

100 Years of Justice

COLORADO LEGAL SERVICES IMPACT REPORT

2024



100TH
ANNIVERSARY

COLORADO LEGAL SERVICES

New look, same high-quality legal aid

Excellent advocacy, empowerment, collaboration, and courage



Colorado Legal Services developed a new logo in 2024 to better represent our work providing free, high-quality, civil legal services to Coloradans with low incomes and seniors.

We hope the new logo will serve as an inspirational symbol of our work. This logo features mountains as well as a cottonwood tree, which can be found throughout our state. The branches and the leaves of the tree show not only our interconnectedness with each other, but also with our clients who, like the leaves on this tree, are many and are able to spread throughout Colorado and hopefully grow through our work. The "C" shape, with the supporting lines evoking a pillar, is a symbol of how we help bolster our fellow Coloradans, often in times of great need.

We also recreated our website from the ground up to help potential clients, community members, volunteers, community partners, and funders easily access information and connect with our offices.

Over 200,000 people visited the website in 2024.



The new logo project and the new Colorado Legal Services website were made possible by a grant from the Kettering Foundation.



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Artwork: The artwork shown on the cover page and throughout this annual report was created by Charlo, a Colorado artist. It includes input from CLS staff and celebrates the organization's 100 years of service. The artwork was made possible by Charlo and the Kettering Foundation.



100 Years of Justice: Serving with excellent advocacy, empowerment, collaboration, and courage

A note from Matt Baca, Executive Director

In 1925, leaders in Colorado created the Legal Aid Society of Denver, observing that people who couldn't afford attorneys were often faced with representing themselves in civil court. That seed of an organization would grow to become Colorado Legal Services and, as you will read in the following pages, would touch the lives of thousands of Coloradans.

Then as today, lack of representation meant low-income people had to argue by themselves in complicated court proceedings, often against attorneys with extensive training and experience. As those of us committed to this work know and see every day, deserving justice does not guarantee its delivery. Being entitled to dignity and a chance to be heard—in a complex and often unforgiving system—does not alone provide it.

The vision of those few concerned souls expanded from a couple people in a Denver office to what is now Colorado's statewide legal aid organization with staff in 13 locations, serving every county in Colorado.

This year, Colorado Legal Services celebrates 100 years of serving Colorado communities, defending low-income people and seniors throughout the state for a full century.

Through all this time, we have provided free legal advice and representation to keep people housed, help people escape domestic violence, stop unfair debt collection, undo bureaucratic public benefits mistakes, protect the rights of trafficking victims, solve tax disputes, fix complicated identification document issues, and protect the rights of farm and agricultural workers. As Carrie Holton, our pro bono and outreach coordinator serving northern Colorado, said last year: **our team is full of problem-solving super heroes serving the underserved in our communities in the great state of Colorado.**

I am eternally grateful for the dedication and hard work of our brilliant and big-hearted team—attorneys, paralegals, social workers operations staff, interns, fellows, volunteers, pro bono attorneys, and others—who show up daily and uphold our core values: excellent advocacy, empowerment, collaboration, and courage.

Onward—adelante—to the next century.

What Is Colorado Legal Services?

We Help for Free

Colorado Legal Services is Colorado's statewide legal aid nonprofit that has served Coloradans in poverty for 100 years, guiding through difficult civil legal matters. We represent Coloradans who meet income and other requirements for free. When someone applies, we go through a checklist with them to see if they qualify for representation and personalized legal advice.

We Represent Coloradans in Civil Court

Because people are not guaranteed an attorney if they can't afford one in civil court (unlike in criminal court where a public defender will be assigned), we fill that need by serving as many Coloradans in poverty and seniors as possible. This means we represent people whose landlords are illegally trying to evict them or aren't keeping their homes up to basic, legal safety and health standards. We go to bat for people who are being pursued by debt collectors for payment for medical services even though their insurance covered those services. We fight for victims of violence to help them keep their kids. We help farmworkers whose employers aren't paying them what they promised or who don't provide workers legally required shelter or food.

We know that civil legal representation helps keep Coloradans housed, fed, and safe. We are committed to providing compassionate legal advocacy for Coloradans in some of life's toughest moments.

