

Civil Legal Needs Assessment

2025 Report Commissioned by Connecticut Bar Foundation

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Report Prepared by
CTData Collaborative

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With Gratitude From Connecticut Bar Foundation

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1. Executive Summary

Civil legal problems are widespread in Connecticut, affecting hundreds of thousands of residents. The state's legal aid system delivers high-impact free legal services, but demand far outpaces capacity, leaving many without legal support. This assessment highlights the scale of need and, based on findings, suggests opportunities to increase access to justice in Connecticut.

Civil legal problems affect 72% of low-income households in Connecticut, impacting over 400,000 residents. People of color, women, children, individuals with disabilities, and those with lower educational attainment are overrepresented in this group. Low-income families report that housing, children and family issues, employment, public benefits, and consumer issues are the legal areas of greatest need. The data also show that individuals frequently face multiple issues at once. Low-income residents report that civil legal problems often bring stress and anxiety, negatively impact their physical and mental health, and increase their financial strain.

This report analyzes the demand for legal aid in Connecticut, unmet need, and gaps in services based on findings from a survey of low-income residents, interviews with providers, and administrative and web analytic data from legal aid organizations and the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch. This needs assessment is more in-depth than previous assessments by incorporating the perspectives of providers and judicial stakeholders and by analyzing administrative data. The report highlights system needs and examines the ecosystem of Connecticut's legal aid providers.

Unmet Need

Survey and hotline data reveal that demand far exceeds the legal aid system's current capacity, underscoring the need for evaluation and additional support. **Connecticut's legal aid hotline received over 25,000 calls while closed and another 9,000 during emergency hours, with nearly 31,000 calls disconnected due to high volume.**

Survey data revealed that **nearly two in five low-income residents who sought legal aid did not receive help.**





Role and Impact of Legal Aid

In 2024, Connecticut's legal aid programs served over 20,000 low-income residents. Most of these clients received legal advice, and roughly a quarter received direct representation. Survey data show that 42% of those who received legal aid were satisfied with the resolution of their issue, compared to only 17% who received no help, highlighting the positive impact of legal aid services.

Connecticut's legal aid programs' work to expand access to justice goes well beyond services for individual clients, to include community education and systemic advocacy. In 2024, over 36,000 residents were reached by legal aid community education and client outreach events.

Additionally, Connecticut's legal information and support services play a vital role in helping self-represented residents navigate the civil justice system. In 2024, court support staff assisted nearly 187,000 self-represented parties at Court Service Centers and Public Information Desks, providing guidance on court procedures, help with forms, and language support. Law librarians assisted 17,000 individuals and CTLawHelp.org further extended reach online with nearly 678,000 views, demonstrating the scale of demand for accessible, plain language, reliable legal resources. Together, legal information and support services help low-income residents navigate the civil justice system, ease the burden on courts, and advance equitable access to justice across the state.

Barriers to Accessing Legal Aid

Survey data reveal **that income eligibility requirements and lack of awareness of legal aid programs are substantial barriers to low-income residents accessing legal aid services.** A majority of low-income residents are not aware of the services provided by legal aid programs. Among those who had experienced a civil legal need but did not seek legal aid, more than one third said this was because they were unfamiliar with legal aid, and roughly one in four said it was because they did not believe they qualified for legal aid. More than 2,000 individuals who called the legal aid hotline in 2024 were denied services due to being over-income.





Systemic Gaps in Capacity and Access

There are several notable gaps in our current civil legal aid system limiting access to justice for Connecticut residents.

- Legal aid providers face challenges with recruitment and retention due to low salaries, limiting their ability to meet demand.
- According to attorneys interviewed, elder law expertise does not match the growing needs of older adults, and survey data reveal a gap between the prevalence of civil legal needs and the provision of legal aid to older adults. The findings suggest that building elder law capacity across providers would strengthen the system's ability to respond to our aging population.
- Geographic and service-related gaps further limit access to legal aid for many residents, especially in Fairfield County where the gap between demand and service is the greatest. The data reveal significant unmet needs in the areas of consumer protection, employment, public benefits, healthcare, immigration, and elder law. Gaps are also present in Litchfield, Tolland, Middlesex, and Windham Counties.

Providers explained that they need more resources to recruit staff and meet the demand of their intake lines. Hotline staff reported that sometimes legal aid providers are closed to intake. This means that even if a client is screened and determined to be eligible, they still may not receive services beyond advice and counsel. Providers expressed frustration with the gap between their salary levels and those offered by the private sector, with one stating bluntly, *"Salaries are so low, [staff] are making a teacher's salary."* Challenges with compensation limit recruitment and retention, which impacts the services available to clients.

Providers claim it is essential to pursue systemic reforms that target the root causes of inequity, including eviction practices, police response to domestic violence, access to public benefits, housing discrimination, conservatorship proceedings, and affordable housing development. As one legal director explained, systemic advocacy and individual casework are inseparable: "We cannot do one without the other."

CHAPTER 2

Recommendations for Strengthening Access to Justice





2. Recommendations for Strengthening Access to Justice

Connecticut's legal aid system has a long history of ensuring access to justice for residents experiencing poverty, even while underfunded and overstretched. Providers consistently integrate partnerships, education, and systemic advocacy to meet client needs, yet demand far exceeds current capacity. The recommendations below are directly informed by the insights from this needs assessment.

Strengthen Hotline Capacity and Coordination

Create a task force of legal aid providers to address persistent challenges with the statewide intake hotline, including technology limitations, staff shortages, and scheduling gaps. The task force could examine national hotline models, invest in improved technology to manage call volume, and analyze possible duplication of services at the hotline and within the firms of other providers.

Increase Resources for Service Delivery

Across all data sources, it is apparent that significantly more resources are needed to meet Connecticut's civil legal needs. The [2016 Task Force to Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters](#) recommended strategies to increase revenue, including expanding state funding, enacting fee-shifting statutes, redirecting funds from penalties and fines, allocating state-owned office space to providers, and supporting pilot programs. Reviving and expanding these approaches would provide critical stability for the legal aid system.

Advance Salary Parity, Retention, and Mentorship

Legal aid staff accept salaries far below private sector peers, weakening retention and organizational stability. A comprehensive analysis of compensation across legal aid programs, government and private sector legal staff could support understanding pay disparities. Findings might support the development of funding strategies to achieve salary parity, ensuring providers can recruit and retain the staff needed to meet demand.

A coordinated system of mentorship and training across providers would strengthen the pipeline of attorneys and advocates, expand professional development, and ensure consistency in service delivery. Shared training also reduces burnout and builds a more resilient statewide system.



Expand Service Models, Including Community Justice Workers and Social Workers, to Tackle the Justice Gap

Only 27% of Connecticut's legal aid services are direct representation; most clients receive advice or brief service. Expanding limited-scope representation (allowed under Connecticut's Practice Book Sec. 3-8(b)) and piloting roles for community justice workers, such as court navigators and paralegals, could increase capacity, improve outcomes, and ensure clients receive meaningful assistance even when full representation is not possible.

Civil legal challenges are deeply intertwined with mental health, trauma, and disability status. Providers stress that legal interventions alone cannot resolve these issues. Strengthening partnerships with mental health providers and disability services, or embedding social workers within legal aid teams, would ensure clients receive comprehensive support for both their legal and personal needs.

