



2018 ANNUAL REPORT



EQUAL



Justice.
Rights.
Opportunity.



NORTHEAST NEW JERSEY

LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Justice for All

Dear Friends and Supporters:

For more than 50 years, Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) has had the privilege of providing the low-income residents of Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties with free legal representation and advice in civil law matters. Now, we are delighted to share this annual report highlighting the impact of our services on our clients and communities.

There are legal aid organizations across the state and the nation, and yet the NNJLS service area stands out for its exceptional ethnic and cultural diversity, with Jersey City repeatedly ranked as the most diverse city in the nation.¹ Home to those who have immigrated from or identify heritage from China, Dominican Republic, India, Korea, Mexico, and many other nations speaking languages including Arabic, Cantonese, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Polish, Tagalog, and Spanish—our tri-county area continually reminds us of the magnitude of ensuring these diverse populations have access to equal justice. Low English proficiency, cultural mores, and general inexperience with the American judicial process can prevent many individuals from seeking legal help. We at NNJLS always remember that—in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty—it is our honor and duty to ensure that all Americans, regardless of origin or ability to pay, feel welcome to partake in the benefits of our shared judicial system.

Within these pages, you will read about just a few of the more than 9,000 cases NNJLS handled in 2018. For each statistic and each short vignette, there exists a real person and family who is more than just a number or story. Many have relatable narratives of unpaid fines spiraling into the loss of a driver's license, inability to get to work, trouble paying rent, eviction, and homelessness, while other eligible individuals are trying to expunge non-violent criminal records so they can get a fresh start on their lives and contribute to their families and society. Regardless of specifics, each client receives respect and fair legal treatment at NNJLS. Our services give individuals an invaluable resource to challenge barriers and take back control of their lives.

We are proud of what we have accomplished in 2018, but know there is always more to do. The demand for legal services will always outpace supply across the nation, but we are happy to report that we have recently hired new attorneys who will help us expand our quest for justice. We thank our federal and state funders, our community partners, volunteers, and supporters for helping us reach as many clients as possible across our remarkable service area.



John H. Fitzgerald
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Jack J. Wind
PRESIDENT

1. <https://wallethub.com/edu/cities-with-the-most-and-least-ethno-racial-and-linguistic-diversity/10264/#methodology>

NNJLS at a Glance



Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) focuses on four core areas of civil law—housing, consumer, family, and public benefits law. These present some of the most pressing issues facing low-income populations in our service area—and matters in which our clients are most likely to develop legal problems they cannot address themselves.

NNJLS also has specialized programs in place to address the legal needs of veterans, seniors, survivors of domestic violence, students, immigrants, persons living with HIV or AIDS, formerly incarcerated individuals facing legal barriers to re-entry, the homeless, and low-income residents with federal income tax issues.

9,133 cases handled in 2018

BERGEN COUNTY
2,628

HUDSON COUNTY
2,961

PASSAIC COUNTY
3,544

What is Civil Legal Aid?

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "Civil Legal aid is free legal assistance to low- and middle income people who have civil legal problems. These problems are non-criminal; rather, civil legal aid helps people access basic necessities such as healthcare, housing, government benefits, employment, and educational services."

Legal aid is based on the belief that those living in poverty should have equal access to the civil justice system. Unlike criminal cases where defendants are granted the Sixth Amendment right to council, those facing civil legal challenges—such as unlawful evictions, domestic abuse, consumer fraud, or denial of public benefits—have no constitutional right to an attorney. Legal aid providers offer representation, advice, education, and other forms of legal advocacy for people living in poverty, helping to ensure justice for all—not just those who can afford it.

Where does NNJLS Fit In?

In New Jersey, one in three adults living below 200% the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) has at least one civil legal problem requiring the assistance of a lawyer in a given year. However, only 20% manage to secure the assistance of a lawyer for their legal problem; the remaining 80% get no legal help. Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) helps to close this gap by providing free legal aid assistance to the low-income residents of Hudson, Passaic, and Bergen Counties. With offices in Jersey City, Paterson, and Hackensack, we serve some of the most racially and ethnically diverse communities in the nation through legal representation and advice, community outreaches, Know-Your-Rights sessions, pro se workshops, and more.