Our Practice Areas

Our 12 offices help people facing a variety of legal problems in eight primary areas of work, which include these four core practice areas, as well as four statewide specialty areas discussed in detail on the next page:

Economic Justice

- Debt Collection Defense
- Bankruptcy
- Garnishment
- Repossession

Family Law

- Divorce
- Custody
- Protection Orders

Housing

- Evictions
- Foreclosures
- Landlord/Tenant Issues

Public Benefits

- Social Security
- Medicare
- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)



Statewide Projects

Farm Worker Rights Division

The Farm Worker Rights Division of Colorado Legal Services provides education, advocacy, and legal representation to farm workers throughout Colorado. Based in the Denver office of Colorado Legal Services, the division serves farm workers throughout the state, with an emphasis on Northeastern Colorado, the Arkansas Valley, Southeastern Colorado, the San Luis Valley, and the Western Slope.

The division offers free and confidential services to individuals and families and participates in community education events to provide information about the legal rights of farm workers.

The division assists farm workers with a variety of legal issues related to their work such as unpaid wages, dangerous or abusive working conditions, sexual harassment and other types of discrimination.

Supporting Survivors of Crime

The Survivor Services Unit of Colorado Legal Services helps foreign national survivors of crime, including survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence, apply for victim-based immigration applications. The unit also provides technical assistance and information to the community about these issues and applications.

Low Income Taxpayer Clinic

The Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic resolves disputes with the IRS or Colorado Department of Revenue, and provides education and outreach to low-income taxpayers.

The tax system distributes billions of dollars in poverty-alleviating tax benefits each year.

The Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic defends the right to claim these tax benefits in examinations and audits, and negotiates settlements for outstanding tax debt so people receive these credits.

The clinic also fights tax-related identity theft, especially on behalf of domestic violence survivors whose former spouses or partners unlawfully filed taxes or claimed tax credits on their behalf.

The clinic also provides representation in the United States Tax Court and participates in an advice clinic when the Tax Court is in Denver.

ID Project

The Colorado ID Project is designed to assist low-income, disabled, homeless and elderly Coloradans seeking documentation of their identity, immigration, or citizenship status.

Identity documents are a vital part of accessing healthcare, public benefits, housing, transportation, employment and securing other essential human rights, but the process of obtaining documents can become extremely difficult in some situations.

Project activities include representing individual clients needing assistance in complex cases, providing technical assistance and community education involving identification issues, and managing a supplemental document fund for individuals and nonprofits to pay needed document fees.

The ID Project is the state's largest distributor of vouchers for accessing free Colorado birth certificates, IDs, permits, and driver licenses.



100 Years of Justice: the History of Colorado Legal Services

Colorado Legal Services began as several separate legal aid organizations, which combined in 1999 to form Colorado Legal Services, to most effectively serve low-income Coloradans. Today, the organization represents thousands of Coloradans for free each year.

1925

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Denver, Inc.

The Legal Aid Society of Denver formed in 1925. In 1962, the name of the organization was changed to the Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Denver. Until the Legal Aid Society of Colorado Springs was founded in 1953, Denver was the only city in the state with a formal legal services program for low-income Coloradans.

The Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Denver eventually added services to Boulder and Jefferson counties, and in 1981, it also began a pro bono program for 11 rural counties in northwest Colorado, known as the Northwest Colorado Legal Services Project.



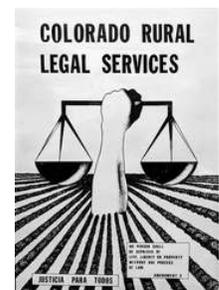
1953

Pikes Peak Legal Services began as the Legal Aid Society of Colorado Springs, staffed by a part-time attorney and part-time secretary. The part time office later grew to a full time operation housed in the courthouse. The Pikes Peak Legal Services attorney also served as a half-time deputy district attorney.

In the late 1990's, Pikes Peak Legal Services joined with Pueblo County Legal Services, which was founded in 1966. The combined program was renamed Pikes Peak-Arkansas River Legal Aid.

