorneys per capita in the country with **one attorney** per every **426 Arkansas residents**.
[American Bar Association, 2020]



Arkansas' poverty rates rank **5th highest** in the nation.
[America's Health Rankings, 2021]



ABOUT US

OUR MISSION

The **mission** of Legal Aid of Arkansas is to champion equal justice for low-income individuals and communities and to remedy the conditions that burden and marginalize them.

**Fighting Poverty,
Maintaining Dignity,
Assuring Justice**

WHO WE ARE

Arkansas started its first legal services program in 1965 - after multiple mergers, **Legal Aid of Arkansas** was created in 2002.

Legal Aid of Arkansas is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization that provides **free legal services** to low-income individuals residing in the state of Arkansas in civil (non-criminal) cases. Legal Aid has offices in **9** locations, serving **31 of the 75** counties in Northern and Eastern Arkansas.

Legal Aid works together with The Center for Arkansas Legal Services and the Arkansas Access to Justice Commission to provide civil legal aid to all Arkansans.



www.arlegalaid.org



@arlegalaid



Helpline: 1-800-952-9243



Office: 1-870-972-9224

OUR IMPACT

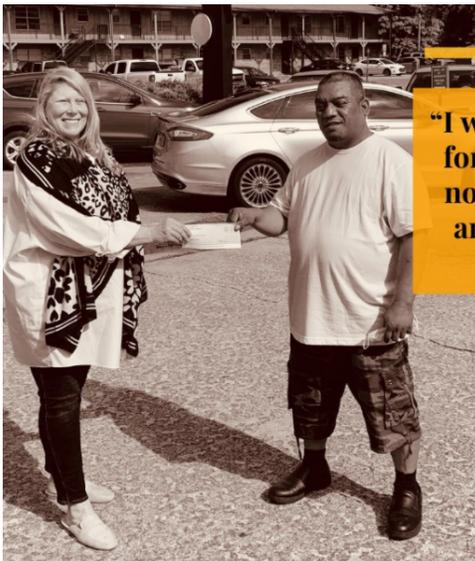
In 2021, we provided civil legal services to **7,290** people, impacting **18,507** household members and **8,510** children.

We recovered **\$4,520,409** in economic benefits for low-income Arkansas families

We helped **2,081** domestic violence survivors.

We empowered **1,007** families impacted by Opioid Use or Substance Use disorder.

We represented **1,657** individuals in court or administrative hearings.



"I would like to thank Legal Aid for helping me and my family now that I am able to support and provide for my family."

--Resmond Pankae

In addition to three dozen Legal Aid staff members, **190 private attorney volunteers** assisted by closing cases we referred to them.



Our Domestic Justice group assisted 1,113 clients seeking an Order of Protection
The Domestic Justice workgroup helps with obtaining and enforcing orders of protection and a variety of family law issues, including divorces and child custody cases, where there is an immediate or ongoing risk of harm to the child.

Our Economic Justice group assisted 136 clients with unemployment compensation cases

The Economic Justice workgroup protects rights related to public benefit programs (Medicaid, SNAP, Unemployment Insurance, Social Security), special education services, and employment, including the enforcement of laws outlawing discrimination and wage theft.



Our Housing group helped 828 clients with private Landlord/Tenant issues
The Housing workgroup fights housing discrimination under a variety of federal, state, and local laws. It defends tenants facing civil eviction suits and homeowners facing foreclosure suits.



Our Consumer group assisted 371 clients with criminal record sealing cases

The Consumer Protection workgroup focuses on asset, income, and resource protection. It protects consumers from unfair trade and debt collection practices. It files petitions to seal criminal records to remove barriers to employment and housing.



Tell your story...

CLIENT STORY

"Life can change in just a heartbeat. In my case it really did.

I suffered a series of heart attacks over a three year period that decimated my ability to work and whipped out what I thought was a secure financial future in just a matter of years.

My situation, because of all the medical expenses, spiraled out of control, so I was forced to make some very difficult decisions about where the limited resources that I had could be spent..." - Jon, Client



Jon finds hope after facing life altering medical issues, financial hardships, and navigating a complex legal battle. His experience is one of many experiences people in Arkansas are currently facing. **Listen to his story in this short interview!**

"LEGAL AID JUST CAME ALONG AND PUT THEIR ARMS AROUND ME AND SAID, **WE CAN TAKE CARE OF THIS FOR YOU, AND THEY DID.**"

STAFF AWARDS

Congratulations to Neyra Galvez for receiving the Lynda Ware award!

Neyra Galvez is our Intake Specialist and Spanish Interpreter.

She joined Legal Aid in 2016.



Congratulations to Jason Auer for receiving the Versalee Wyatt award!

Jason Auer is the Housing Workgroup Leader and Director of Fair Housing Projects.

He joined Legal Aid in 2011.





