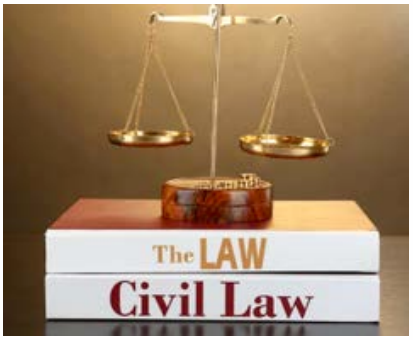
SOUTH CAROLINA
LEGAL SERVICES™
Balancing the Scales of Justice

IMPACT REPORT

2024



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1. Introduction

Who We Are

South Carolina Legal Services is a statewide law firm that provides civil legal services to protect the rights, and represent the interests, of low-income South Carolinians. We have a workforce of 44 attorneys, 26 paralegals, 40 staff members, 5 law school interns, 2 social work interns, as well as multiple volunteers who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of members of our community every day.

What We Do

We provide free civil legal assistance to individuals and families as they navigate issues related to housing, family law, education, health care, employment, public benefits, and more. With support from federal, state, and local sources, SCLS works to ensure full and fair access to justice, empowering communities through advocacy, education, and direct representation.

SCLS serves all 46 counties in South Carolina, partnering with community organizations, hospitals, and government entities to reach people where they are. By building collaborative networks and providing critical legal support, SCLS helps close service gaps and ensures more South Carolinians have the tools and representation they need to protect their rights and strengthen their futures.

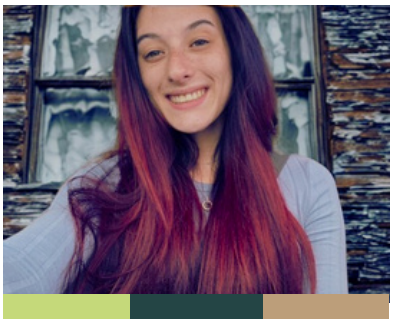
In 2024, our work impacted **21,294** individuals across the state.

Why We Do It

Although Americans have a right to a lawyer when accused of a crime, they do not have a right to a lawyer when facing civil issues. Not having legal counsel can negatively affect the outcomes of civil court cases and negatively impact the lives of those most underserved people in South Carolina. SCLS provides free legal aid to people who cannot afford an attorney in these matters. The need is growing; the gap in access to justice is widening in South Carolina. More than 35% of South Carolinians (approximately 1.7 million people) live below 200% of the federal poverty guideline, making them eligible for subsidized legal assistance. A shortage of private attorneys in rural parts of the state, combined with the cost of legal help and lack of awareness about rights and resources, makes what we do a crucial part of the system we all live within.

We Do it For People Like Audra

When Audra signed a lease for what was supposed to be a safe, single-family rental home in Greenville, South Carolina, she hoped it would be a fresh start for her and her family. What she encountered instead was a nightmare: a house so dilapidated and unsafe it was condemned by Greenville County authorities 19 days after she signed the lease.



A Code Enforcement officer posted a stark warning on the front door, “UNFIT, UNSAFE, UNLAWFUL.” The house had structural flaws, electrical hazards, water supply issues, and a leaking roof. Unable to live in the house she rented, she asked the landlord just to return her prepaid rent and security deposit. But the landlord refused, leaving her without shelter, out $1,590 dollars, and nowhere to turn.

Audra was able to find her advocate in South Carolina Legal Services. SCLS Deputy Director of Litigation and Training Mark Fessler, seasoned in housing law and committed to justice, stepped in to fight for Audra’s dignity, her rights, and her future. The legal battle that followed would test the limits of landlord accountability and reaffirm the powerful role of civil legal aid.

The facts were clear: her landlord had leased her a home unfit for human habitation, then refused to return her prepaid rent and security deposit. Worse still, the lease was crafted to unfairly push maintenance responsibilities, legally required of landlords, onto tenants. When Audra approached her landlord, he brushed her off: “That’s why our lease says y’all were willing to keep the place up. Read it!”

SCLS knew this wasn’t just wrong, it was illegal. Backed by thorough evidence, strong advocacy, and the protections of South Carolina’s Residential Landlord and Tenant Act, SCLS secured summary judgment in Audra’s favor. The court found that the landlord violated the Act by renting an uninhabitable house willfully and in bad faith, and also by refusing to return Audra’s prepaid rent and security deposit after she notified him that she was terminating the lease because the house was unlivable.

The court awarded Audra treble damages under two statutes. The landlord appealed. The South Carolina Court of Appeals not only affirmed the lower court's decision, but also awarded additional attorney's fees.

The final result? Audra was awarded $24,085.92, including more than $19,000 in legal fees recovered by SCLS to support its ongoing mission. The ruling sent a clear message: landlords must be held accountable, and tenants have rights—especially those without the means to pay for private legal counsel.