In the past year, 71% of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem.

Source: Legal Services Corporation, 2017. The Justice Gap: Measuring the Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-Income Americans. Prepared by NORC at the University of Chicago for LSC.



The origins of NNJLS reach back to the 1960s, when concerned attorneys and legislators realized the need to provide funding for legal services organizations. The result was new non-profit organizations dedicated solely to providing legal assistance to those in poverty, including Bergen County Legal Services, Hudson County Legal Services, and the Passaic County Legal Aid Society. In 2003, these three agencies merged to become Northeast New Jersey Legal Services, serving all three counties.

Whom We Serve



70%
are women



27%
are senior
citizens



79%
are from racial
and/or ethnic
minorities



86%
are below the
federal poverty
level



33%
have mental
and/or physical
disabilities



46%
of all households
helped have
children



30%
are non-English
speakers

"Before I came to Northeast New Jersey Legal Services, I felt hopeless, but all of that changed when I walked into your office and saw your smiling face."

-Client in a thank you letter to the NNJLS Director of Private Attorney Involvement

"Throughout the process, I was made to feel that my case was important, and all efforts were made to put my mind at ease during a very stressful time."

- Client survey response

NNJLS Programs and Practice Areas

HOUSING LAW

Keeping tenants in their homes.

The NNJLS Housing Law Unit provides legal representation and advice to clients seeking to prevent evictions, foreclosures, and elimination of housing benefits.

FAMILY LAW

Preserving family stability.

The NNJLS Family Law Unit assists those who have significant family law issues affecting the safety and stability of the family including divorce, custody, child support, spousal support, and parenting time.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Helping clients keep their hard-earned money.

The NNJLS Consumer Law Unit helps people who have financial problems arising from transactions with creditors or lenders. Many

of our clients are victims of consumer fraud or identity theft, while others have problems with credit cards or other loans, repossessed automobiles, or unpaid medical bills.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

Maintaining public assistance for those most in need.

The Public Benefits Unit helps individuals and families who need assistance in obtaining or maintaining public benefits to keep them and their families financially secure.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Providing safety and security for survivors.

NNJLS helps survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault obtain restraining orders and other relief to keep them and their families safe and secure from the threat of future violence.

IMMIGRATION

Providing legal help to our newest neighbors.

The NNJLS Immigration Representation Project provides legal help to legal permanent residents seeking to become US citizens, renew permanent residency status, and with other immigration issues.

TAX

Helping low-income taxpayers with federal tax issues.

The NNJLS Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic (LITC) is a federally-funded program which assists low-income residents who have federal tax controversies involving the IRS.

SENIORS

Promoting well-being.

The NNJLS Senior Law Project provides legal assistance to seniors aged 60 and older with powers of attorney, healthcare surrogacies, simple wills, and public benefits.

VETERANS

Serving those who served.

The NNJLS Veterans Assistance Project was established to address the legal needs of low-income and homeless veterans and their families in the NNJLS service area.

ELDER JUSTICE

Helping victimized seniors.

The NNJLS Elder Justice Project provides seniors with access to quality legal representation and advice to address civil legal issues that arise from elder abuse, neglect, and/or financial exploitation.

RE-ENTRY

Helping the formerly incarcerated overcome barriers to stability and prosperity.

NNJLS helps those with criminal records to clear their records (expungement) as well as restore their drivers licenses.

RYAN WHITE (HIV/AIDS)

Ensuring legal assistance for those with HIV/AIDS.

NNJLS provides legal services catering to the needs of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

EDUCATION

Making education accessible to those in need.

The NNJLS Education Representation Project provides free legal advice, representation, and advocacy in a variety of education matters such as school registration, special education, and disability accommodations.

