

# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT

2023

Colorado Legal Services





## FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATTHEW BACA

*Continuing a tradition of compassionate legal care*

Colorado Legal Services is an organization of brilliant, big-hearted advocates providing compassionate and dedicated legal care throughout our state. I joined the office in 2023 as the executive director, returning to CLS after four years in the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

Throughout this first year, I saw a steady, relentless determination in each team member to serve Coloradans in need to the best of their ability, even with limited resources and on a nonprofit, shoestring budget. I saw clients and their families keep their homes when they faced eviction or foreclosure. I was proud of attorneys and paralegals who worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of survivors of domestic violence and trafficking and secure rightful and life-saving public benefits for Coloradans. I was amazed by CLS social workers who provided the encouragement some needed to care for themselves and find their path forward.

And each day intake staff greeted Coloradans in crisis with compassion and patience. They, along with our administrative staff, support each other so our team can pour hours—and sometimes years—into helping Coloradans navigate a complex and challenging court system during times of great need and trauma.

I consider Jon Asher, who served for 42 years as executive director, a mentor, a friend, and a guide through this transition. Something he said in his farewell email to staff sticks with me: "If it is true that the moral arc of the universe bends towards justice, we, more than most, know it only bends if people with skills, energy and dedication keep pushing it."

We will continue to follow in his footsteps, amplifying the voices of those in need, empowering those among us who are marginalized and too often excluded from our justice system, and fighting for equal justice.

Another insight of Jon that I carry with me: "I hope that all of us remember that we really are engaged in building a cathedral – the cathedral of justice, fairness and equality for all."

In 2023, we recognized some of the extraordinary impact of our staff and volunteers, including through sharing a [third-party analysis](#) estimating a staggering social return on investment of 619%. For every dollar put into CLS, our communities benefit to the tune of \$6.19.

We [highlighted our ID Program](#), which saw an uptick in people who largely reported they were unhoused asking for help obtaining identification documents, which are vital for those who need to find housing, jobs, and other necessities. We celebrated the [hundreds of pro bono attorneys](#) who volunteer their time to help the clients we don't have resources to serve.

And we recognized that while we help many people who are in crisis keep their homes and families intact, our organization has seen an increasing need to help clients find additional resources to help them avoid these crises in the future. Our [social workers](#), who are part of a new program to provide holistic services, helped about 325 people in 2023, a 50% increase from 2022.

In 2023, we also worked to assemble an incredible coalition that would, in 2024, secure the passage of HB24-1286, which I wrote about in the [Colorado Sun](#) and which was covered in the [Denver Post](#). This bill will, for the first time in Colorado, provide general operational funding to support legal aid organizations throughout Colorado at an estimated \$2 million each year, in perpetuity. I could not be more grateful to the many who worked so hard to get this bill passed, inside and outside of CLS.

I am honored to be a part of this organization, which has for nearly a century made real the belief that everyone—regardless of whether they can afford an attorney—deserves justice.

As we look to the year ahead, I have three priorities: 1) refining the leadership restructuring we embarked on in 2023, 2) continuing to develop our new communications work, and 3) focusing on growing our revenue to make sure we can serve as many Coloradans in as many cases as possible into the future. What a joy and an honor to be back at CLS.

Adelante—onward—to the work ahead.

# Statewide snapshot

**11,445 CASES OPENED  
IN 2023**



Colorado Legal Services is Colorado's statewide nonprofit legal aid program providing civil legal assistance—which does not include criminal or traffic matters—to low-income individuals and older Coloradans throughout the state. Its 13 offices provide free legal assistance in a broad variety of legal areas, including eviction defense, consumer protection, services to survivors of serious crime and human trafficking, representation for domestic violence survivors, and many others. CLS is also the only legal service provider to older Coloradans in 14 out of 16 regions for Area Agencies on Aging.

The organization opened 11,445 cases in 2023.

Almost 1.4 million Coloradans qualify financially for CLS's services. CLS's current staff of 85 attorneys and 52 paralegals is supplemented by a robust private attorney involvement program. Learn more at [www.coloradolegalservices.org](http://www.coloradolegalservices.org).

Top three types of cases opened include:



**5,372**

**Housing**



**2,514**

**Family and children**



**1,303**

**Consumer**

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; 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 matters.