1969

Colorado Rural Legal Services was founded and funded in 1969 by an Office of Economic Opportunity grant and began as a program designed primarily to serve migrant farm workers throughout Colorado. Colorado Rural Legal Services was run out of an office in Boulder, with regional offices originally located in La Junta, Alamosa, Grand Junction and Greeley. Offices were added in Montrose, Trinidad and Durango when the state provided funding for a short time in the early 1970's. Later, offices were added in Fort Collins and Fort Morgan.



1999

Colorado's three existing legal services programs, the Legal Aid Society of Metro Denver, Colorado Rural Legal Services, and Pikes Peak-Arkansas River Legal Aid combined to form a new statewide program: Colorado Legal Services. The joined program was recommended by a statewide planning group that included staff and board members from the three programs and other leaders throughout Colorado. We continue the legacy and shared geographic reach of these predecessor organizations today.





In the Community



Alisiana Medina (left), Boulder pro bono and outreach coordinator; Naomi McDonald (center), paralegal/intake supervisor; and Benita Greer (right), ID Unit paralegal; at the Colorado Legal Services booth at the Juneteenth festival in Denver.



Matt Baca (right), executive director, with Daniella Shively (left), Grand Junction managing attorney, at her monthly radio show on KAFM, The Legal Brief, in Grand Junction.



Jackeline Ruiz, outreach coordinator, at the housing rights event she helped organize with Servicios de la Raza in Denver.



Clinton Albert, assistant supervising attorney of the Housing Unit at the CLS Colorado Springs office, giving a community presentation on Renter Rights.



CLS staff preparing to help people at an eviction clinic at the Arapahoe County Courthouse. Staff visit several courts in Colorado on a regular basis in order to help people on the day of their eviction summons.



Heather Frank (left), CLS Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Director, and Eric Santos, Executive Director of the Georgia Tax Clinic, present at the 2024 Annual Low Income Taxpayer Clinic Grantee conference in Washington, DC.



Thomas Freeman (center), staff attorney for the CLS Low Income Taxpayer Clinic, and Jeanna Baitlon (right), an attorney of the CLS Salida office, at the Embracing Aging Expo in Salida.



An Aunt's Determination to Give Her Niece a New Life

A Story from a Colorado Legal Services Client

Angela, who lives in northern Colorado, was shocked and worried when, in 2022, she learned that her young niece could be in danger.

Her 3-year-old niece, Lilly, was living with her parents – Angela's brother and his girlfriend – in Tennessee. Both parents had challenges with substance abuse. Angela, who has long acted as a caretaker and who raised children of her own, quickly reached out to her brother and asked if Lilly could visit Colorado for the summer. Thankfully, her brother agreed.

When Angela flew to Tennessee to pick Lilly up, she found a 3-year-old with tight-fitting clothes, two stuffies, one extra outfit, and a tattered backpack.

"I got really emotional," Angela recalled.

She decided to make the most of their time together.

"We had a great summer," Angela said. "We went to the art museum, the aquarium, the science museum, Estes Park—and neither parent contacted me."

When she started reaching out to Lilly's mom about extending her stay, Lilly's mom started sending threatening messages to Angela's adult daughter. But Angela still couldn't get ahold of Lilly's mom when Angela tried to call.

"I started getting the gut feeling that we shouldn't send her back," Angela said. She soon learned that Lilly's mom had a warrant out for her arrest on drug-related charges, and Angela's brother had been arrested and was in jail. It felt too dangerous to let Lilly return.

As she began investigating how to keep Lilly with her, she was referred to Colorado Legal Services. Joan Woodbury, managing attorney of the CLS Fort Collins office, helped Angela gain custody of Lilly.

"What a wonderful advocate for children—everyone was so kind, so helpful," Angela said.

Now Lilly is in the first grade and reading at a 5th grade level. She goes to therapy, she recently won an art contest, and she takes good care of her pets.

"Now she can be her true little self," Angela said. "She's a brilliant artist and a very caring human being. She has empathy for everyone."

Angela said that Lilly not only has a new life, but also gave Angela renewed purpose in caring for her. Together, they have the chance to thrive.

The names in this account were altered to protect Colorado Legal Services' client and her niece's privacy.