Cases Handled by Unit in 2018

HOUSING	2,479
PUBLIC BENEFITS	1,853
FAMILY	1,577
CONSUMER	1,315
IMMIGRATION	639
OTHER	434
PRO BONO	428
TAX	206
GENERAL	202
GRAND TOTAL	9,133



A Closer Look

Poverty Close to Home

PASSAIC COUNTY

35% of the population of Passaic County (174,266/ 502,606) is 200% FPL or below*

48% speak a language other than English at home

78% are minority

Domestic violence offenses: 3,367**

BERGEN COUNTY

18% of the population of Bergen County (163,465/927,026) is 200% FPL or below*

40% speak a language other than English at home

45% are minority

Domestic violence offenses: 3,391**

HUDSON COUNTY

35% of the population of Hudson County (238,567/ 672,241) is 200% FPL or below*

59% speak a language other than English at home

88% are minority

Domestic violence offenses: 3,441**

* Based on American Community Survey data

** State of New Jersey, Dept. of Law and Safety. Domestic Violence Offense Report, 2016 .

Stories of Justice



NNJLS is proud to devote special efforts to represent foreign-born survivors of domestic violence as part of its Legal Assistance for Victims grant, a program administered through the US Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women. NNJLS assisted "Salma," an Egyptian woman who separated from her husband "Robert" after suffering severe harassment at his hands for years. Suspecting that Robert was breaking into the apartment where she and their two children lived, Salma installed security cameras throughout her apartment, which confirmed that Robert was indeed breaking in, spending time there, and even stealing from her. Salma immediately filed a Temporary Restraining Order (TRO) against Robert.

Salma then sought help at NNJLS to obtain a Final Restraining Order (FRO) so she could

be protected from him for good. NNJLS' attorney helped Salma amend the TRO to include all incidents of Robert's harassment to clearly show the abusive history. However, in retaliation, Robert filed a cross TRO against Salma, making false claims that she had harassed him and, during his testimony, he presented fabricated medical records to allege that Salma was delusional. As Salma was not proficient in English, the attorney arranged for her to use an Arabic interpreter so she could deliver her story in her native language—a powerful addition to her case. The NNJLS attorney argued that Robert's claims were baseless and simply an act of retaliation against Salma. Thanks to NNJLS' persistence and attention to Salma's linguistic needs, the Judge dismissed Robert's TRO against Salma and granted her the FRO.

NNJLS' Public Benefits Unit helps low-income and vulnerable individuals access public benefits to meet their most basic and essential needs.

“Carol” is a single mother of three children. Though Carol was working two jobs—one as a school tutor and one as a preschool paraprofessional—in order to support herself and her children, she still needed Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Temporary Rental Assistance (TRA) to help cover expenses. After she had to stay home for a week with her ill child, the loss of the week’s wages made it impossible for her to continue to afford child care. Further, the lack of public transportation options to her preschool job posed a further limitation, ultimately forcing her to quit that job. Carol then received a notice from the Board of

Social Services that her TANF and TRA benefits were being terminated due to a voluntary quit from her job.