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



# Cases opened by category



Cases that were opened in 2023 may be ongoing, as some cases take several months or years to resolve.

We may not provide legal advice or representation in every case we open, although we do attempt to provide at least a referral or other resources.

## Denver / Metro Areas

Family and Children	<b>353</b>
Consumer	<b>496</b>
Housing	<b>1,313</b>
Health and Elder	<b>253</b>
Denver Other	<b>112</b>
Colorado Springs	<b>1,088</b>
Denver Intake (240 of the cases opened by this team were family and children cases)	<b>256</b>

## Statewide Projects

ID Project	<b>831</b>
Coordinated Statewide Intake	<b>2,378</b>
Tele-Medical	<b>46</b>
Survivor Services	<b>63</b>
ID Project	<b>831</b>
Migrant Farmworkers	<b>16</b>

## Non-Metro Offices

Alamosa	<b>241</b>
Boulder	<b>292</b>
Craig	<b>14</b>
Durango	<b>288</b>
Fort Collins	<b>650</b>
Frisco	<b>129</b>
Grand Junction	<b>697</b>
Greeley	<b>537</b>
La Junta	<b>231</b>
Northern Colorado	<b>39</b>
Pueblo	<b>802</b>
Salida	<b>130</b>

# 11,445

Total Opened Cases in 2023



# Cases closed by category



## Denver / Metro Areas

Family and Children	<b>353</b>
Consumer	<b>456</b>
Housing	<b>1,318</b>
Health and Elder	<b>199</b>
Denver Other	<b>121</b>
Colorado Springs	<b>976</b>
Denver Intake (this team largely fields family and children cases)	<b>153</b>

## Statewide Projects

ID Project	<b>731</b>
Coordinated Statewide Intake	<b>1,677</b>
Tele-Medical	<b>5</b>
Survivor Services	<b>12</b>
ID Project	<b>731</b>
Migrant Farmworkers	<b>46</b>

## Non-Metro Offices

Alamosa	<b>235</b>
Boulder	<b>415</b>
Craig	<b>21</b>
Durango	<b>245</b>
Fort Collins	<b>600</b>
Frisco	<b>151</b>
Grand Junction	<b>484</b>
Greeley	<b>476</b>
La Junta	<b>124</b>
Northern Colorado	<b>29</b>
Pueblo	<b>794</b>
Salida	<b>123</b>

**8,696**

Total Closed Cases  
in 2023

Cases that were closed in 2023 include cases opened in previous years that were ongoing.

