



WE BELIEVE IN  
**JUSTICE**  
**FOR ALL**

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) Colleagues and Friends,



One more year has come and gone and the “justice gap” – the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs - has grown wider.

When we say the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance we repeat the phrase “with liberty and justice for all”, which represents the idea that justice should be accessible to everyone. There is a right to legal assistance in criminal cases, but no such right exists in civil matters, and most low-income Americans are forced to go it alone without legal representation.

The most recent Legal Services Corporation Justice Gap Report shows:

- In the past year, 86% of the civil legal problems reported by low-income Americans received inadequate or no legal help.
- 71% of low-income households experienced at least one civil legal problem in the last year, including problems with health care, housing conditions, disability access, veterans’ benefits, and domestic violence.
- In 2017, low-income Americans will approach SEOLS and other LSC – funded legal aid organizations for support with an estimated 1.7 million problems. They will receive only limited or no legal help for more than half of these problems due to a lack of resources.

SEOLS has planned and worked strategically to develop ways to reach more people and to serve them more effectively. We are addressing social and environmental factors that keep people sick through medical-legal partnerships – partnerships with health centers, substance abuse treatment centers and university-operated medical clinics. Our attorneys are working with community leaders, community action agencies, child care centers and schools to help revitalize long-neglected communities, increase access to jobs and make sure that children have the help they need for school success.

We continue to explore the use of technology as another way to make justice more accessible to more people. With grant assistance from the Ohio State Bar Foundation and other funding sources, self-help kiosks are operational in several SEOLS counties and our attorneys are developing software systems that will enhance communication with the courts, and that can be used by legal aid organizations statewide.

SEOLS has diversified funding streams to give us more resources to target legal assistance to senior citizens, veterans, the disabled, the homeless, the abused and neglected, and others who rely on legal aid in times of crisis, and we will continue to develop innovative ways to fund work that will help to bridge the justice gap.

We appreciate the support that comes from all of you. Our volunteers, our donors, our community partners and all the people who work with us to help low-income families access justice and support them on their journey toward economic stability.

I have been committed to supporting legal aid for many years and I will continue that commitment and support in years to come. We can all help shrink the justice gap and help legal aid by spreading the word about legal aid’s vital role in the community, becoming a volunteer and sharing your resources to help us increase the availability of legal help in all our communities.

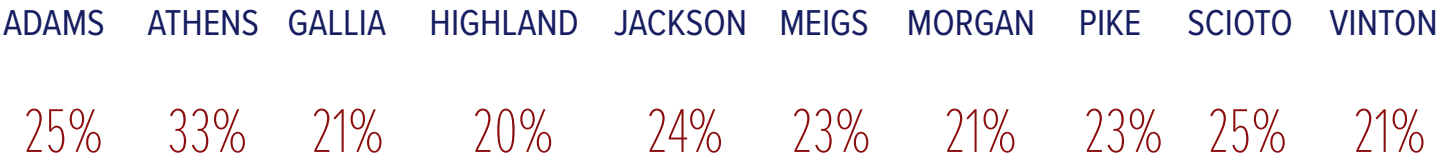
Civil legal aid does indeed increase the quality of life for our clients, for their families, for all of us and for the communities in which we live.

Best regards,  
Thomas J. Bonasera  
Ohio State Legal Services Association Board Chair

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE SHOULD NOT DEPEND ON INCOME

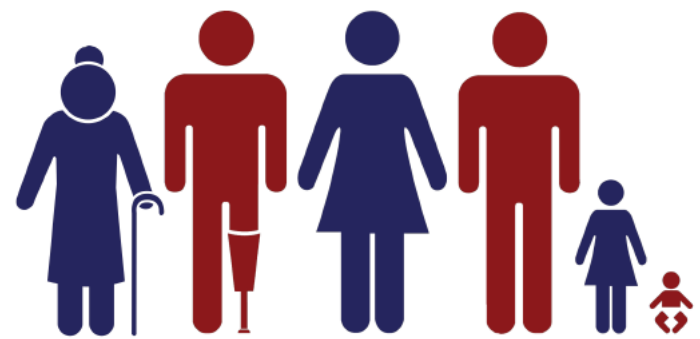
Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS) is the voice of civil legal justice for thousands of low-income families, senior citizens, children, veterans, and the abused and disabled in our 30-county service area. SEOLS’ mission is to ensure equal access to justice for our clients through advocacy, education, and empowerment. Civil legal aid assures fairness for all in the justice system, without regard for how much money a person has.