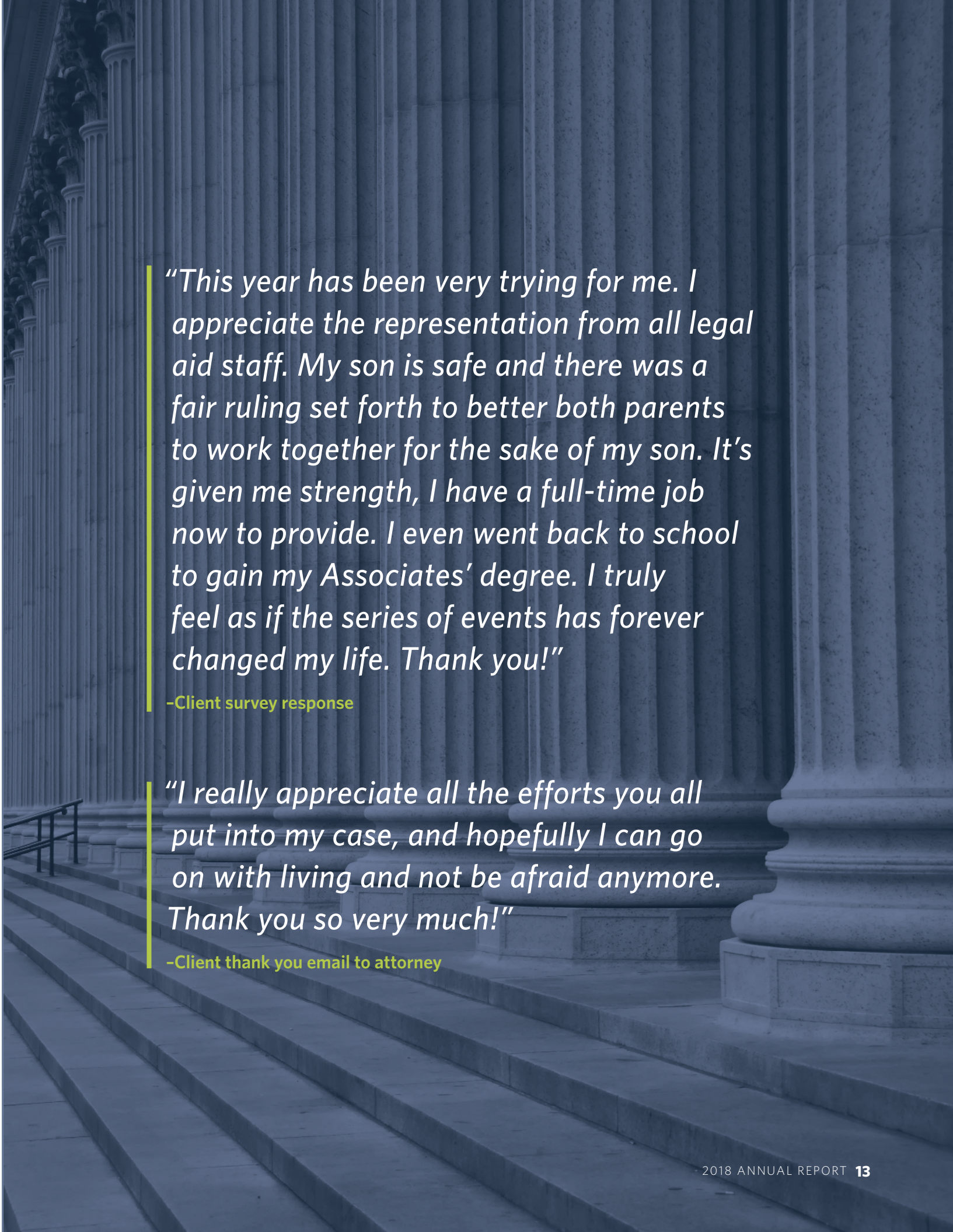
Unsure what to do and worried she would not be able to provide for her children, Carol met with an NNJLS Public Benefits attorney. After conducting extensive research, the attorney determined and then argued at the hearing that Carol should not be penalized for quitting because child care and transportation are valid reasons for quitting. Furthermore, Carol maintained her other job as a school tutor. The Administrative Law Judge agreed with the attorney and a settlement with the Board of Social Services was reached such that Carol’s TANF and TRA benefits were reinstated, giving her the support she and her family need.

In a case of identity theft, NNJLS provided critical assistance

to “Mariska,” a 62-year-old woman who was victimized by her own nephew. Mariska applied for a car loan and was denied because her credit history mysteriously revealed that she owed \$30,000 in student loans. It was only through contacting the loan provider that she learned that the debt belonged to someone else, who had used her identity to apply for student loans. Initially, Mariska tried to resolve the situation on her own, attempting unsuccessful appeals to the loan provider and then the Prosecutor’s Office.