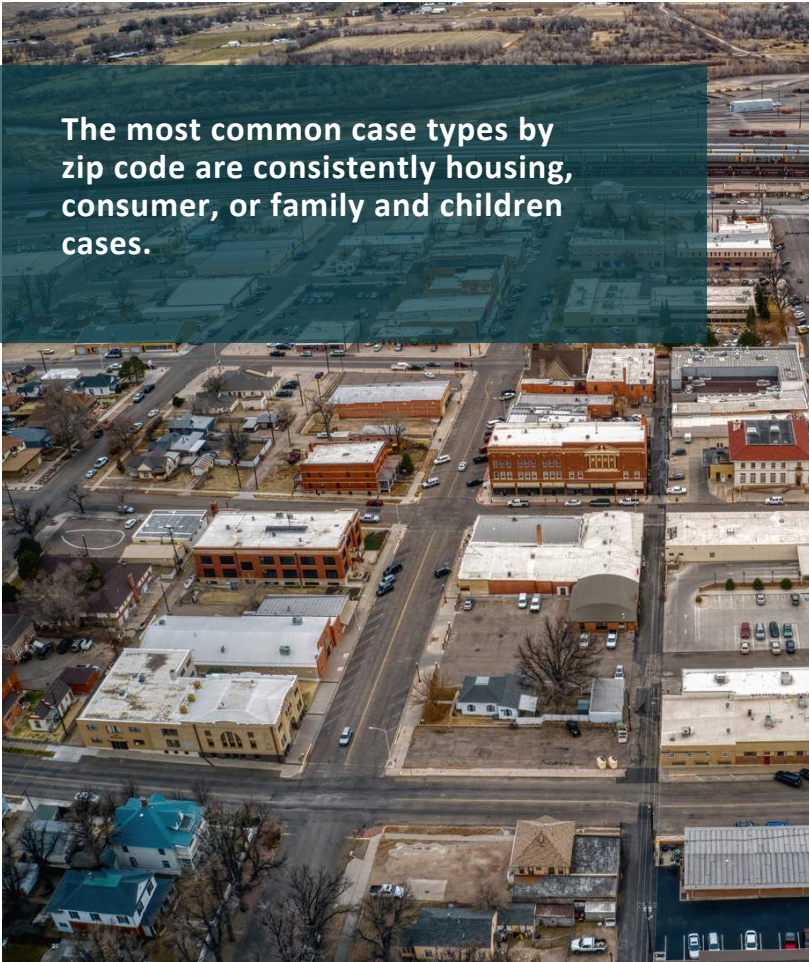




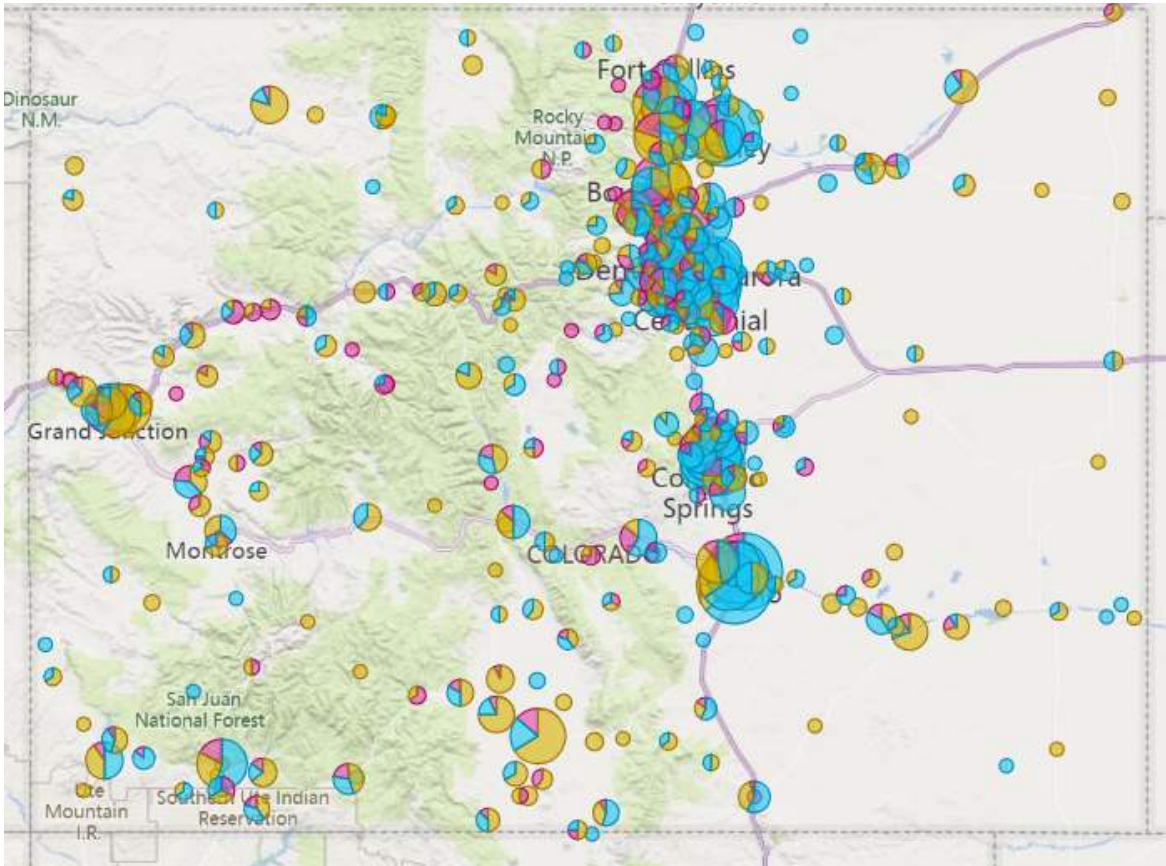
# Zoom in: top case types by zip code



- Housing
- Consumer
- Divorce/Family/Custody



The most common case types by zip code are consistently housing, consumer, or family and children cases.