SEOLS’ clients are among Ohio’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. Low-income families and individuals often face legal issues that need to be resolved in order to protect their livelihood. Ohioans who earn less than 125% of the federal poverty level financially qualify for free civil legal aid. Ten of twelve Ohio counties with the highest poverty rates in the state are served by SEOLS.

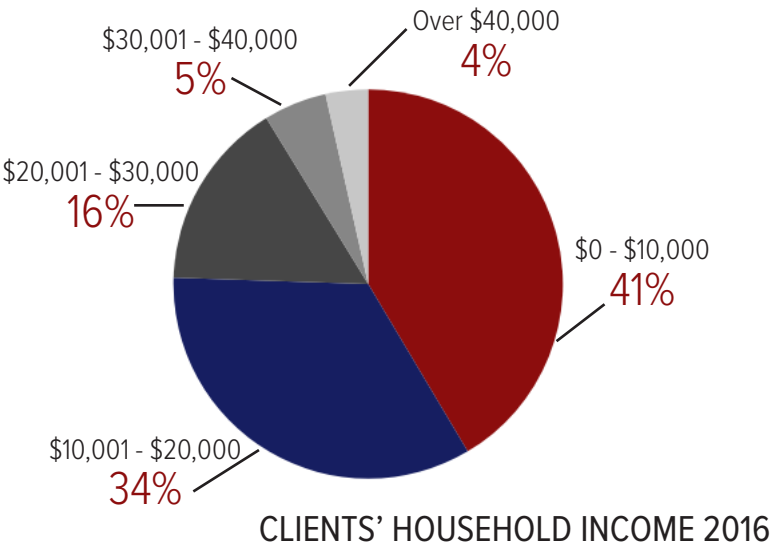


Poverty rates in our service area from The Ohio Poverty Report, Ohio Development Services

## OUR CLIENTS



4,452 CLIENTS SERVED IN 2016



# A VOICE OF JUSTICE FOR THOSE IN NEED

In 2016, SEOLS focused on strengthening our community partnerships, re-evaluating and re-shaping common practices, and ensuring that children, families, and individuals have equal access to justice under the law. By providing free civil legal aid to our most impoverished communities, we help low-income Ohioans remove barriers to success and protect their livelihoods.

## SUPPORTING THE FIGHT AGAINST THE OPIOID CRISIS

### Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) with The Counseling Center / SEOLS Portsmouth

The SEOLS Portsmouth collaborative with The Counseling Center is one of the first medical-legal partnerships in the country with a focus on helping people struggling to overcome addiction.

Southeast Ohio has been devastated by the opioid crisis. Mental health and substance abuse treatment providers offer a place of hope for addicts who are ready to change their lives, but treatment facilities in our service area are at maximum capacity. In 2016, the SEOLS Portsmouth MLP served 139 clients who were in various stages of treatment. Clients came to The Counseling Center from counties all over Ohio. In addition to providing direct legal services for people in Scioto, Lawrence, and Adams counties, SEOLS Portsmouth helped many people connect to legal and other services in their home county outside the service area. By removing legal barriers to jobs, education, and housing, clients are more likely to complete treatment, sustain their recovery, and become productive members of society.

## MAKING SURE CHILDREN GET THE HELP THEY NEED FOR SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

### Children's Legal Assistance Program (CLAP) / SEOLS Newark

The Children's Legal Assistance Project (CLAP) helps families navigate the complicated process of getting services for children with special needs. All children are entitled to the services they need to help them learn. The SEOLS Newark project works with the family and the school to identify needed services - including testing, Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and other classroom assistance, and continues to work to ensure that each child receives the help they need to be successful.

Our attorneys listen to a family's concerns and offer legal guidance, working with the family and the school to get the best result for the child. Through this process, our attorneys empower the family to speak for the rights of the child while also helping the schools to understand their responsibility and how fulfilling that responsibility will improve the child's ability to function well in school.

Our goal through this project is to improve each child's chances for reaching their true potential. That means in addition to making sure they get the help they need for success in school, we make sure the family gets the legal help needed to have a safe place to live, resources for food and medical care, and help to get over any legal hurdles that might stand in the way of opportunity.