Audra's story is more than a legal victory. It is a testament to the life-changing power of legal aid. Thanks to SCLS, a landlord was held responsible, and a vulnerable tenant was empowered, vindicated, and made whole.

In a system too often weighted against the poor, SCLS leveled the playing field, and reminded us all that justice should not depend on a person's wealth or socioeconomic status. At SCLS, every story is a reminder of what access to justice can mean: stability, safety, dignity, and a second chance. We are proud to walk alongside our clients as they face life's most difficult challenges and fight for their rights.

2024 Was A Year of Change

Our biggest change in 2024 was the addition of Shunna Vance Jeter as Executive Director. Shunna came on board to succeed long-time Executive Director Andrea Loney upon her retirement. Shunna came to SCLS from GLEAMNS Human Resources Commission and has hit the ground running. A graduate of the Joseph F. Rice School of Law at the University of South Carolina, Shunna is using her background as a lawyer, as well as a seasoned nonprofit leader, to implement creative new ideas that build on SCLS's existing programs, expand SCLS's impact, and continue to foster strong community relationships.

Shunna's boundless energy, contagious enthusiasm, leadership, strategy, and oversight across all areas of SCLS operations, including long-term strategic planning, compliance and financial stewardship, has already changed the face of the organization.

Also, in 2024, we significantly expanded our collaborative relationships with South Carolina's diverse range of communities. We enhanced our presence throughout the Upstate, Midlands and Low Country as we fostered relationships with more community partners, as well as local and state leadership. In addition to our physical presence, we rolled out a fresh new brand to help enhance our recognition value, bolster our digital reach, and support our continuing effort to connect in-person and online with individuals, families, supporters, volunteers and donors.

OUR MISSION

South Carolina Legal Services is a statewide law firm that provides civil legal services to protect the rights, and represent the interests, of low-income South Carolinians.

A Message from the Executive Director

2024 marked both a milestone and a new chapter, not just in my own journey, but for South Carolina Legal Services as we continue to stand at the forefront of access to justice. As I reflect on my first year with this extraordinary team, I'm filled with gratitude, hope, and a renewed commitment to our shared mission.

This Impact Report reflects a year of transition. For the first half of 2024, South Carolina Legal Services was led with wisdom, dedication, and steady vision by our longtime Executive Director, Andrea Loney, whose leadership built the foundation upon which we now continue to grow. I am grateful for the path that has been laid and honored to carry this work forward alongside such a passionate team.

At South Carolina Legal Services, we believe access to justice should not depend on where you live or how much you earn. Access to justice belongs to everyone. This past year, we doubled down on delivering not just legal assistance, but meaningful, transformative support. From safeguarding families facing eviction to defending survivors of domestic violence, our work was more than courtroom victories, it was about ensuring dignity, stability, and peace of mind for our neighbors. With every case closed and every client empowered, we reaffirmed a simple truth: justice must be accessible to all.

But our impact extends well beyond legal outcomes. Together, we forged stronger community partnerships, rallied volunteers and pro bono attorneys, and deepened our efforts to reach rural and underserved corners of South Carolina.