Support Systemic Reform and Policy Advocacy

Providers highlight the need to pursue both case-level and systemic strategies. Expanding resources for long-term litigation, administrative advocacy, and policy reform would address root causes of inequity, reduce recurring burdens on the system, and strengthen justice for thousands of residents.

Modernize Technology and Information Management

Legal aid providers face outdated case management systems, fragmented data collection, and limited digital intake options. Connecticut has the opportunity to lead nationally by investing in a coordinated, secure information management system that can track unmet need, streamline evidence submission, and improve service continuity. Modernization should also extend to the courts, ensuring universal courthouse Wi-Fi, robust interpreter access, and mobile-friendly participation tools.

Leverage Technology and CTLawHelp.org to Expand Reach

With nearly 700,000 annual visits, CTLawHelp.org is a critical resource. Advanced technology—such as AI-enabled search, automated document drafting (e.g., disability accommodation letters, landlord repair requests), and chatbot navigation might help individuals and advocates access legal tools more efficiently.

Address Geographic Gaps Through Regional Innovation

Significant service deserts remain in Fairfield, Litchfield, Tolland, Middlesex, and Windham Counties. Connecticut should map provider coverage, practice areas, and judicial districts to target resources strategically. Mobile and virtual legal aid, community lawyering, and partnerships with local organizations can ensure equitable access statewide.



Build Capacity to Serve a Wider Range of Civil Legal Problems

More than four in five legal aid cases address civil legal needs related to housing or children and family issues. Other civil legal problems – particularly those related to consumer protections, employment, public benefits, healthcare, immigration, and elder law – are relatively underserved by the legal aid system. The dominance of housing and children & family issues among legal aid cases reflects the urgency of resolving these issues. However, the system could more fully serve the entire range of residents' needs by recruiting more legal aid attorneys with expertise in other areas of legal need or offering professional development in these areas.

Expand Housing Crisis Response

Housing is the most pressing civil legal need, described by one attorney as “like drinking out of a firehose.” Expanding limited representation in housing sessions, strengthening partnerships with housing authorities and fair rent commissions, and connecting clients to healthy homes initiatives would help stabilize households. At the systemic level, policy reforms to reduce eviction inflow and expand tenant protections are essential to reducing long-term demand.

Strengthen Pro Bono Engagement

Connecticut should centralize its pro bono service model and explore how the CT Pro Bono Portal can be used more effectively to increase the number of private practice attorneys participating in pro bono services and to standardize training and mentorship for pro bono attorneys. Expanding private practice attorney participation, in coordination with bar associations and community partners, would extend reach and provide relief to overburdened legal aid staff, and potentially enhance the system's capacity to serve a wider range of civil legal needs.



CHAPTER 3

Introduction





3. Introduction

Why Does Connecticut Need a Civil Legal Needs Study?

Every day across Connecticut people with low income seek civil legal help. Families facing eviction, veterans seeking VA benefits promised by our country, survivors of domestic violence seeking protection, seniors unable to access critical healthcare or public benefits are searching for legal answers and legal services.

Legal aid providers work tirelessly to meet these civil legal needs, but there are times when Connecticut residents are left without the help they need. This report presents the most recent findings on the civil legal needs of people with low income in Connecticut.

This is not the first time Connecticut has examined these issues. Previous assessments have shown that civil legal problems are widespread and that the state's legal services network struggles to keep up with demand. This new study (1) builds on those findings by highlighting the unmet legal needs that continue to threaten the housing, health, and stability of Connecticut's most vulnerable residents and (2) examines the systems through which Connecticut's residents access the civil justice system.

Although Connecticut had made great strides in meeting the civil legal needs of people with low income, the current findings are sobering. Civil legal problems touch 72% of low-income households in Connecticut. The consequences are often profound and include families losing their homes, workers denied fair wages, children's education disrupted, and residents unable to access the benefits and protections to which they are entitled. These challenges are not experienced equally: people of color, individuals with disabilities, survivors of abuse, and older adults disproportionately encounter serious civil legal problems.

This report is both an assessment and a call to action. When civil legal needs go unmet, the safety, health, and economic well-being of families and entire communities are put at risk.

We can continue to do better.

- Our justice system must make sure every Connecticut resident knows their rights and can find help when they need it.
- Our legal system must actively address inequities, including racial and economic disparities, that shape access to justice.
- Every Connecticut resident deserves a justice system that is fair, accessible, and accountable.



The strength of our democracy depends on the promise that justice is a right—not a privilege—no matter who you are, where you live, or the resources you have. Together, we can move even closer to that promise in Connecticut.

Civil Legal Aid & Access to Justice

What is civil legal aid?

Civil legal aid is the system of services that ensures low-income people can protect their basic rights when facing life-altering civil legal problems. Unlike in criminal cases, where individuals are guaranteed a lawyer if they cannot afford one, no such right exists in most civil matters—even when someone’s home, health, safety, or livelihood is at stake.

Civil legal aid fills that gap. It provides advice, information, and representation so that people can navigate complex systems, assert their rights, and resolve problems that otherwise threaten their stability and well-being.

Civil legal aid attorneys and advocates help people with the most essential aspects of daily life. The work ranges from direct legal advice through hotlines and online tools, to community education and systemic advocacy that strengthens protections for all low-income residents, to full representation in court.

From Legal Aid to Access to Justice

Civil legal aid is the bridge between civil legal needs and true access to justice. The people it serves—families facing eviction, survivors of violence, older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, workers, and immigrants—are those most at risk when legal problems go unresolved. Studying civil legal needs reveals not only how widespread these challenges are, but also who is most affected and where services fall short. By understanding these needs, we can better target resources, strengthen the civil legal aid system, and ensure that every Connecticut resident has a fair chance to protect their home, health, income, and family.

Access to civil justice describes whether people can resolve those problems fairly and effectively through the justice system. When civil legal needs go unmet because someone cannot afford an attorney, does not know their rights, or cannot navigate complex court processes, access to civil justice is denied in practice—even if it exists in theory.



Expanding access to civil justice requires more than courts and laws; it requires ensuring that everyone, regardless of income, has a real opportunity to enforce their rights and resolve their legal problems.

Access to justice is not a guarantee unless it is accessible to all—and this report is a step toward making that promise real.

Who does civil legal aid help?

Civil legal aid serves the people in Connecticut who are least able to afford private attorneys yet most vulnerable to the consequences of unresolved legal problems. Clients are overwhelmingly low-income residents—individuals and families living at or below 125% of the federal poverty level—but within that broad group, certain communities are especially impacted.

Legal aid helps families facing eviction or foreclosure, ensuring parents and children do not lose their homes. It helps survivors of domestic violence obtain protective orders and secure safe living arrangements. It assists older adults struggling to access Social Security, Medicaid, or food assistance. It assists people with disabilities facing barriers to services and fair treatment. It supports workers denied wages or benefits. It assists immigrants who need help navigating complex systems to remain safe and stable. It assists people burdened by consumer fraud or medical debt.