Colorado weighs in

Colorado Legal Services works with community partners statewide to make sure our communities receive the holistic, professional, timely services they need. We partner on educational events, help connect our clients to each other to give them the resources they need, and so much more.

Below: Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser and two of CLS's many community partners on why our work matters.

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser

"Access to justice is something that must be available to all Coloradans, no matter their income or background. That's why Colorado Legal Services is so important. Every year, thousands of Coloradans rely on them for access to legal help when it's needed most. Whether it's assistance with an eviction or other housing issue, help navigating the tax code, support for survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence, or any of their other services, their network of attorneys is there for people in all four corners of the state and everywhere in between. **Colorado Legal Services has been a trusted, invaluable institution for the past 100 years, and I know the organization will be here providing compassionate legal expertise for the next 100 years and beyond.**"

Hollie VanRoosendaal, Vice President of Community Programs Hilltop Community Resources

"For 75 years, Hilltop Community Resources, Inc. has been dedicated to building a community where everyone belongs. Providing crucial human services and programming for all ages, we have relied on our strong partnership with Colorado Legal Services to **meet the full spectrum of needs for the people we serve in Western Colorado.**"

Patrick Noonan, Program Director, Colorado Housing Connects Brothers Redevelopment, Inc.

"Brothers Redevelopment has been fortunate to partner closely with Colorado Legal Services for several years. This dates back to our administration of the Colorado Foreclosure Hotline during the height of the Great Recession. CLS continues to help us meet the need of the moment. Most recently, we've collaborated to benefit renters and homeowners through cross referrals for financial assistance and legal aid, education and outreach, and support in grant proposals. **In 2024, we teamed up to host 11 eviction prevention legal workshops serving 650 attendees.** We deeply value the work CLS does in the community and the transformative impact it offers Coloradans each and every day. **We're proud to call Colorado Legal Services partner.**"

Community spotlight: Arapahoe Eviction Clinic



(Right) CLS staff helping people at the Arapahoe County Court eviction clinic understand court forms. Staff visit several courts in Colorado on a regular basis in order to help people on the day of their eviction summons. Many court forms are only available in English, and they can be challenging to understand and fill out in any language.

In 2022, Arapahoe County worked with Colorado Legal Services to start an eviction clinic at the Littleton Courthouse.

The purpose of the program was and continues to be to provide legal assistance to low-income households and to help prevent or lessen the serious impacts of eviction and homelessness within Arapahoe County on families and communities.

CLS's Client Support Services social workers also work with attorneys and paralegals to serve Arapahoe County residents at the clinic.

Social workers provided over 500 individuals with resources including housing, mental health, shelters, food banks, medical, domestic violence, rental assistance, utility assistance and benefit attainment since starting work at the clinic in 2023.

How eviction clinics can help

In 2024, one woman who was disabled, out of work and facing eviction connected with our Arapahoe eviction clinic team which helped her remain housed.

The court had incorrectly ruled that she should be evicted.

A CLS attorney filed an emergency motion asking the court to cancel its decision. The court realized its error and changed its ruling, allowing the client to remain housed. A CLS social worker then gave her valuable resources and helped her apply for benefits, which will support her in maintaining housing stability in the future.

By the numbers

2024

Over **1,500** households served

Over **500** People connected to community resources

Kept over **2,000** People and their families housed in Aurora, Unincorporated Arapahoe, Englewood, Littleton and Centennial.