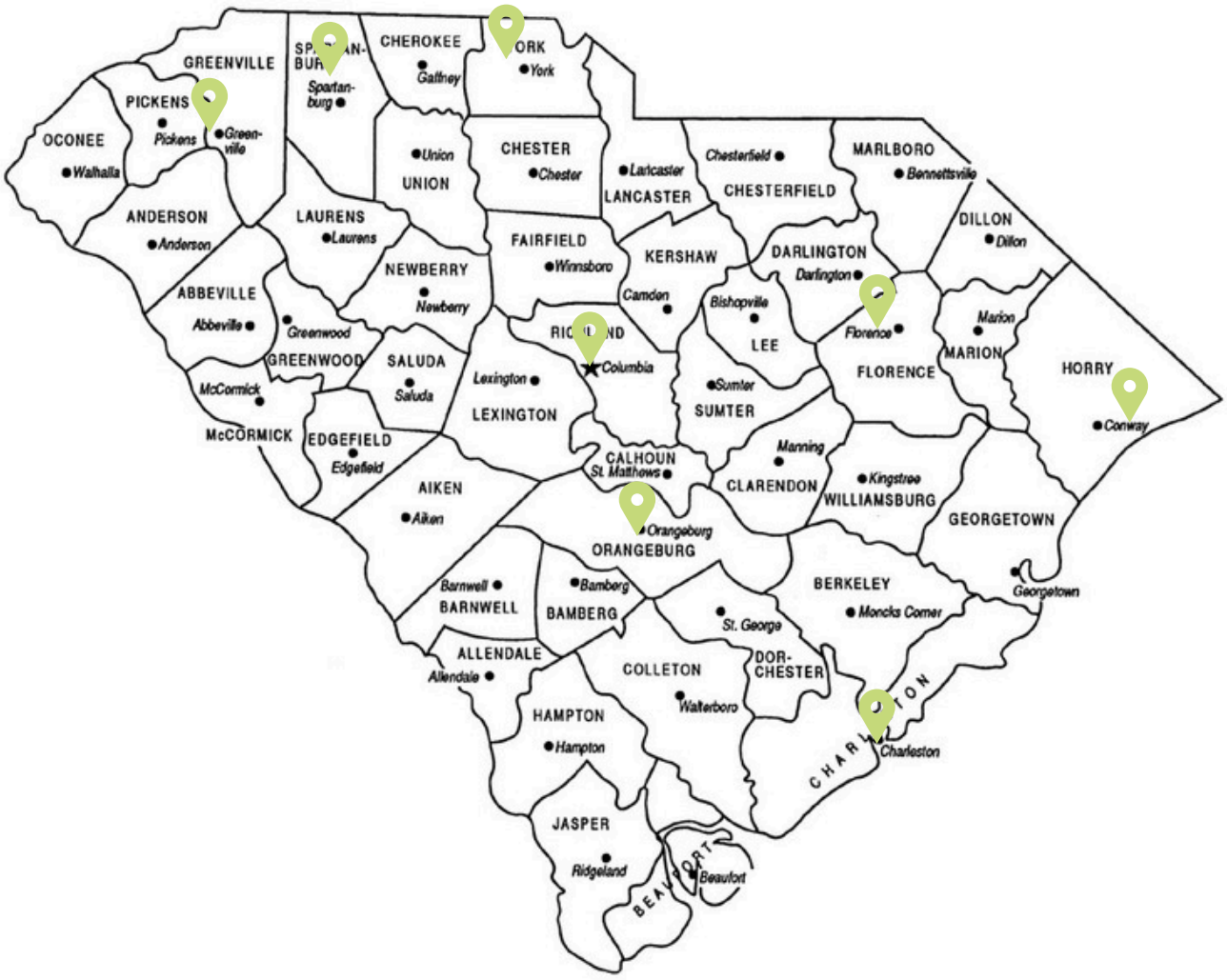
The efforts of our staff, Board of Directors, collaborators, and volunteers made all of this possible. It's clear that as legal aid providers, we stand not only as advocates but also as listeners, educators, and agents of systemic change. Guided by our principal values, we will continue to innovate, adapt, and expand our reach.

Looking ahead to the future, our commitment is to build on this foundation: to grow our impact, to strengthen the equity of our services, and to deepen our collaboration with community stakeholders so that our clients' voices are not just heard, but amplified.

To our remarkable staff, devoted Board of Directors, fierce volunteers, generous funders, and resilient clients, we say thank you. This is your work. Your courage and compassion light our way.

Shunna Vance Jeter

STATEWIDE REACH



EIGHT LOCATIONS

Charleston
Columbia
Conway
Florence
Greenville
Orangeburg
Rock Hill
Spartanburg

2. By the Numbers

Annual Income Level for Eligibility

Individual	Family of 4
$18,825	$39,000

Income eligibility thresholds are 125% of the 2024 Federal Poverty Guidelines set by the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services.

Estimate of Eligible Population

Eligible Population	Percent Eligible
904,375	17.3%

Populations with household incomes below 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (based on 2023 data). One-year American Community Survey estimates were provided to Legal Services Corporation by the U.S. Census Bureau.