In short, civil legal aid helps people at the moments when the stakes are highest—when their health, safety, housing, income, or family stability are on the line. Without access to a lawyer or trusted advocate, many of these individuals would be left to navigate complex legal systems alone. With legal aid, they have a fair chance to assert their rights and protect their futures.

Connecticut's legal aid landscape is a complex system. There are eleven legal aid organizations, thirteen judicial districts (JDs), fifty-four probate districts, and six regional children's districts. There are also several law school clinics at Connecticut's law schools: Yale, Quinnipiac, and the University of Connecticut. The legal aid organizations employ over 300 advocates, attorneys, and support staff, and are further supported annually by over 1,000 pro-bono attorneys. The legal aid system also includes dozens of community partners who work to increase access to legal services through different formal and informal agreements with legal aid providers.





Methodology & Data Sources

This report is based on the results of a Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs ("the Survey") conducted by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Survey Center, interviews with legal aid providers conducted by CTData Collaborative, administrative data provided by Connecticut's legal aid organizations and the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch, hotline call data provided by Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, and website analytic data provided by CTLawHelp and the Judicial Branch. All analyses are conducted by CTData Collaborative.

The Survey distributed by UNH received responses from 389 individuals with household incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). An additional 60 individuals responded to a Survey link distributed by Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut to clients who had opted in to receive text messages. These 60 individuals supplement the Survey sample for analyses focused only on those individuals who have used legal aid services. They are excluded from all analyses focused on the overall prevalence of civil legal needs.

For analyses related to the prevalence of civil legal needs, the Survey data are weighted to match the county of residence and demographic characteristics of Connecticut's low-income adult population based on Census Bureau data. For analyses related to the experiences of individuals who have used legal aid services, the Survey data are weighted to match the characteristics of Connecticut's legal aid clients based on administrative data provided by the legal aid organizations.

For more information about the methodology and data sources for this report, see the Appendix.

CHAPTER 4

Overview of the Low-Income Population in Connecticut





4. Overview of the Low-Income Population in Connecticut

This report focuses on the civil legal needs of Connecticut’s low-income residents, which are defined here as those with household incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Across the nation, low-income individuals experience disproportionate barriers to accessing justice for civil legal problems.¹ To better understand who Connecticut’s low-income residents are, this section provides a brief overview of their characteristics and how they compare to Connecticut residents overall. This provides insight into the population that is most likely to experience unmet civil legal needs.

Of Connecticut’s 3.5 million residents, about **776,000 (22%)** live in households with incomes below 200% of FPL.

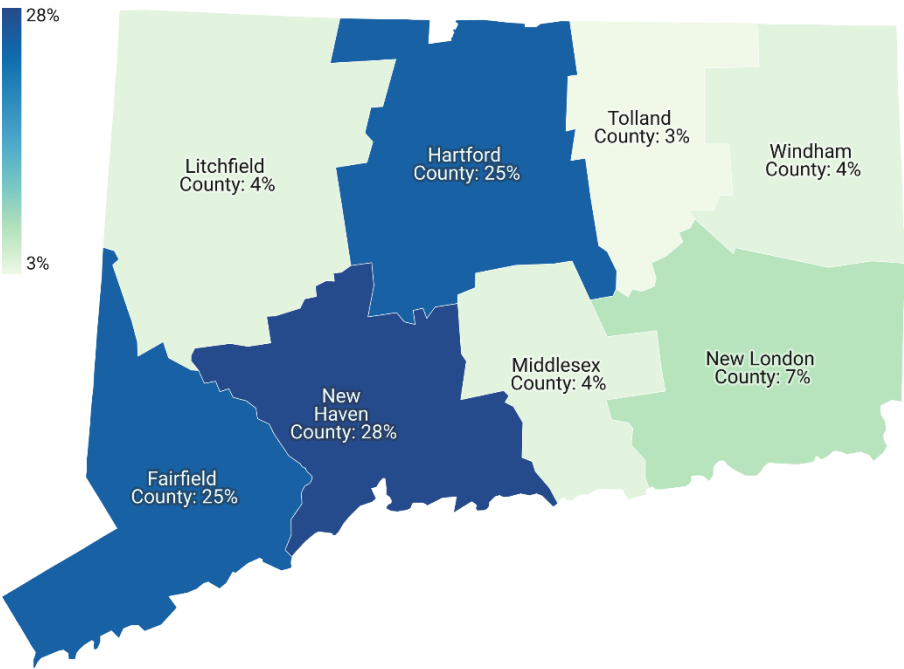
Understanding where Connecticut’s low-income residents live is essential for guiding the strategic localization of legal aid services and community outreach activities across the state.

Nearly four in five (78%) of Connecticut’s low-income residents live in just three counties: Hartford County (25%), New Haven County (28%), and Fairfield County (25%).

More than one in five (22%) of Connecticut’s low-income residents live outside these three counties, with the

Connecticut's Low-Income Population by County of Residence

Percent of Connecticut's low-income residents that live in each county



"Low-income" includes all individuals with household incomes below 200% of FPL.
Map: CTData Collaborative • Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates • Created with Datawrapper

¹ Legal Services Corporation (2022). *The Justice Gap: The Unmet Civil Legal Needs of Low-income Americans*. Prepared by Mary C. Slosar, Slosar Research, LLC.

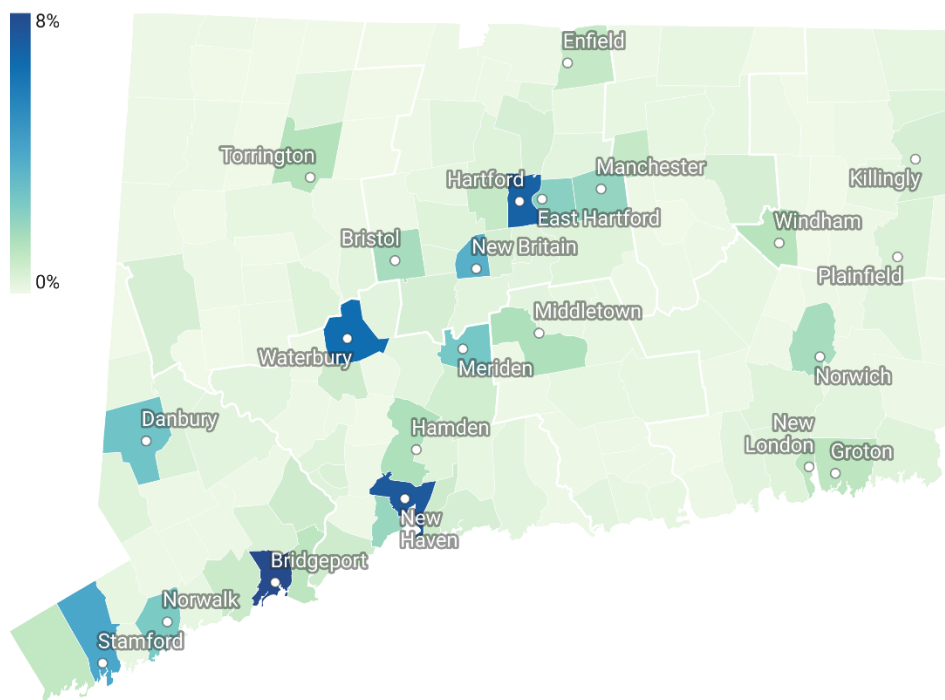


greatest concentration in New London County (7%) and the remaining counties each being home to 3% to 4% of Connecticut's low-income residents. It is important to ensure that low-income residents across the state – including the 22% living outside of Hartford, New Haven, and Fairfield Counties – have access to civil legal aid.