PRO BONO

"As the world was going back into the classroom, back into the office and back into the courtroom with overcrowded dockets, volunteers never stopped giving their time, attention, and expertise to those in need."

- Greneda Johnson, Pro Bono Director

With the help of over **235** attorneys, students and paralegals who lent **2,500+** hours of their time drafting documents, handling cases and providing support, we closed **327** cases.

Tyson Pro Bono Partnership

Tyson Foods' Law Department has supported the work of Legal Aid of Arkansas for a number of years, providing financial assistance to support various programs. In 2021, this support was taken to a new level by Tyson's Pro Bono Committee, who pledged to provide four legal clinics over a twelve-month period, in partnership with Legal Aid of Arkansas.

The first clinic, a virtual criminal record sealing clinic, proceeded in late 2021. The legal services for the clinic were provided by attorneys from Tyson's legal team, assisted by volunteer students from the University of Arkansas School of Law. The Tyson attorneys met via Zoom with clients from the Washington County Salvation Army, as well as clients from Legal Aid's service area who contacted our helpline or were referred from other sources. Ninety legal documents were prepared for the clients served in this clinic.

Criminal record sealing improves the lives of Arkansans with criminal histories in many ways. It increases the chances of finding safe housing, as background checks are standard procedure for many landlords. Criminal records also negatively impact job seekers in their efforts to secure employment, as well as advance in jobs once employment is obtained, since even employers may be unwilling to promote, or even hire, individuals with any criminal background.

The legal services provided by Tyson attorneys during this clinic benefitted deserving Arkansans, and the continued clinic partnership between Tyson and Legal Aid of Arkansas will provide greater benefits in the coming year.

JUSTICE PROJECTS

BEYOND OPIOIDS

Beyond Opioids provides free civil legal services to eligible clients impacted by the **opioid crisis and other substance use disorders** in Arkansas.

Beyond Opioids is a consortium of **prevention, treatment, and recovery service providers** led by the two legal aid programs in Arkansas: Center for Arkansas Legal Services (CALs) and Legal Aid of Arkansas (Legal Aid).



For more information,
visit:
www.beyondopioids.org

In 2021,

- **1,114** individuals impacted by substance use disorder were provided services.
- **69%** were domestic justice cases.
 - **Divorce (34%), Custody (22%), Guardianship (13%)**
- Majority of cases came from **Washington, Benton, and Craighead county.**

LOW INCOME



Low Income
Taxpayer Clinics
REPRESENTATION • EDUCATION • ADVOCACY

TAXPAYER CLINIC

The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic ensures the fairness and integrity of the tax system for taxpayers who are low income or speak English as a second language. They provide representation, resources and education on rights, and they actively advocate and identify issues that may be unjustly facing low-income Arkansans within the IRS tax system.

- The average household income was only 84% of the federal poverty line.
- Recovered over \$620,000 for 116 clients against the IRS alone.
- Helped clients avoid paying state & federal tax authorities approximately \$738,000.
- Conducted 166 educational activities and 21 outreach events. We estimate that we reached over 225,000 taxpayers during 2021.

Taxpayers overwhelmingly came to the LITC in 2021 because they had not received their income tax refunds and could not resolve the issue with the IRS. For example, a single custodial father's 2019 income tax return was delayed in processing because his W-2s did not arrive at the IRS to match with the income he indicated on his return. We worked with the client to secure the proper letter from one of his employers to verify his refund and submitted it to the IRS. He promptly received his refund of \$5,917.

In another case, a young, struggling, low-income family went to a paid preparer where the preparer e-filed client's 2019 return. The refund was delayed because the IRS examined the return. To the client's surprise there was an unknown dependent listed on the return. We assisted client in amending the 2019 return, then assembled extensive documentation to show that the 2 children, including a newborn, lived with the client. We established that client was entitled to EITC and CTC, and he received his refund of \$8,377.

The pandemic brought unprecedented numbers of taxpayer to our clinic for help. The LITC represented 286 tax clients in 2021, after representing 291 tax clients in 2020. We set a record for advice and consultation cases, with 500 this year. We represented 13 taxpayers in US Tax Court, recovering thousands of dollars for low-income petitioners.

In 2021, 53% of our tax clients were Marshallese, which was the highest level ever for us at the tax clinic.

FAIR HOUSING PROJECT



The Fair Housing Project of Legal Aid of Arkansas works to **eliminate housing discrimination** and to ensure **equal housing opportunity for all** people through education, outreach, public policy initiatives, advocacy, and enforcement.



In 2021, Fair Housing staff conducted 110 fair housing tests, a 50% increase from the previous year!

Provided representation in state or federal courts on 13 cases

To help eliminate housing discrimination in Arkansas, sign up to be a Fair Housing Project Tester here:

<https://arlegalaid.org/housingtester/apply.html>

If you believe you have been discriminated against, please call the fair housing helpline at 1-870-338-9834.