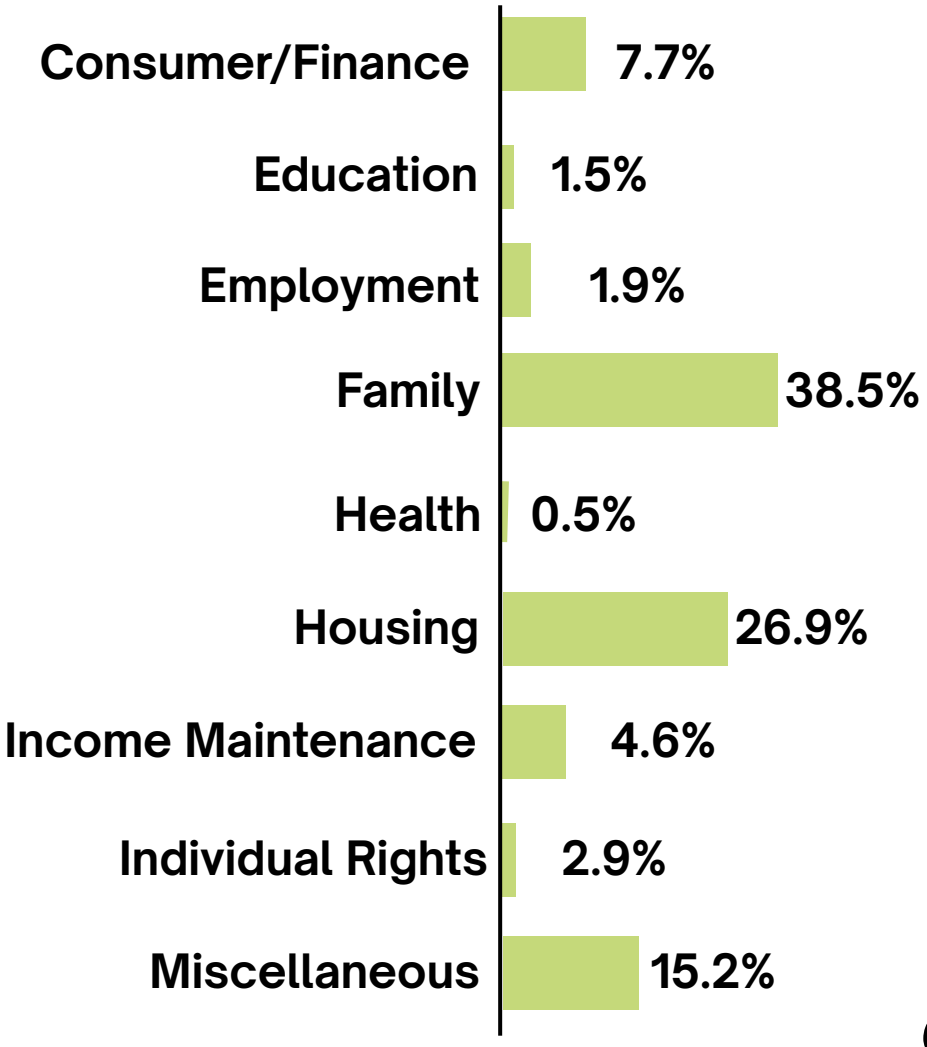
People Served in Closed Cases

Adults Served	11,695
Children Served	9,599
Total Persons Served	21,294

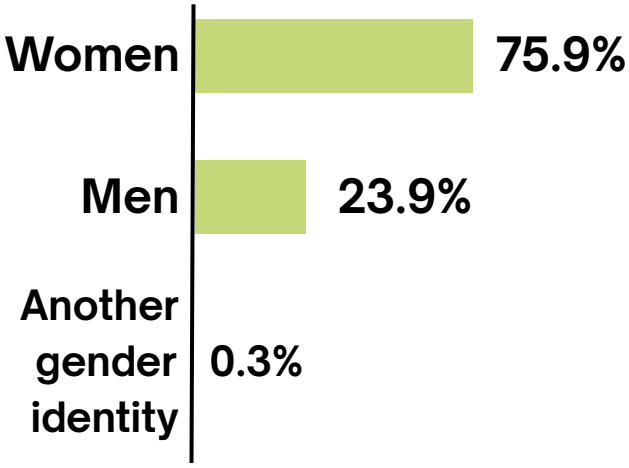
Special Populations Served

Cases Involving Seniors	**2,301** Age 60 and over
Veterans	**476** Households with veterans
Cases Involving Domestic Violence	**1,185** Cases closed in which domestic violence was a factor