Importantly, Connecticut's low-income population is not evenly distributed within each county but rather is concentrated in urban centers and historically industrial towns. One third of Connecticut's low-income population lives in just five towns: Bridgeport (8.1%), New Haven (7.5%), Hartford (7.1%), Waterbury (6.6%), and Stamford (4.1%).

Connecticut's Low-Income Population by Town of Residence

Percent of Connecticut's low-income residents that live in each town



"Low-income" includes all individuals with household incomes below 200% of FPL.

Map: CTData Collaborative • Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates • Created with Datawrapper

Women represent the majority of low-income adults in Connecticut.

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of low-income adults in Connecticut are women. In comparison, women make up 51% of the overall adult population.

More than one in four children in Connecticut live in low-income households.

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of all children in Connecticut live in a low-income household. By supporting access to justice for low-income families, legal aid plays an important role in helping to ensure that these children have access to safe living spaces and environments that promote healthy physical, social, and emotional development.





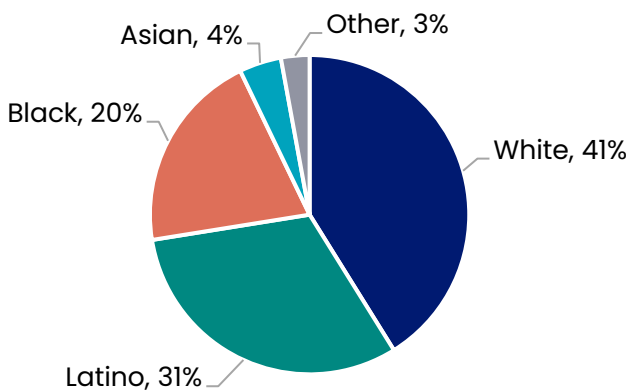
More than one in five seniors over age 60 have low household income.

Twenty-two percent (22%) of Connecticut’s seniors ages 60 and older live in low-income households. This is in line with the proportion of Connecticut’s total population that has low income. National data show that seniors are most likely to experience problems related to consumer issues, health care, and income maintenance that could benefit from civil legal aid.²

Roughly half of Connecticut’s low-income population identifies as Latino or Black.

Latino individuals make up 31% of Connecticut’s low-income population, even though they only constitute 16% of the state’s overall population. Similarly, Black individuals make up 20% of the low-income population compared to 14% of the state’s overall population. By promoting access to justice for low-income residents, civil legal aid plays an important role in working to reverse historical and present race-based injustices for

Connecticut’s Low-Income Residents by Race and Ethnicity



Connecticut’s Latino and Black residents, including segregation, displacement, community disinvestment, and discrimination in the workplace, in schools, and in law enforcement.

More than half of Connecticut’s low-income adults have at most a high school level of education.

Fifty-five percent (55%) of Connecticut’s low-income adults have at most a high school diploma or GED. Nearly one in five (18%) have not completed high school, and only one in four (25%) have a college degree. Lower literacy associated with lower education levels impacts the ability to understand and navigate legal documents and court processes. This underscores the importance of providing plain-language guidance that is accessible to those with lower literacy levels for promoting equal access to justice.

² Legal Services Corporation (2022). *The Justice Gap: Seniors*.
<https://justicegap.lsc.gov/resource/seniors/>





One in five low-income individuals in Connecticut have a disability.

Twenty-one percent (21%) of low-income individuals in Connecticut have a physical or mental disability, in comparison to 13% of Connecticut’s overall population. Civil legal aid plays an essential role in helping these individuals assert their legally protected rights to accessible housing, non-discrimination in the workplace, special education services and accommodations, public benefits, and appropriate physical and mental health care.

About the Data

This section utilizes data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey. Data on the demographic characteristics of Connecticut’s residents are from custom tabulations of the 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year public use microdata. For this analysis, “low-income” residents are defined as those with household incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Data on the county of residence of Connecticut’s low-income residents are from the 2023 ACS 5-year public data tables (Table S1701). County-level estimates were calculated by aggregating town-level estimates, as the Census Bureau transitioned to using planning regions for Connecticut’s county-equivalent estimates in 2022.



CHAPTER 5

Civil Legal Needs Experienced by Connecticut's Low-Income Residents





5. Civil Legal Needs Experienced by Connecticut's Low-Income Residents

Many of the civil legal problems that Connecticut's low-income residents face relate to essential life needs: stable housing, protecting children, managing a health issue, or increasing income and benefits to maintain health. Knowing the prevalence of civil legal needs in Connecticut is important because it shows how widespread civil legal problems are and underscores the scale of the demand on the state's justice system and legal aid providers.

Prevalence of Civil Legal Needs Faced by Low-Income Residents

72% of Connecticut's low-income residents have experienced a civil legal need.

According to the Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs ("the Survey"), **72%** of Connecticut residents with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level

(FPL) have experienced a civil legal need, and another 4% have a family member who has experienced a civil legal need. Out of the 594,326 adults in Connecticut living below 200% FPL³, this suggests that approximately **427,915** have experienced a civil legal need.

The Survey asked about experiences with eight specific areas of civil legal need:

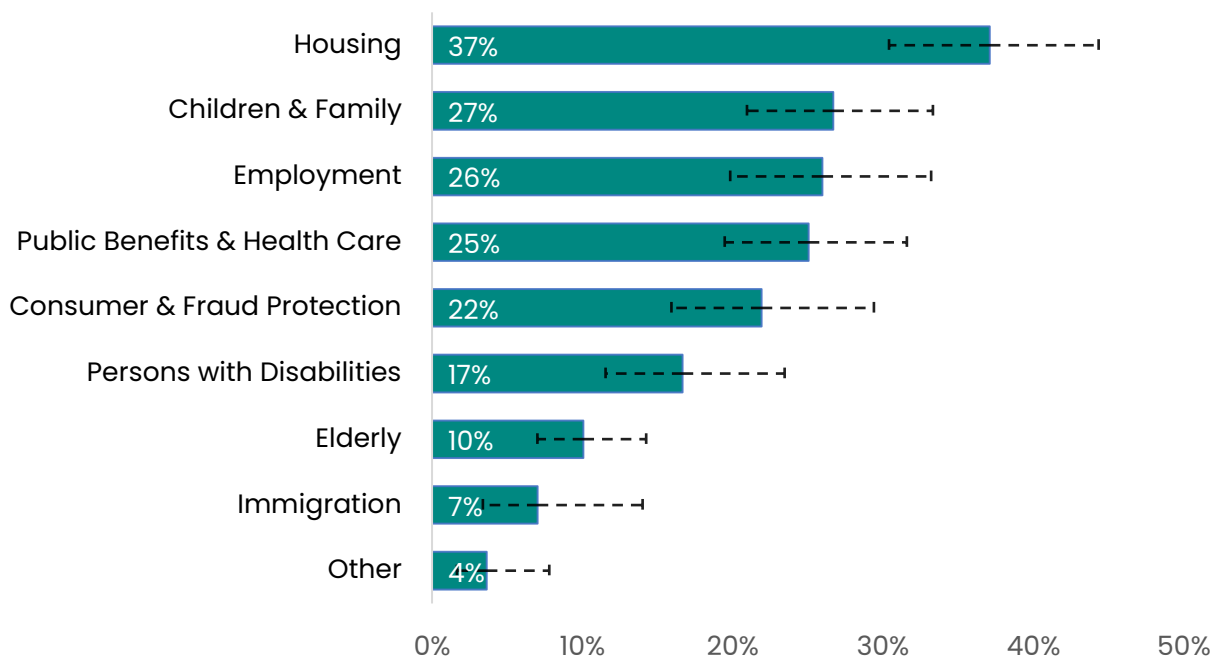
- **Public Benefits & Health Care**, including public assistance, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), food stamps, childcare subsidies, medical assistance, VA benefits, discharge upgrades, and access to healthcare benefits
- **Immigration**, including representation and advice in immigration matters including asylum, U-Visa, naturalization, and removal proceedings
- **Employment**, including discrimination, unemployment compensation, wages, work hours, sexual harassment, workplace conditions, and barriers to employment
- **Children & Family**, including divorce, child support, custody, visitation, restraining orders, guardianship, abuse, neglect, domestic violence issues, and access to education services and accommodations

³ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 1-year Public Use Microdata.



- **Consumer & Fraud Protection**, including bankruptcy, debt collection, small claims actions, fraud protection, and medical debt
- **Elderly**, including nursing home problems, right to home care, medical assistance, social security, consumer issues, credit card debt, medical debt, abusive and harassing collection practices, and identity theft
- **Housing**, including discrimination, eviction, security deposit returns, rent increases, utility shutoffs, homelessness, unsafe conditions, landlord/tenant disputes, access to public housing and housing vouchers, home foreclosure, and mortgage modification
- **Persons with Disabilities**, including housing discrimination, employment discrimination, conservatorship, equal access to public and private services such as hospitals or nursing homes, special education, vocational rehabilitation, and transportation

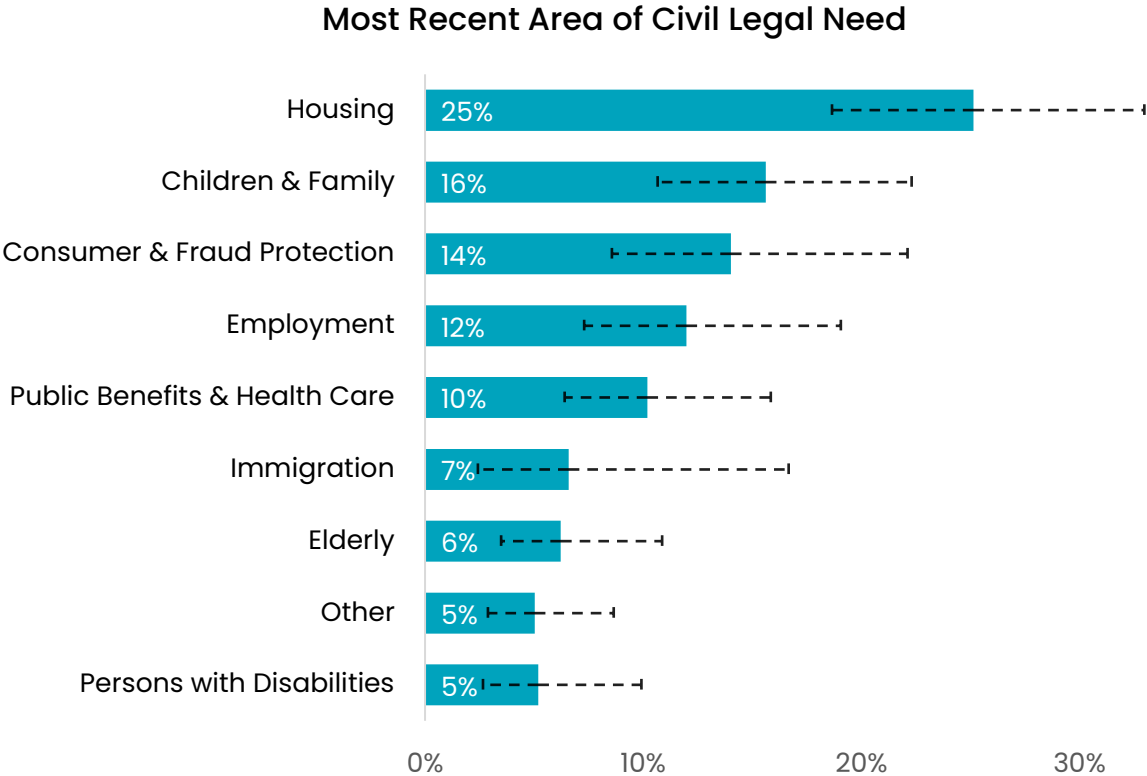
Percent of Low-Income Families Having Experienced Civil Legal Needs by Area of Need



Nearly two in five low-income families in Connecticut have experienced a civil legal need related to Housing (37%), and roughly one in four have experienced a civil legal need related to Children & Family issues (27%), Employment (26%), Public Benefits & Health Care (25%), and/or Consumer & Fraud Protection (22%). Roughly one in six (17%) have experienced a civil legal need related to Persons with Disabilities.



Low-income families often experience civil legal needs in more than one area. The Survey reveals that **41% of Connecticut's low-income families have experienced two or more different kinds of civil legal needs**, for example issues related to Housing and Children & Family.



Among those who had ever experienced a civil legal need, the most recent areas of need were in Housing (25%), Children & Family (16%), Consumer & Fraud Protection (14%), Employment (12%), and Public Benefits & Health Care (10%).