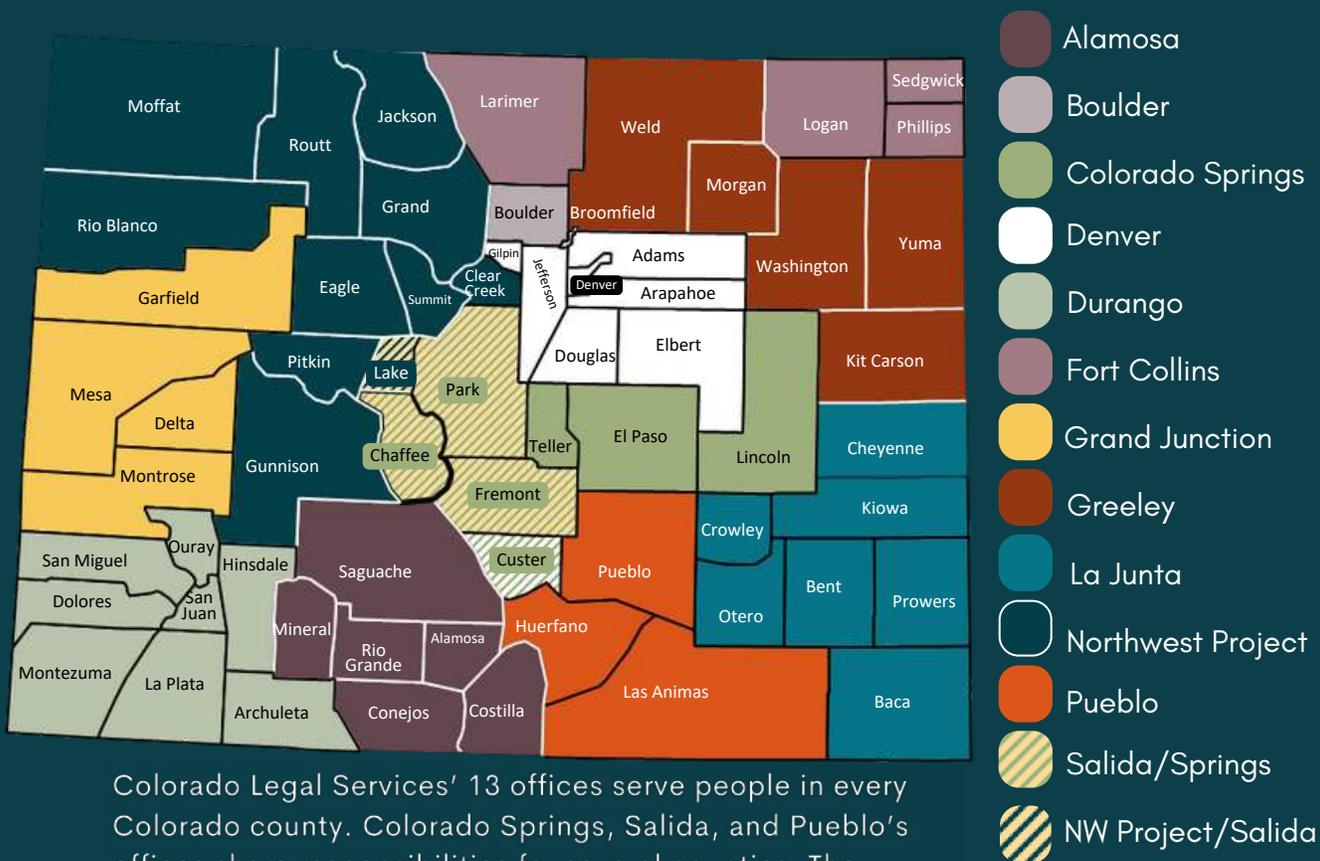
Statewide Snapshot

8,452 Cases closed in 2024

Closed cases are those that were resolved in 2024. This could include cases that were opened in previous years. Additional cases may have been opened in 2024 that are not yet resolved.

Colorado Legal Services closed 8,696 cases in 2023.

Office Locations and Coverage Areas



Colorado Legal Services' 13 offices serve people in every Colorado county. Colorado Springs, Salida, and Pueblo's offices share responsibilities for several counties. The Northwest Project includes 11 counties, which are served by an office in Craig, an attorney in the 5th Judicial District, and local contract attorneys.

By the Numbers

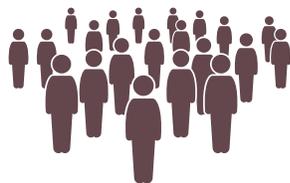
We connected with...

2,372 Seniors

3,784 People with Disabilities

2,760 Survivors of Domestic Violence

628 Veterans



16,760

Total people reported in the 8,452 households that connected with Colorado Legal Services for help in 2024.

By the Numbers

Top legal areas

4,006 Housing cases

1,464 Family cases

1,062 Consumer cases



Housing cases could include defending against evictions; negotiating rent agreements with landlords to help people stay in their homes; helping tenants learn their rights regarding security deposits and conditions impacting the habitability of their homes; helping people keep housing subsidies; and directing clients to rental assistance and community resources.