# Zoom out: More ways to help



Over  
**\$3 million**  
awarded to clients

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 money. In 2023, we secured more than \$3,600,000 for our clients.

Our work is supported by the excellent work of many private or retired attorneys who volunteer their time to help Coloradans. In 2023, attorneys gave 3,212 hours of their time.

Over  
**3,000**  
pro bono attorney hours

Over  
**300**  
outreach events

In 2023, 2,944 people attended our 310 outreach events, allowing us to provide legal representation, offer legal information, and otherwise help more Coloradans.

# Spotlight: Eviction diversion



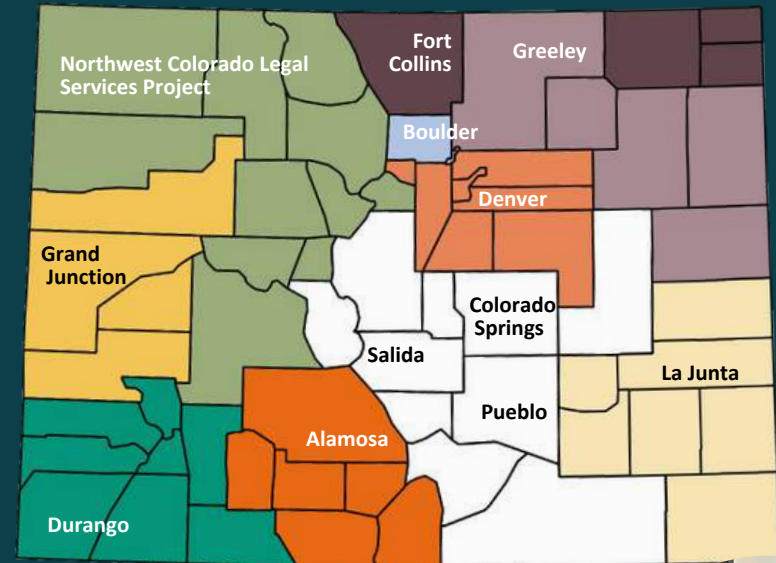
Several of our offices throughout the state include eviction diversion programs, in which staff are stationed in courtrooms to help people understand the eviction process, provide advice or representation, and connect people with resources to help them remain housed.

Below are some of the numbers of people we assisted in 2023:

- **Adams/Broomfield Eviction Clinic:** We gave legal advice to 198 people. The eviction clinic staff also provided general advice or information to about 100 additional people.
- **Arapahoe Eviction Clinic:** 433 people received legal advice.
- **Denver Eviction Clinic:** 234 people received legal advice.

Pueblo's Eviction Diversion Program is a partnership with Colorado Legal Services, the city of Pueblo and the Department of Human Services. The pooling of resources and expertise allowed these entities to address the multifaceted needs of individuals and families in housing crisis, going beyond simple housing assistance to improve the overall well-being of the community.

Engaging with the community and raising awareness of available resources is essential for breaking down the barriers that lead to eviction. Access to eviction diversion programs, with legal representation, financial aid, and tailored support services, reduces the risk of homelessness and fosters a more stable community. In the over 1,000 eviction cases filed in Pueblo in 2023, more than \$938,000 from various eviction assistance programs was paid to help community members avoid eviction or homelessness. And during the fourth quarter of 2023 alone, 105 cases, or 46% of the total eviction cases filed in Pueblo County during that period, were diverted.



*A map showing Colorado Legal Services' offices and the counties they serve.*

*Colorado Legal Services social work and legal staff collaboratively offer advice to a person facing potential eviction at the Arapahoe County Courthouse in January 2023.*







## Spotlight: Client story

Colorado Legal services helps Coloradans who have low income and older Coloradans with a broad variety of legal issues, including eviction defense, consumer protection, services to survivors of serious crime and human trafficking, representation for domestic violence survivors. Below is one of their stories.

A young widow and mother of five children facing an imminent crisis attended a Colorado courtroom when she faced potential eviction. A recent letter from Social Security added to her distress – her husband hadn't worked enough quarters for survivor benefits to be paid to their children.

Her only lifeline was a program with the Department of Human Services that was working to place her in a program that would help to provide childcare, enabling her to reenter the workforce. The mother found herself in a dire situation with no family support system. Unpaid rent had been accumulating since her husband's death, leaving her five children crammed into a single bedroom.