Impact of Legal Problems

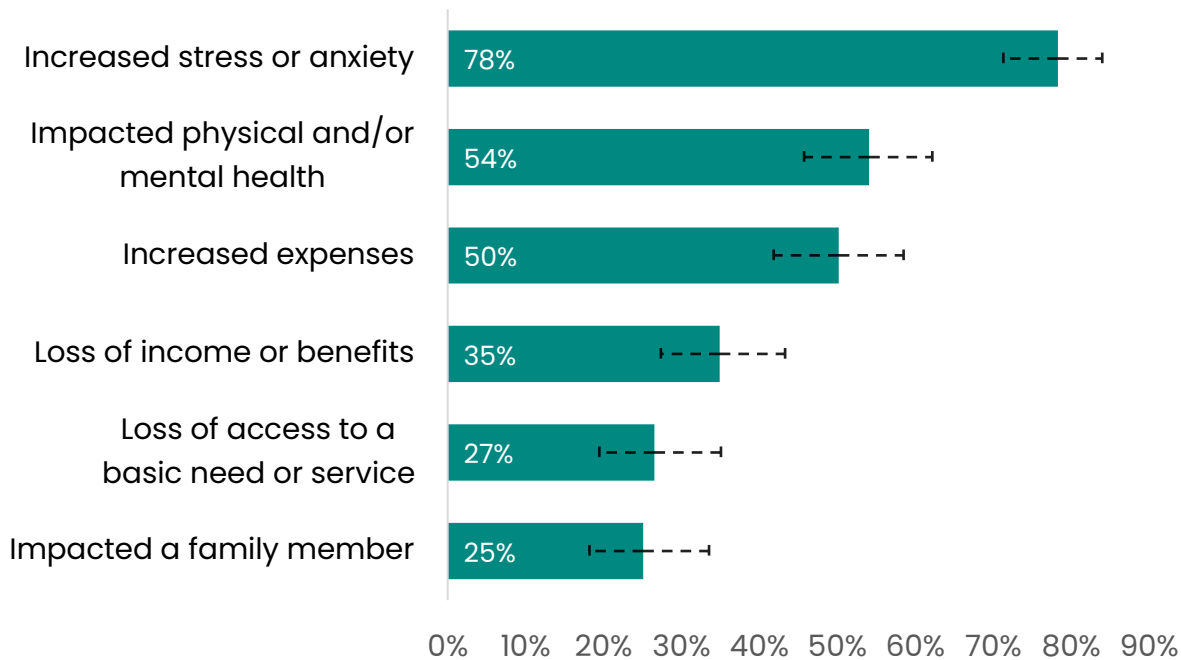
Civil legal problems are more than just legal issues—they often carry serious consequences for people’s lives. For Connecticut’s low-income residents, unresolved legal needs can take a heavy toll on health, finances, and overall well-being.

The Survey findings show just how far-reaching these impacts can be, with many residents reporting increased stress, harm to their physical or mental health, and added financial strain as a result of their most recent legal problem. The data below illustrate the breadth and severity of these challenges.





Impacts of Civil Legal Needs



Among those who had experienced any civil legal issue, nearly four in five (78%) reported that their most recent civil legal issue had increased their **stress or anxiety**. Approximately half (54%) reported that their civil legal issue had impacted their **physical and/or mental health** or that it had resulted in **increased expenses** (50%).

Survey respondents reported, in particular, that housing-related issues caused great distress, including being evicted from their home and facing homelessness, dealing with excessive rent that they cannot afford to pay, disputes over accommodations for disabilities, and distress over having to try to find a new home when a legal resolution was not possible.



“

“I have to be out of my apartment by April 2nd and have nowhere to go.”

“It is said tenants have rights but in reality tenants have NO rights because a landlord can choose not to renew a lease for no reason. I live in an uninsulated apartment and have to pay for my own gas heat and have to put up with loss of heat due to the uninsulation & other problems as well but I can't complain or else my lease won't get renewed and I will become homeless.”

“I'm tired of moving every year. I'm a senior citizen with major medical issues.”

“Housing is a big issue with landlords taking advantage of people with high prices in the rent.”

”

Respondents also shared that the legal system can feel overwhelming, difficult to navigate, and too costly.

“

“The legal system in general is [a maze] that no simple person can get through.”

“I feel like the CT court system feels like it's hopeless to people going through it if they can't afford representation.”

“I wish I knew where to get help. It's overwhelming and anxiety producing for me because of my disability.”

”



Disparities in Civil Legal Needs

Some low-income individuals may be more likely to experience a civil legal problem. This section reports findings regarding disparities in self-reported civil legal needs by demographics and county of residence, as estimated from the Survey. Chapter 8 will discuss how the Survey-based estimates of the prevalence of civil legal needs compare to the distribution of legal aid cases by demographics and county, highlighting areas of potential unmet need.

It is important to note that the Survey only asked whether individuals had ever experienced a civil legal need. Survey data do not address the severity of civil legal needs experienced, or how many times individuals have faced civil legal problems.

Women and Men Are Equally Likely to Have Ever Experienced a Civil Legal Need

The Survey analysis suggested that low-income women and men in Connecticut are about equally likely to have ever experienced any civil legal need.

Men and women had a similar likelihood of ever experiencing an issue related to Housing, Children & Family issues, and Elderly issues. However, men were more likely than women to report legal issues related to Disabilities (24% of men vs. 8% of women) and Immigration (13% of men vs. 2% of women). There was also a trend for men to report higher rates of needs related to Employment (31% of men vs. 20% of women), Public Benefits & Health Care (29% of men vs. 19% of women), and Consumer & Fraud Protection (27% of men vs. 17% of women), although these differences were not statistically significant due to small sample sizes.

Nearly Two in Five Low-Income Adults with a Disability Face Civil Legal Issues Related to Disability Rights

Understanding how disability shapes not just whether someone faces legal problems, but what kinds of problems they are most likely to encounter is important when aligning legal services and policies that address the unique barriers people with disabilities experience in accessing justice.

People with disabilities face complex legal challenges. Issues like disability rights, health care, and public benefits often involve complicated systems that are hard to navigate without legal help. People with disabilities often face barriers to accessing legal representation due to physical handicaps and mental health challenges, making legal aid critical to protecting their rights and ensuring they can meet their basic needs.



The Survey revealed a trend for low-income adults with a disability to be more likely to have ever experienced a civil legal need (79% of those with a disability vs. 69% of those without a disability), although this difference was not statistically significant due to the small sample size.

Nearly two in five low-income adults with a disability (36%) reported facing a civil legal issue related to disability rights, such as disability-related housing or employment discrimination. Low-income adults with a disability were also significantly more likely to face legal issues related to Public Benefits and Health Care (41% of those with a disability vs. 16% of those without) and Elderly issues (23% of those with a disability vs. 6% without), presumably due to older adults being more likely to face aging-related disabilities such as loss of hearing, vision, or mobility.

Civil Legal Needs Impact Low-Income Households Both With and Without Children

The Survey shows that civil legal needs are widespread among low-income families regardless of whether they have children. There were no significant differences in the specific areas of need experienced, with the exception that families with children in the household were less likely to have experienced needs related to Elderly issues (13% of those without children vs. 4% of those with children), presumably due to older adults being less likely to still have children living in the household. This highlights that the need for legal aid is not limited to certain household types — almost all low-income residents face legal challenges that affect housing, work, health care, or benefits.

The Prevalence of Civil Legal Needs Varies Across Connecticut's Counties

The Survey suggested that the prevalence of civil legal needs among Connecticut's low-income families varied somewhat across counties, although small sample sizes within each county lead to low reliability of the survey estimates. To be transparent about the reliability of the estimates, the table below shows 90% confidence intervals in brackets next to each estimate. These intervals show the range in which the "true" value is likely to fall based on the survey data.

New London County had the lowest overall prevalence of civil legal needs, with 52% of low-income families having experienced a civil legal need. In particular, low-income families in New London County had significantly lower rates of civil legal needs in the areas of Housing (19%), Consumer & Fraud Protection (3%), and Elderly issues (3%).





Some counties had elevated rates of particular types of civil legal needs, relative to the average rate across counties:

- Fairfield County had elevated rates of needs related to Employment (40%), Persons with Disabilities (30%), and Immigration (16%).
- Hartford County had elevated rates of needs related to Consumer & Fraud Protection (32%).
- Middlesex County had elevated rates of needs related to the Elderly (21%).