Total Cases Closed by Problem Category, 2024



Client Gender



Outreach Efforts

Legal Education or Legal Information Provided to Clients

Number of Group Presentations or Events

In Person	Virtual
564	23

Number of People Served in Group Presentations or Events

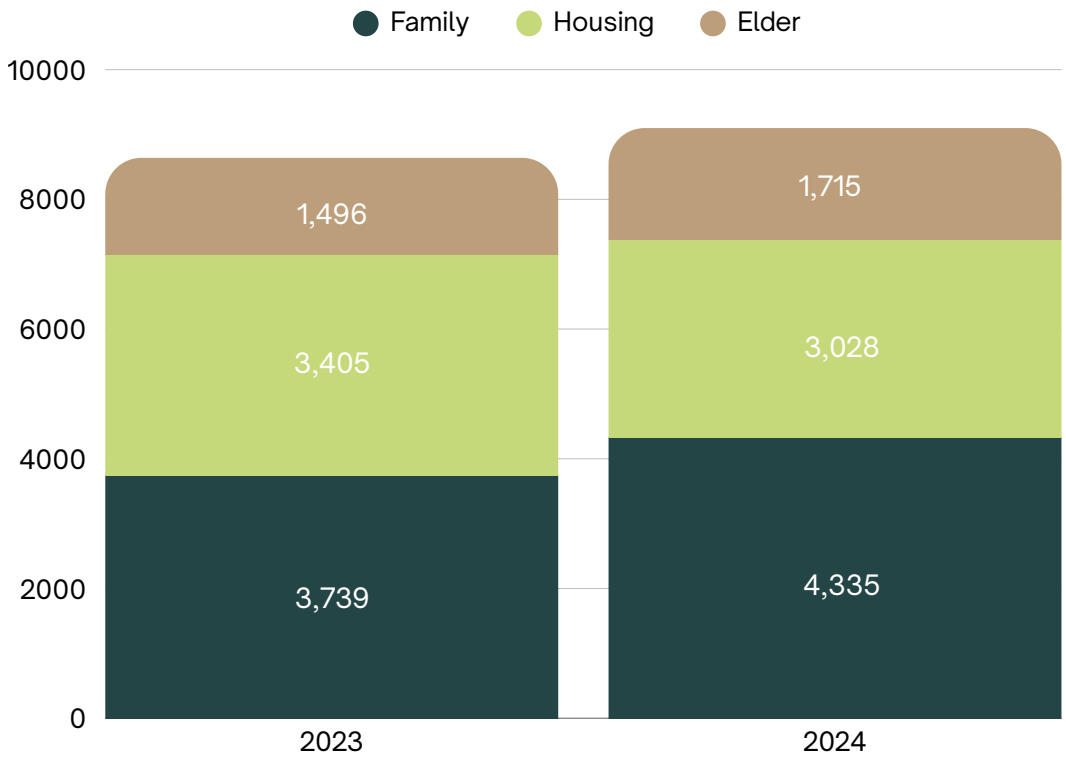
In Person	Virtual
52,523	681

Outreach Events Provided to Professionals

Number of Events Focused on Professionals, Partner Organizations, Social Services Agencies, Bar Groups, Etc.

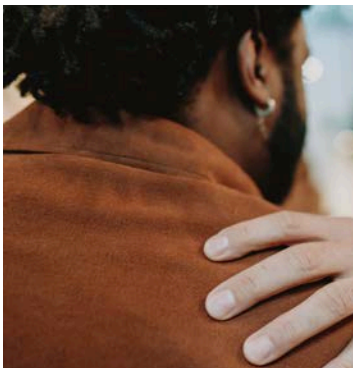
In Person	Virtual
371	74

In 2024, South Carolina Legal Services closed 11,250 cases, serving thousands of individuals and families across the state. Our top areas of assistance—family law, housing, and elder law, reflect the essential role civil legal aid plays in protecting stability and security. In 2024, our caseload increased over 2023 by 7%. This underscores the growing need for accessible legal services in South Carolina. Our work impacted 21,294 individuals across the state.