Our eviction diversion attorneys and program staff became her advocates in the courtroom. Through skillful negotiations, a stipulation was reached – she could remain in her home through the holidays. In exchange, the eviction diversion program initiated the application process for state emergency funding to secure rental assistance.

The looming challenge was to secure housing for the family starting in January to avert homelessness. The program took swift action, reaching out to a local agency for transitional housing. Fortunately, a four-bedroom unit would be available in January, with rent based on income. Remarkably, the agency even waived the deposit, easing the financial burden on the struggling mother.

This client's story serves as a poignant reminder of the struggles faced by many families in desperate need of appropriate housing. Even with a temporary stipulation to keep them sheltered and an eviction off their record, the lack of adequate income, credit history, and funds for a deposit hinder their ability to stabilize. In this instance, the collaborative efforts of legal representation, rental assistance, and cooperation with the local housing agency proved instrumental in preventing homelessness and providing a glimmer of hope for a family in crisis.

# Spotlight: Migrant Farm Worker division

## **Wages**

We represent farm workers seeking to recover unpaid wages or who are misclassified or have other wage related issues.

## **H-2A Workers' Rights**

We represent H-2A farm workers and those in corresponding employment who are seeking to enforce their rights under the H-2A regulations and/or state or federal laws.

## **Civil Rights**

We represent farm workers who have been discriminated against in their employment based upon their race, color, national origin, and sex (including sexual harassment).

## **Immigration**

We represent farm workers who are human trafficking survivors or victims of other work related crimes. We also represent eligible farm workers interested in going through the naturalization process to become U.S. Citizens.

Click below to read more about the plight some migrant workers face:

## High Country News

The dark side of America's sheep industry



## Since 1993

### **Legal services for farm workers**

The Migrant Farm Worker Division of Colorado Legal Services provides education, advocacy, and legal representation to farm workers throughout Colorado. We are based in the Denver office of Colorado Legal Services, and we serve farm workers throughout the state, with an emphasis on Northeastern Colorado, the Arkansas Valley/Southeastern Colorado, the San Luis Valley, and the Western Slope. We collaborate with community groups, nongovernmental organizations, governmental agencies and others who also serve the interests of Colorado's farm workers.

We offer free and confidential services to individuals and families. We also participate in community education events to provide information about the legal rights of farm workers.

We assist 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.



# Employee Highlights 2023

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## Isabel Dufford

Isabel Dufford received an [Equal Justice Works Fellowship](#), sponsored by Greenberg Traurig, to work with our office for the next two years, providing direct representation, education and advocacy for the Native American community in Denver in family law matters.

*“As a tribal citizen, I know how important it is that Native families have access to legal services and providers with whom they share a connection, especially in family law where the issues are deeply personal and complex.”*



## Matt Forstie

Matt Forstie, formerly a fellow in the Boulder Office and now an attorney with the Denver Consumer Unit, was named the [2023 Outstanding Young Lawyer](#) by the Boulder County Bar Association.

Susan Spaulding, with the City of Longmont, said:

**"His human-centered public justice approach exemplifies that access to legal remedy for all is alive and well."**

# COLORADO LEGAL SERVICES 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:** Kymberly Merrick  
Craig

## **Members**

**Melissa L. Decker**  
Minturn

**Jerome DeHerrera**  
Denver

**Karla Gomez**  
Durango

**Amber Gonzales**  
Denver

**Michelle T. Adams**  
Denver

**Anne Castle**  
Golden

**Paula Greisen**  
Denver

**Patricia Hall**  
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**Franz Hardy**  
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**Nancy Hajar**  
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**Jeffrey Johnson**  
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## **Meshach Rhoades**

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## **Helen Starr**

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## **Danielle Survine**

Denver

## **Kara Veitch**

Denver

## **Daniel Vigil**

Denver, Colorado

## **Rachel Wallace**

Colorado Springs

**Robyn Schnetzler**, *Technical Accounting Expert for the Finance and Audit Committee and the Board of Directors*



## New logo

Colorado Legal Services recently revealed our new logo. We hope the new logo will serve as an inspirational symbol of our work.

This logo has 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, is a symbol of how we help bolster our fellow Coloradans, often in times of great need.





**COLORADO  
LEGAL SERVICES**

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