MEDICAL LEGAL PARTNERSHIPS



Legal Aid of Arkansas is engaged in Medical-Legal Partnerships (MLP) throughout Arkansas with a variety of health care providers. MLP's team lawyers and paralegals work with health care teams in medical settings to **detect, address and prevent health-harming social conditions for people and communities**. The goal is for attorneys and medical staff to work together to achieve lasting positive health outcomes for low-income patients and clients.

- Mid-Delta Health Systems and Friday, Eldridge & Clark
- Arkansas Children's Hospital
- Mid-South Health Systems

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



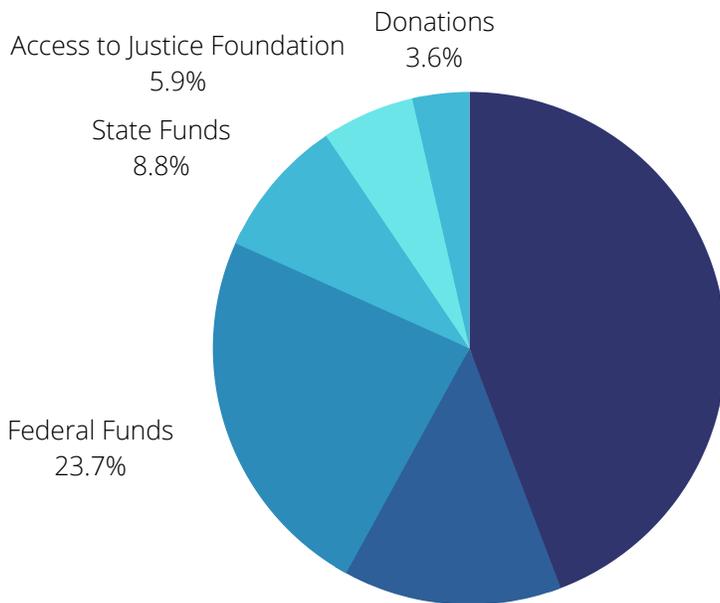
Legal Aid of Arkansas works to mitigate Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) by **prioritizing cases where households have children under 5 years old**.

Legal Aid of Arkansas can help **prevent stress** in a child's life from causing serious physical, mental and emotional issues by helping with **Domestic Violence, Guardianship/Custody, Housing, Education, and Benefits cases**.

BUDGET

Revenue

\$4.25 million

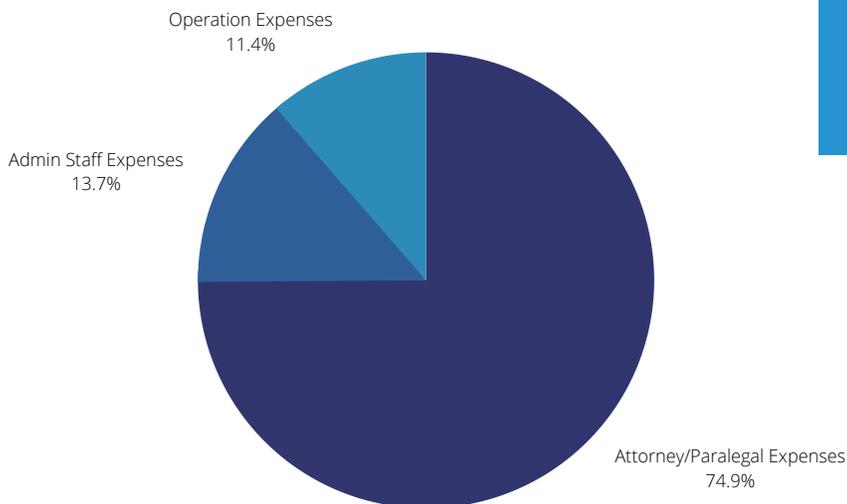


Legal Services Corporation
44.2%

Legal Aid of Arkansas receives funds from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Legal Aid complies with the LSC Act, 42 USC §§ 2996 et seq., regulations, 45 CFR Part 1600, et seq., appropriations riders and all other applicable law. See, Pub. L. 104-134 (1996).

Expenses

\$4.37 million





LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Volunteer with us!

Providing pro bono services to people of limited means can mean the difference between justice for some and justice for all. **Pro bono service is one of the most rewarding experiences in an attorney's career.**

You can register to become a pro-bono volunteer here:

<https://arlegalaid.org/how-to-help/volunteer.html>

Join our mission!

A lack of resources is the number one reason Arkansans get turned away at Legal Aid of Arkansas. **Through your donations, you can cover what it costs for legal aid to represent a domestic violence victim, a family struggling to pay their bills, or a child in need of a stable home.**

You can make your one-time or monthly gift online today at:

<https://arlegalaid.org/donation-landing-page/donate-landing.html>

Join the Legal Aid Loop!

Our **monthly newsletter** shares our current events and news.

Sign up here: <https://arlegalaid.org/news-events/sign-up-for-our-newsletter.html>