Percent of Low-Income Families Having Experienced Civil Legal Needs, by County⁴

Civil Legal Needs	County							
	Fairfield (n = 42)		Hartford (n = 51)		Litchfield (n = 54)		Middlesex (n = 48)	
Any Civil Legal Need	85%	[71% - 93%]	72%	[56% - 84%]	80%	[67% - 89%]	79%	[65% - 88%]
Areas of Civil Legal Need								
Housing	47%	[31% - 64%]	43%	[28% - 58%]	46%	[29% - 64%]	36%	[23% - 51%]
Children & Family	25%	[15% - 39%]	20%	[10% - 36%]	37%	[22% - 54%]	22%	[12% - 37%]
Employment	40%	[24% - 58%]*	20%	[11% - 35%]	35%	[19% - 57%]	32%	[20% - 48%]
Public Benefits & Health Care	32%	[19% - 49%]	18%	[9% - 33%]	24%	[10% - 47%]	26%	[14% - 42%]
Consumer & Fraud Protection	19%	[7% - 43%]	32%	[18% - 50%]*	26%	[13% - 45%]	20%	[11% - 35%]
Persons with Disabilities	30%	[16% - 51%]*	7%	[3% - 16%]	24%	[10% - 47%]	5%	[2% - 12%]*
Elderly	11%	[5% - 24%]	4%	[2% - 11%]*	11%	[5% - 24%]	21%	[11% - 37%]*
Immigration	16%	[5% - 41%]*	2%	[0% - 7%]*	0%	[0% - 0%]*	2%	[0% - 10%]*

Civil Legal Needs	County							
	New Haven (n = 72)		New London (n = 50)		Tolland (n = 28)		Windham (n = 44)	
Any Civil Legal Need	78%	[67% - 86%]	52%	[35% - 68%]*	75%	[53% - 89%]	68%	[50% - 82%]
Areas of Civil Legal Need								
Housing	30%	[19% - 43%]	19%	[10% - 33%]*	22%	[10% - 43%]	28%	[16% - 44%]
Children & Family	36%	[23% - 50%]	19%	[10% - 34%]	39%	[21% - 61%]	17%	[8% - 32%]
Employment	22%	[12% - 37%]	23%	[13% - 38%]	17%	[7% - 34%]	2%	[0% - 9%]*
Public Benefits & Health Care	32%	[20% - 45%]	13%	[7% - 23%]	16%	[7% - 31%]	14%	[7% - 25%]
Consumer & Fraud Protection	23%	[14% - 35%]	3%	[1% - 7%]*	17%	[8% - 33%]	6%	[2% - 14%]*
Persons with Disabilities	17%	[9% - 29%]	12%	[5% - 26%]	15%	[7% - 31%]	4%	[2% - 10%]*
Elderly	13%	[7% - 24%]	3%	[1% - 11%]*	17%	[7% - 34%]	14%	[5% - 34%]
Immigration	8%	[3% - 20%]*	6%	[2% - 21%]*	0%	[0% - 0%]*	0%	[0% - 0%]*

⁴ Percentages reflect the proportion of low-income families from each county who are estimated to have experienced a given type of civil legal need (90% confidence intervals are provided in square brackets). Asterisks (*) mark estimates that are significantly different from the average of the percentages experiencing the civil legal need across all counties with 90% confidence.



About the Data

This section presents data on the prevalence and impacts of civil legal needs among Connecticut's low-income residents from the Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs ("the Survey"). The data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's population of adults with household incomes below 200% of FPL by county of residence, gender, age, education, race and ethnicity, disability status, military service, and income range.

CHAPTER 6

The Access to Justice Ecosystem in Connecticut Today





6. The Access to Justice Ecosystem in Connecticut Today

Connecticut's civil legal aid system plays a critical role in ensuring equal access to justice for people with low income. Across the state, individuals and families encounter legal challenges involving housing, family stability, public benefits, employment, immigration, and healthcare. For many, these problems threaten basic needs such as safety, shelter, and economic security. Because civil legal representation is not universally guaranteed in most of these matters, Connecticut's network of nonprofit legal aid providers fills the gap by offering free legal services, advocacy, and community partnerships that protect the rights of the most vulnerable residents.

This legal aid network is diverse, with organizations that serve specific populations as well as those with broader missions or geographic reach. Four legal aid organizations provide free legal services for a wide range of legal problems to residents across the state:

- **Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut (SLS)** operates as Connecticut's legal aid hotline, providing intake, advice, and referrals to clients seeking help.
- **New Haven Legal Assistance Association (NHLAA)** provides civil legal aid for low-income residents in New Haven County and the Lower Naugatuck Valley.
- **Greater Hartford Legal Aid (GHLA)** provides civil legal aid to low-income residents in the Greater Hartford region.
- **Connecticut Legal Services (CLS)** provides civil legal aid to Connecticut's low-income residents who do not reside in the greater Hartford and New Haven areas.

Seven legal aid programs focus on serving communities with specific needs:

- **Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA)** supports the legal rights of children, in particular youth of color who have been impacted by systemic racism, children who have been abused and neglected, children with disabilities and chronic health conditions, immigrant children, LGBTQ+ youth, those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and justice-involved youth.



- **Children’s Law Center of Connecticut (CLC)** works to ensure safety and stability for children, prioritizing child-centered, trauma-informed advocacy in family legal matters.
- **Lawyers for Children America (LFCA)** protects the rights of abused, abandoned, and neglected children through pro bono legal representation and partnerships that create systemic change.
- **Connecticut Fair Housing Center (CTFHC)** addresses systemic housing discrimination and barriers to fair housing, promoting equal access to safe and stable housing across the state.
- **Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC)** removes legal barriers for veterans, helping them access healthcare, housing, and stability.
- **Open Communities Alliance (OCA)** works to dismantle housing segregation and promote access to opportunity for families of color and low-income households.
- **Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP)** provides legal services to people with psychiatric disabilities primarily on matters related to their treatment and civil rights.

In addition to providing direct legal advice and representation to low-income individuals in need of legal assistance, these legal aid organizations advocate for systemic change to enhance justice for Connecticut’s most vulnerable communities.

Connecticut has also invested in online and court-based resources that expand access to civil justice.