It was only after she met with an NNJLS Elder Justice Attorney that the pendulum began to swing in her direction. The NNJLS attorney sent formal letters to all relevant

parties to dispute the charges and worked with the Prosecutor’s Office to absolve her of these wrongful debts. At trial, the identity thief was found liable for the student loan payments and a criminal order was entered against him. However, the next day, the Department of Education seized Mariska’s recently issued tax refund, as they were unaware that Mariska was relieved from these debts. The NNJLS attorney again advocated for her rights to the Federal Student Aid Ombudsman, resulting in Mariska receiving the tax refund that she was rightfully due. Mariska was very grateful for the attorney’s support in this lengthy case, which yielded results not possible through her initial attempts at self-representation.



“This year has been very trying for me. I appreciate the representation from all legal aid staff. My son is safe and there was a fair ruling set forth to better both parents to work together for the sake of my son. It’s given me strength, I have a full-time job now to provide. I even went back to school to gain my Associates’ degree. I truly feel as if the series of events has forever changed my life. Thank you!”

-Client survey response

“I really appreciate all the efforts you all put into my case, and hopefully I can go on with living and not be afraid anymore. Thank you so very much!”

-Client thank you email to attorney

Private Attorney Involvement

The Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program is an integral part of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services. Coordinating all of NNJLS' pro bono attorneys and volunteers, PAI matches private attorneys with clients who would otherwise have to face their legal problems alone.

In 2018, pro bono attorneys, legal interns, and volunteers from various backgrounds contributed more than 2,500 hours to help meet the civil legal needs of impoverished residents of Bergen, Passaic, and Hudson Counties. Volunteers have provided service in many roles including representing clients, facilitating clinics, providing legal advice, conducting outreach, assisting staff attorneys with various legal tasks, and much more. We are grateful for the time and energy our volunteers contribute to NNJLS and our clients.

2,669
VOLUNTEER HOURS

MONETARY VALUE OF HOURS VOLUNTEERED

\$533,800

54
CLINICS CONDUCTED

Types of clinics:

BANKRUPTCY	6
SECURITY DEPOSIT	16
DIVORCE	21
NATURALIZATION	11

Total number of clients assisted at clinics: 210

489
CLIENT CASES CLOSED

Types of cases handled by Volunteer Lawyers:

IMMIGRATION	75
CONSUMER	95
FAMILY	166
PUBLIC BENEFITS	54
HOUSING	95
OTHER INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS	4



"It is with a sincere heart and mind that I want to thank you for your support and referring me to my pro bono attorney for my bankruptcy. I was able to solve my financial hardship as I was hoping, and it was such an easy and smooth process."

- Client in a thank you email to PAI Director

302 veterans were served.

457 people received help accessing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamp) benefits.

Nadia is **safe from her estranged husband**, who was harassing her and breaking into her home, after NNJLS helped her obtain a final restraining order against him.

Twelve tenants of a local apartment building received **significant financial compensation** after the building's roof collapsed and destroyed all of their belongings, and can now look for a safer place to live.

498 parents secured custody of their children.

Jennifer **no longer has to live in fear** of the man who sexually assaulted her after NNJLS helped her obtain a protective order against him.

Our services have benefited **18,615 household members** including **6,655 children**.

Mrs. L is **no longer facing homelessness** after falling victim to several financial scams for which she was using all of her social security income as payment.

677 survivors of domestic violence got legal assistance.