Family and children cases include representation of domestic violence survivors in divorce, custody, and protection order cases.



Consumer cases include debt collection defense, avoiding foreclosure, bankruptcy, and other matters.

By the Numbers



Nearly

\$4 million

awarded or returned
to clients



3,019

pro bono attorney hours



554

outreach events

In 2024, an estimated 8,333 people attended our 554 outreach events, allowing us to provide legal representation, offer legal information, and otherwise help more Coloradans.

Deeper dive: What does the \$4 million entail?

While not every case involves getting money back to clients (as much of our work is more intangible, like helping someone retain housing), some cases involve getting justice for clients through monetary means.

This could include modified child support, corrected or increased benefits, tax refunds or credits, or defending someone against a predatory lending practice.

In 2024, we secured more than \$3.9 million for our clients, up \$300,000 from 2023.

The Low Income Taxpayer Clinic is a significant part of this work. In 2024, staff obtained \$164,565 in delayed refunds for clients and reduced tax liabilities by \$566,742.

Employee Highlights



Kathryn Hall, Managing Attorney of our Greeley office, received the annual Sandy Carr award from the Weld County Bar Association in recognition of her service as an attorney working to assist those who cannot afford legal services and striving to make the legal process accessible to those without counsel. The award was for her volunteer work with the Weld County Legal Services organization, another private attorney volunteer program in the Weld County area.

Sarah Lipka, Advocacy Director for Southern Colorado, was awarded the Excellence in Civil Legal Representation award by the Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center.



Boulder Pro Bono Coordinator Alisiana Medina Was awarded the Foster Youth Voice Award for her volunteer work. The award, from the Office of the Colorado Child Protection Ombudsman and others, recognized her for using her own experience in foster care to advocate for current and future foster youth. The Office of Child Representatives also awarded her a Certificate of Appreciation for her leadership and advocacy.

The Denver Bar Association gave its highest honor, the Award of Merit, to Jose Vasquez, Managing Attorney of our consumer and housing units. Jose has been with Colorado Legal Services for 25 years. In accepting the award, Jose shared his personal journey as a career-long legal aid lawyer and said it is an honor to work for CLS and our clients.



Get Involved

Give

The Legal Aid Foundation of Colorado raises money for Colorado Legal Services, the only nonprofit serving every county in the state by providing free legal services in civil cases to clients who could not otherwise afford them.

For every client served by CLS, at least one income-eligible person is turned away simply because of our limited capacity relative to the great need for legal help. With your support, CLS is working to meet a constantly expanding need and help ensure that justice for all is more than just an aspiration.

Donate at legalaidfoundation.org

Volunteer

Pro bono attorneys and volunteers are key partners in our work to represent Coloradans. We welcome everyone who is interested in being part of our work to defend low-income Coloradans, including attorneys, paralegals, law students, and social workers.

Learn more or volunteer at coloradolegalservices.org/volunteer

Work with us

At Colorado Legal Services, our staff has a passion for serving Coloradans in poverty and we work collaboratively to make a difference in the lives of our clients.

coloradolegalservices.org/careers

Colorado Legal Services 2024 Board

Colorado Legal Services is led by a board of directors that includes attorneys, people who are eligible to be represented by the organization based on their income or other factors, and members of other organizations throughout Colorado that also serve low-income Coloradans.

Officers

Chair:

Tina Smith
Denver

Vice Chair:

John P. Frey
Fort Collins

Treasurer:

Kenzo Kawanabe
Denver

Secretary:

Kymerly Merrick
Craig

Members

Anne Castle Golden
Melissa L. Decker Minturn
Jerome DeHerrera Denver
Karla Gomez Durango
Amber Gonzales Denver
Paula Greisen Denver
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Jeffrey Johnson Denver
Henry Kroll Boulder
Kirsten Kurath Grand Junction
Joi Kush Colorado Springs
Kimberly Lord Boulder
Betty Marroquin Fort Collins
Meredith Munro Denver

Nicole Ponzer Grand Junction
Meshach Rhoades Denver
Helen Starr Denver
Kara Veitch Denver