Number of individuals and families served

21,294



Total Cases Closed

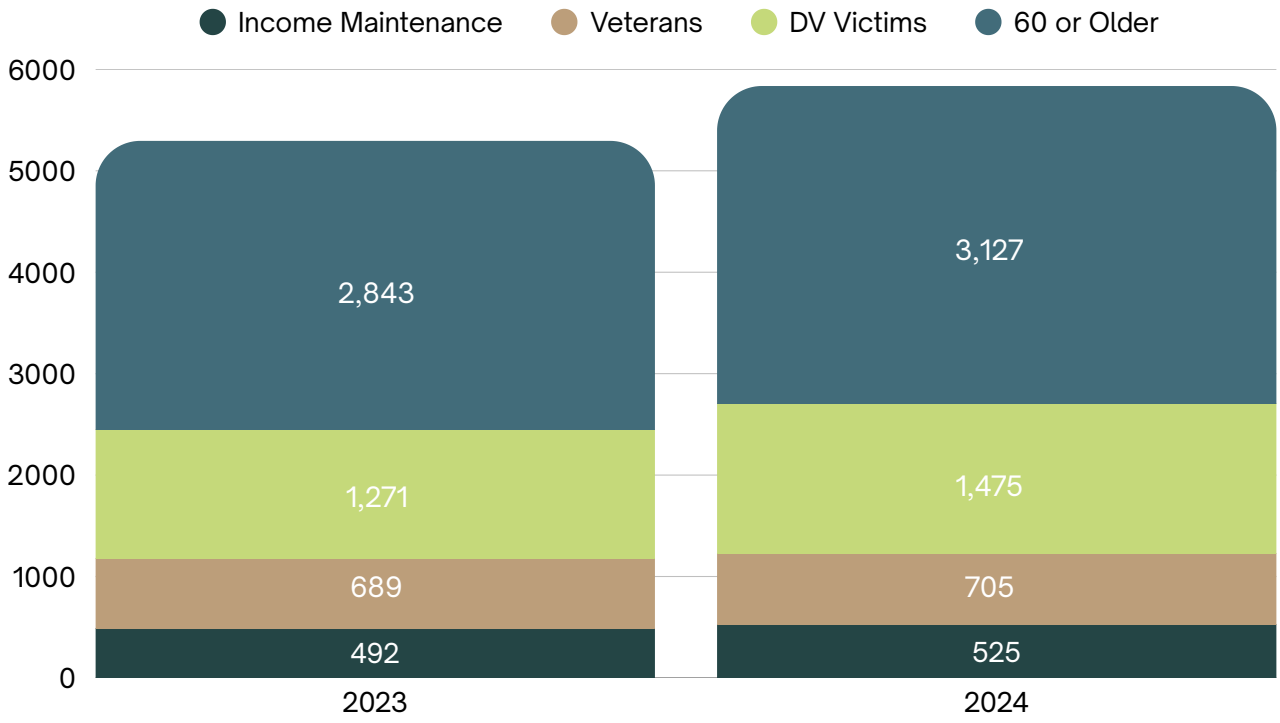
11,250

Top 3 Areas of Law

Family	4,335 cases
Housing	3,048 cases
Elder	2,301 cases

Special Populations

While overall, cases grew by 7%, support for key populations increased even more in 2024. We saw a 16% increase in intake for domestic violence survivors, a 10% rise in cases from individuals age 60 and older, and steady growth in assistance for veterans and clients with income maintenance issues. These shifts underscore the rising need from vulnerable sectors of our community.



↑16%

Rise in domestic violence survivor clients from 2023 to 2024

Core Areas of Law

1. Consumer/Finance
2. Domestic Violence
3. Education
4. Elder Law ✳
5. Employment
6. Family ✳
7. Farmworkers
8. Health
9. Housing ✳
10. Income Maintenance/Public Benefits
11. Tax

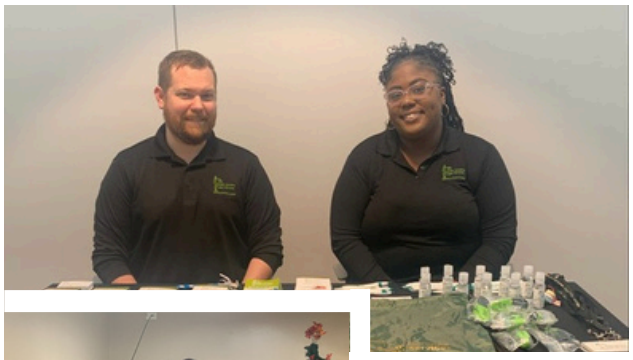
✳ Top Three by Volume

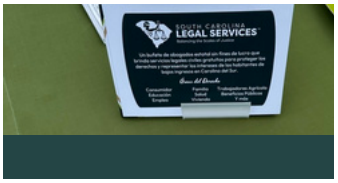
3. Impact In Focus

Beyond casework, South Carolina Legal Services creates change through proactive outreach and targeted programs in traditionally underserved communities. From legal clinics and educational presentations to specialized initiatives like our Medical-Legal Partnership, Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, and Farmworker Unit, we put boots on the ground to address the root causes of legal issues and connect people with the tools they need to protect their rights and improve their lives.

Community Outreach & Education

Outreach is a vital part of our mission to connect people with legal representation. Our attorneys and staff regularly host free legal clinics and educational presentations on topics like housing, family law, consumer rights, and access to benefits. We also participate in community partner events across the state, such as health fairs and resource drives. We organize neighborhood gatherings to answer questions, share resources, and raise awareness about our services. Whether in a classroom, a church hall, or a community center, we meet people where they are.





Disaster Relief

In 2024, SCLS partnered with the South Carolina Bar to provide disaster-related legal services training to attorneys from around the state. After Hurricane Helene struck South Carolina and devastated communities rarely affected by such storms, SCLS hit the ground running. We distributed information about disaster legal services at feeding sites across the 28 counties that were declared disaster areas. SCLS also participated in Governor McMaster's SC County Days, along with state and federal agencies and other emergency service providers. The County Days events served as one-stop shops for South Carolinians affected by the hurricane and provided the forum to deliver much-needed assistance.

SCLS has always had a presence at FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers, and this hurricane was no exception. SCLS provided staff and materials at the DRCs across the affected counties to ensure affected South Carolinians knew where to turn for legal assistance with housing, insurance, FEMA, public benefits, and other legal issues. As a result, SCLS has forged a critical partnership with the South Carolina Office of Resilience (SCOR), the state agency primarily responsible for long-term disaster recovery. SCLS serves as an important referral source for SCOR's disaster case managers who continue to work with survivors of Hurricane Helene to get their lives back in order. SCLS considers its role in disaster recovery one of its critical missions and will continue to be at the forefront of disaster preparedness and recovery.

> “The process is long, but with SCLS’ support, I feel calmer. My anxiety is gone. I feel like SCLS has got me”
>
> *— Hurricane Helene Survivor*

4. Special Programs

In addition to providing broad civil legal assistance, South Carolina Legal Services offers specialized programs designed to meet certain specific community needs. These specialized programs allow us to tailor services to meet the full range of needs of South Carolinians across the state. Through our Medical-Legal Partnership, Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic, and Farmworker Unit, we reach vulnerable populations where they are, addressing critical legal issues that impact health, financial stability, and workplace rights. These programs extend our mission beyond the traditional legal setting, helping clients overcome barriers and build stronger futures.