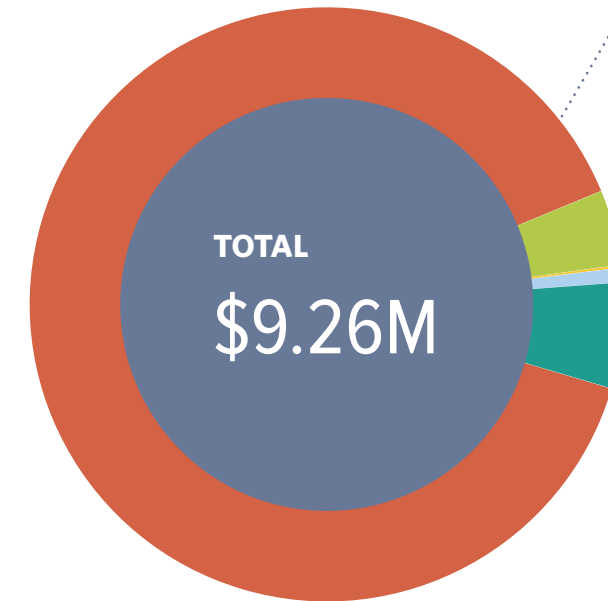
126 eligible clients expunged their criminal records.

104 senior citizens create powers of attorney documents to protect their medical care choices and financial security.

Jake, a veteran suffering from PTSD, was able to **receive the VA medical benefits** that he was wrongfully denied and can now focus on his health.

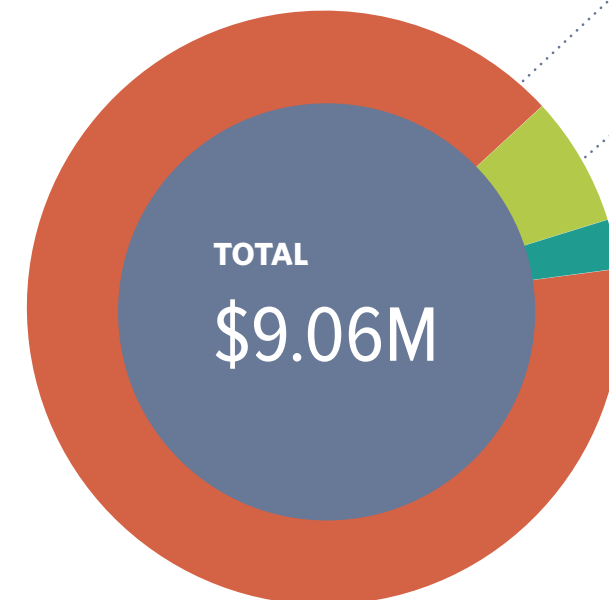
2018 Financial Statement

Revenue



89.2%	Government Grants	\$8,258,000
4.1%	Public Contributions	\$381,000
>1%	Special Events	\$13,000
>1%	Program Revenues	\$74,000
5.8%	Donated Services	\$534,000

Expenses



89.2%	Program Services	\$8,174,000
4.1%	Administration/General	\$642,000
2.7%	Program development/ Fundraising	\$244,000

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services is proud to be a Legal Services Corporation (LSC) grantee, and we comply with all LSC conditions and prohibitions in acceptance of all funds.

Help Us Expand Our Impact

"My attorney accompanied me to Landlord/Tenant court and was instrumental in resolving some of the complicated issues at hand. Had I handled matters myself, no doubt the landlord and his lawyer would have taken complete advantage of the situation. The outcome could have been disastrous ... Thanks guys on a job well done!"

-Client quote from letter he wrote to the editor of the Jersey City Reporter about his experience at NNJLS

"Because of my attorney's help in handling my case I no longer have a problem. To my senior-specialty lawyers I appreciate you acknowledging and dealing with people in a professional manner."

- Handwritten note from a 82 year old leukemia survivor client



"I want to thank you and everyone at the office for all your help and everything you have done for us. You helped us tremendously."

- Pro Bono client

Volunteer

NNJLS is looking for private attorneys, law school students, and other volunteers to help further our mission of providing equal access to justice for all.

Email us at VolunteerNNJLS@lsnj.org or call (201) 792-6363.

Donate

To donate, please visit our website: NortheastNJLegalServices.org/getinvolved

Designate NNJLS as your charity:



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for Equal Justice
LEGAL SERVICES CORPORATION



NORTHEAST NEW JERSEY

LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Justice for All

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