*Mary\* reached out to SEOLS for assistance with her son Andrew\* educational experience. Andrew is six-years-old and Autistic, with sensory and speech issues. Despite recommendations from doctors that Andrew receive at least an hour of speech therapy each week, his elementary school was only providing 15 minutes under his IEP. His inadequately addressed speech issues were inhibiting both Andrew's socialization and his educational progress. His struggles at school were further impacting his self-esteem and his mood, making him difficult at home and with his younger sister. Mary asked SEOLS attorney Sarah Wiley for assistance in getting Andrew the help he needed. Sarah sent a letter to the school detailing the issue and requesting a meeting. The school then gave Mary a meeting during the*

*first week of the new school year in August. Sarah and Mary laid out their concerns to the IEP team, which ultimately agreed to give Andrew the recommended hour of speech therapy each week. This change should help first grade go more smoothly than kindergarten, and enable Andrew, a bright boy, to succeed and thrive in his education, and go on to be a contributing member of the community. It also will allow Mary to put more focus on her job and her daughter, making the family more stable and less likely to need further social services. \*Names are fictitious.*



# KEEPING LOW-INCOME FAMILIES SAFE

## Domestic Violence Screening Tool / SEOLS Athens

Athens Staff Attorney Charles Cohara and New Philadelphia Managing Attorney Mike Harrington have created a screening tool that is now being used by intake specialists in 36 counties to properly assess the extensive and often complicated needs of domestic violence survivors.

The Domestic Violence Screening Tool allows legal aid attorneys to better serve their clients who are separating from their abuser. As you can imagine, it can be overwhelming and difficult to leave any relationship but that is especially true for low-income couples and families. Most of our clients are one unexpected expense away from homelessness and total financial collapse. This creates a unique set of barriers for low-income survivors of domestic violence, leaving them with a financial road block to their path to freedom.

With the use of this tool, attorneys are able to take a holistic approach to legal aid. Walking a client through a series of questions supports them in disclosing as much information as possible. This helps our clients provide information that they think is unimportant, and it helps our attorneys connect them to community resources to help their transition to safety and a better life.



*Ms. B contacted the SEOLS Athens office for help getting a domestic violence protection order against the father of her child. We discovered that Ms. B. already had a protection order issued from another state that should still be in effect. However, we also used a screening tool with her to pick up on issues that might be hurting her even though she had left her abuser and had a protection order. We found that even though she and her child had not resided with the abuser for several years; however, he had been claiming the child on his taxes and keeping the return. Ms. B. believed that there was nothing she could do about it because when she tried to file her taxes electronically, her child's social security number was blocked as already claimed. We advised her that she could file a paper return and amend up to three previous years. We prepared Ms. B. that this action would*

*trigger an audit, but it is one she would certainly win. With this information discovered in the screening tool, she was able to amend her previous returns and receive thousands of dollars that she was not expecting for her and her child.*

# LEGAL AID TECH

## Self-Help Kiosks

SEOLS has self-help kiosks available for the public to use in Marietta, Fairfield, Hocking, Marion, and Union Counties. The kiosks include a variety of domestic forms including dissolution, divorce, custody, and contempt. In the near future, the kiosks will also include access to Ohio's newest, most comprehensive online legal aid resource center, [www.ohiolegalhelp.org](http://www.ohiolegalhelp.org). The online resources provide access to record sealing assistance and more extensive options for individuals who are representing themselves.

## Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA) App

With funding provided by Legal Services Corporation, the staff at Ohio State Legal Services Association (OSLSA) were able to build a mobile app for Ohio legal aid attorneys for both Android and iPhones. The app can be used by legal aid professionals, pro bono attorneys, and even social service agencies who serve low-income Ohioans.

This tool has been especially useful in our rural counties where access to the internet is limited or non-existent. Using a mobile device, attorneys and service providers can access legal forms, case information, and other data while they are in the field. Included in the app are simple calculators, access to fillable forms, copies of the benefits help sheets, an offline and searchable copy of several rule books, and local resources for SEOLS counties.

# USING CIVIL LEGAL AID TO CREATE BETTER COMMUNITIES

## Community Partnerships

We know that serving an entire community cannot be accomplished by one single organization. SEOLS has developed partnerships with community service providers throughout our 30-county service region. These partnerships are strengthening our interaction with the communities we serve. Our partnerships include service providers and people who are receiving services. This kind of inclusion gives us a chance to hear from people in our communities, ask questions about community needs and build coalitions to help design and implement strategies for community revitalization.