Medical Legal Partnership

Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

Farmworker Unit

Medical-Legal Partnership

Through our Medical-Legal Partnership, SCLS embeds legal advocates directly into healthcare settings to help patients address civil legal issues that negatively affect their health, like unsafe housing, denial of benefits, or domestic violence. This partnership empowers healthcare providers to identify legal barriers to care and connect patients with timely legal assistance that can support recovery and long-term stability. In 2024, the MLP program continued to grow, expanding our reach through new clinics and strengthening partnerships across the state to serve more South Carolinians at the intersection of health and justice.

Furman University's Institute for the Advancement of Community Health is a critical hub of SCLS' MLP. Furman formally connects **Prisma Health Upstate** and SCLS to improve health outcomes for pediatric and geriatric populations throughout the Upstate, especially those living in poverty.

This partnership is the first of its kind in South Carolina and coordinates streamlined access to non-medical assistance when a medical problem has roots in, or is made worse by, a social or legal problem. Currently, this MLP is the only program in the country where the educational institution involved is a liberal arts undergraduate institution. We partner with the Health Sciences Center at Prisma Health, which is a partnership that includes **Clemson University**, Furman University, and the **University of South Carolina.**

In the Low Country, SCLS partners with the **Medical University of South Carolina** to help train medical staff to spot legal issues which may be contributing to health issues. Identifying these legal issues and working to resolve them ultimately improves the overall health of patients and can reduce costs by eliminating preventable health problems.

SCLS is in its second year of a partnership with the **Department of Veteran's Affairs Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Care System.** SCLS attorneys and support staff go to the VA's outpatient facility to meet with veterans on a monthly basis. At the clinic, veterans and their family members are given information and tools to address issues of care planning, homelessness, benefits, and barriers to employment. Through the clinic, SCLS works with VA employees to increase awareness and recognize signs of potential legal issues that may be affecting patients. This ultimately leads to better health and decreased visits to VA medical centers.

By leveraging the expertise of each partner, the entire team is better equipped to identify and address health harming civil legal barriers before they worsen a patient's condition. This innovative program is firmly committed to achieving health equity and justice for a vulnerable sector of our society.

"The MLP is invaluable to me, enhancing my ability to provide holistic care for patients. Integrating legal professionals into the healthcare team helps address health harming civil legal needs that directly impact a patient's well-being and health outcomes. This collaboration reduces stress, improves patient outcomes, and strengthens the physician-patient relationship. It's a powerful example of how interdisciplinary teamwork can create a profound impact on both individual patients and the broader community."

— Prisma Doctor

Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic

Our Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic provides critical assistance to individuals facing tax-related challenges, including IRS disputes, audits, identity theft, and denial of credits like the Earned Income Tax Credit. For clients who may otherwise have no representation, the LITC offers a lifeline, helping to resolve tax problems, prevent financial instability, and ensure fair treatment under the law.

While SCLS does not prepare tax returns, our clinic helps clients understand their rights and responsibilities, navigate complex systems, and advocate for equitable outcomes. In 2024, the LITC continued to serve clients statewide, offering free legal representation, education, and outreach to ensure low-income taxpayers have a voice when it matters most. In one 2024 case, SCLS was able to help a client convert what would have been a crushing tax bill of $18,000 to a $7,000 refund.

> “I am not sure how to say thank you for all the help you have given me. You stuck with me through the ups and downs. Unlike many, you were there with me to the end. Please stay in touch some way.”
>
> — *LITC Client*

Farmworker Unit

South Carolina's agricultural workers are vital to the state's economy, yet many face unsafe working conditions, wage theft, discrimination, and limited access to legal resources. The SCLS Farmworker Unit serves to protect and advocate for the rights of migrant and seasonal farmworkers, ensuring that issues like language barriers and geographic isolation do not prevent them from receiving legal help.

Our team conducts outreach in rural areas across the state. We meet with workers on site at labor camps and farms. We educate workers about their rights, help them recover unpaid wages, address unsafe housing and labor practices, and assist in cases involving harassment or retaliation. Many of these workers face unique legal challenges and are unaware of the protections they are entitled to under the law. Our Farmworker Unit acts not just as legal representatives, but as trusted advocates.

In 2024, the Farmworker Unit continued to build trust in the communities we serve, working evenings and weekends to reach workers after long days in the fields. With support from statewide partnerships and dedicated staff, the unit plays a critical role in closing the justice gap for one of South Carolina's often overlooked populations.