Through our Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) with Muskingum Valley Health Centers, we've helped hundreds of low-income Ohioans resolve social and environmental issues negatively affecting their health – housing, domestic violence, consumer issues, access to resources for food and economic stability. Our partnership with the Licking County Coalition for Housing and other community-based housing coalitions, supported by funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs, has prevented homelessness for many veterans and their families. Through our partnership with Sojourners Care Network, SEOLS gives youth aging out of foster care a voice in the civil justice system. Many of these young people have been wards of the state most of their lives. They need legal help to access medical and school records, remove barriers to getting a driver's license, benefits for education and job training. These partnerships, along with many others with organizations, United Way, Licking County Foundation, and the Corporation for Appalachian Development (COAD), are creating stronger communities in Appalachian Ohio.



## Community Revitalization

SEOLS has recently received multi-year funding from the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation (OLAF) through a nationwide settlement with Bank of America for its role in the mortgage meltdown during the Great Recession. SEOLS will work with the Corporation for Appalachian Development (COAD), its 17-member community action agencies, and parents in their Head Start programs, school systems, and other community-based organizations and advocates.

Working together, we will develop strategies that will improve access to safe and decent housing, employment, education, health care, and transportation. With help from our partners, we will be working with these low-income parents to help them more effectively advocate at the local and state level for resources for their communities, better education for their children and more opportunities for themselves and their families.

In addition, SEOLS, along with COAD and its member agencies, will be working with the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC). NCRC's mission is to work with community leaders, policy makers, and financial institutions to build wealth for people through fairness in banking, housing, and business development. Our work with NCRC has already begun with a series of "listening" meetings with a NCRC representative in Athens, Marietta, New Philadelphia, Portsmouth, and Steubenville attended by area community action agencies and SEOLS attorneys.

Our goal is to work with our community partners to revitalize those communities – encourage investment in safe, affordable housing, entrepreneurship, quality education and employment opportunities.

# SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY

Individual donors help SEOLS to provide more access legal help. As a result, more Ohioans can protect their livelihoods, their health, their homes, and their families. We are thankful for our community donors.

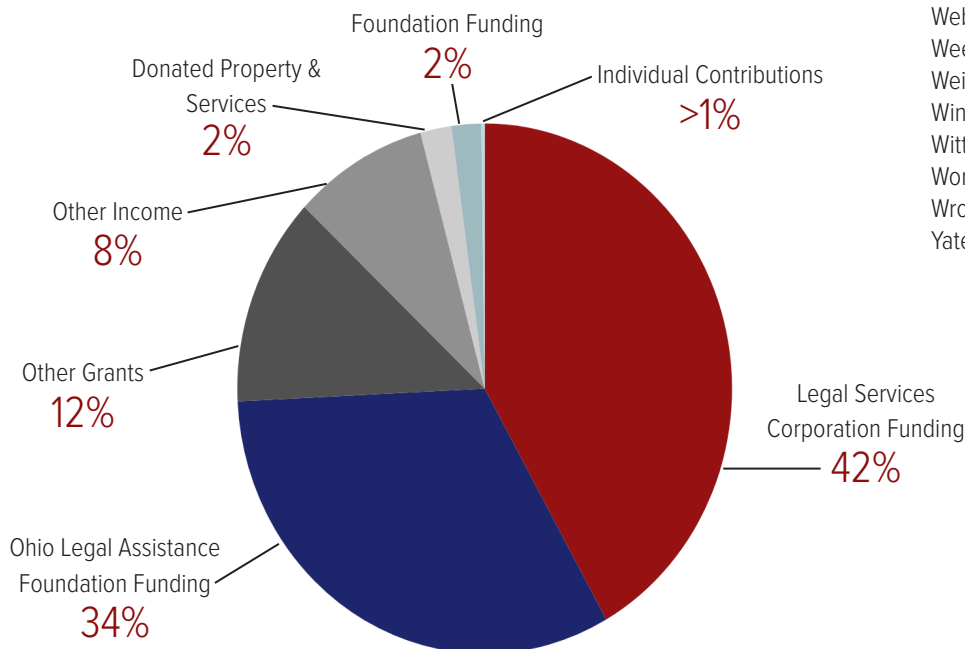
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