5. Cooperative Outreach

"SCLS is a very friendly and courteous group of legal professionals. Everyone who Marion County Branch NAACP has contacted for help has responded to our organization with 10+ ratings. Thank you for your high standards within our communities."

— Marion County Branch, NAACP

"We are pleased to partner with SCLS to help our patients gain access to an often-overlooked service component. Quality of life barriers impact medical care, and it's been fulfilling to connect patients with your services. SCLS covers such a wide variety of issues for people and families, and we feel so fortunate to have you as a valuable resource."

— MUSC Ryan White Clinic

"SCLS is an outstanding partner that is committed to making a positive impact in our community. Not only do they provide a monthly legal clinic at our site, but they also generously support our program efforts through donation drives and even volunteering at our events. Additionally, they participate in our Roundtable Alliance meetings as we collaborate to create solutions to identified gaps in services for the unhoused."

— Neighbors Together

"Partnering with SCLS over the years has been very beneficial to the individuals and families we serve. Most of the families we serve are not familiar with how SCLS can benefit them. Having a good understanding and relationship with our local SCLS office helps our families when they need legal services."

— Lighthouse For Life

6. More From Our Clients

James' Story

When James received eviction papers, he was confused and afraid. He had paid his rent on time every month and couldn't understand why his landlord wanted him out. James has a severe intellectual disability and was unable to understand the process or how to resolve the issue.

James had simply asked for basic repairs to make his home livable. But instead of fixing the issues, the landlord retaliated, sending a notice to vacate.

Then things got worse. Days after receiving the notice, James came home to find that his water and electricity had been shut off. No lights. No running water. No way to cook, bathe, or stay warm. It was a terrifying situation for anyone, but for James, who lives with a severe disability, it was nearly impossible to navigate alone.

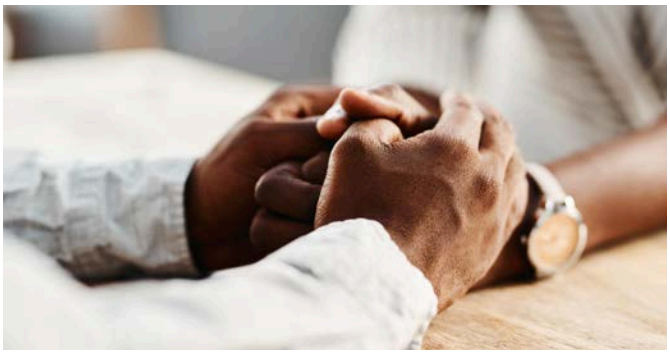
He had no idea what his rights were, or where to turn for help. That's when SCLS stepped in. Our team met James in his darkest moment and listened to his story. It was clear this wasn't just an eviction. It was unlawful. The landlord had taken matters into his own hands, hoping James would be too vulnerable to fight back.

But James found SCLS and he was no longer alone. We represented him in court and raised a counterclaim for the illegal shutoff of his utilities. The judge agreed and ordered immediate restoration of water and power to his home and further ordered a dismissal of the eviction.

Thanks to this legal victory, James was able to remain in his home for three more months rent-free. The result gave him precious time to plan his next steps safely and with dignity. James' story reminds us that a house is more than just shelter—it's a lifeline. And for our most vulnerable neighbors, access to justice can mean the difference between crisis and stability.

At South Carolina Legal Services, we fight for people like James every day. Because no one should lose their home simply for asking to live in it safely.

Client Quotes



"I appreciate your support. You are real with your words. Some people I wouldn't trust talking to, but I trust you. You are real, sincere, and honest."

"SCLS did such an amazing job helping me to secure my birth certificate. The knowledge and dedication you brought to my correcting and obtaining my birth documents was remarkable."

"I want to express my gratitude for assisting my brother with a mental disability in obtaining an ID card. I've been trying to accomplish this since 2013. After contacting SCLS, we were at the DMV within days. Thank you very much for your service!"

"Thank you for everything you do to help people like us. You are truly appreciated. God bless you always."

7. Get Involved

Are you looking for a rewarding experience? Want to give back to the profession and your community? There are many ways to contribute to SCLS—financially, with time, and/or resources. Attorneys who volunteer get training, pro bono credit, compensation and, more importantly, personal fulfillment. Our programs serve the underserved across all walks of life throughout the state. We'd love you to come and stand with us and our clients and community partners as we work to ensure that fairness, dignity, and justice are realities for all South Carolinians. It will the most satisfying thing you do!

Donate

Invest in justice. Donate resources, or financially online at SCLS at sclegal.org/donate

Become a PAI Attorney

Lend your skills as a volunteer pro bono attorney. Expand our reach. Learn about the PAI Program at sclegal.org/PAI

Partner with Us

Let's combine resources to better serve those in need. Learn how to connect with us by emailing Betsy Goodale at betsygoodale@sclegal.org

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sclegal.org

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