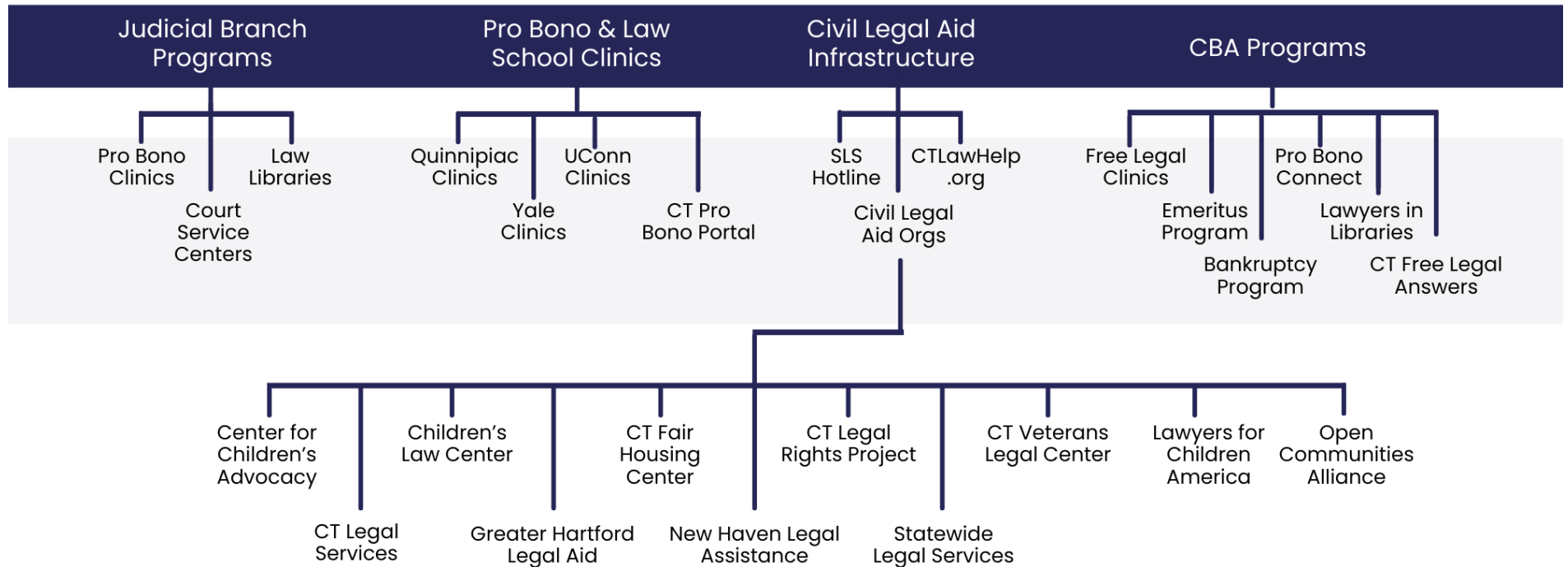
- **CTLawHelp.org**, operated by the legal aid community, serves as a statewide online platform for self-help legal information. It offers plain-language guides, court forms, and instructional materials to empower individuals to navigate civil legal issues on their own.
- **Connecticut Judicial Branch system** plays a central role by maintaining a comprehensive self-help section on its website, operating **Court Service Centers** in courthouses across the state, and offering language access and mediators that make the legal system more approachable for people without attorneys. Together, these resources provide critical entry points to justice for residents who might not otherwise be able to obtain formal legal representation.

A schematic representation of Connecticut’s Access to Justice Ecosystem is provided below.





CT Access to Justice Ecosystem



CHAPTER 7

Strengths in Legal Service Delivery





7. Strengths in Legal Service Delivery

Legal aid in Connecticut has been at the forefront of systemic litigation that has increased access to public benefits, fair housing, and services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Attorneys in our system have led the nation in protections for domestic violence victims and increased access to benefits for veterans.

This systemic work has been done alongside direct representation, community lawyering, education and outreach, and tireless administrative advocacy.

The strengths of Connecticut's legal aid system are the people committed to service.

Connecticut also excels in the provision of pro se materials on CTLawHelp.org, where anyone who is facing a civil legal need can access plain-language information to help them defend their rights. The State of Connecticut Judicial Branch provides extensive support for self-represented parties at Court Service Centers, Public Information Desks, and Law Libraries in courthouses throughout the state and provides self-help and legal reference resources on the Judicial Branch website.

Services Provided by Connecticut's Legal Aid Programs

Connecticut's legal aid programs provide free civil legal services for tens of thousands of low-income residents each year who cannot afford to hire a private attorney. These services help the state's most vulnerable residents avoid the serious life impacts of civil legal needs, including the potential loss of a home, a job, or personal safety and dignity.

20,732 low-income residents
received legal aid services in 2024.

In 2024, a total of 20,732 low-income residents or families received legal help from one of Connecticut's eleven legal aid programs. Of these,

15,363 were new cases opened during the calendar year.

Legal aid clients were predominantly women (69%), with 31% identifying as men and nearly 1% as non-binary, non-conforming, or another gender identity. Nearly one in five clients (19%) were seniors 60 years and older, and 12% were children under 18 years old. One in three clients (33%) identified as Latino, 30% as African American,



and 27% as White. About two in five legal aid clients (41%) reported having a physical and/or mental disability, with 23% declining to report their disability status.

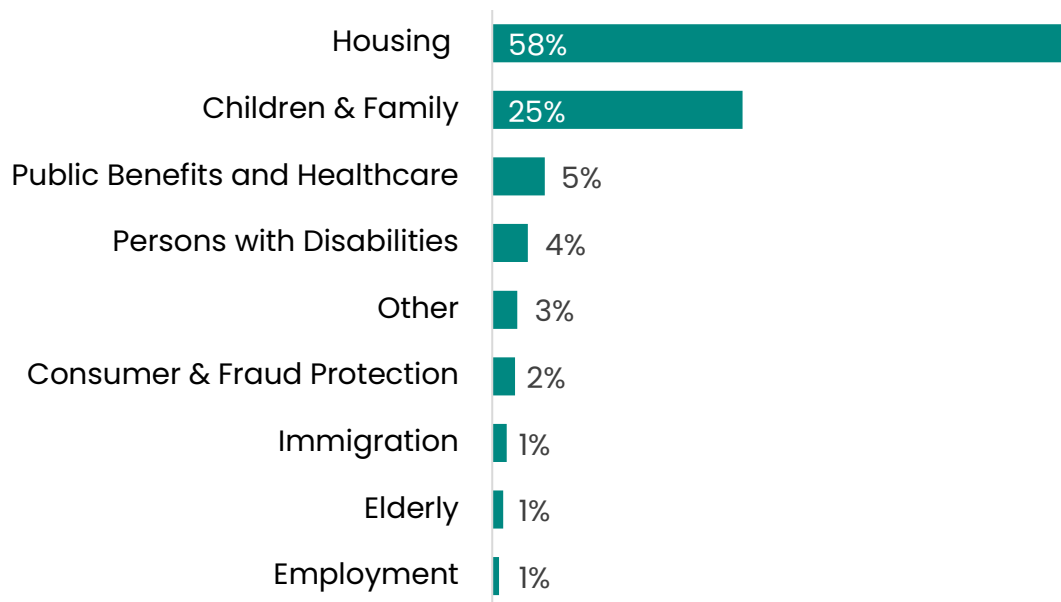
Distribution of Legal Aid Cases by Client's County of Residence

County	Percent of all Legal Aid Cases
New Haven	33%
Hartford	33%
Fairfield	18%
New London	6%
Middlesex	3%
Litchfield	2%
Tolland	2%
Windham	2%

The highest proportion of legal aid cases served residents of New Haven and Hartford Counties, constituting about one-third of all cases each. Eighteen percent (18%) of legal aid clients resided in Fairfield County and 6% in New London County. All other counties each accounted for 3% or fewer of all legal aid cases. Looking at new cases by city, Hartford and New Haven each accounted for about 15% of new cases, followed by Bridgeport (7%), Waterbury (6%), New Britain (5%), and Stamford (4%).

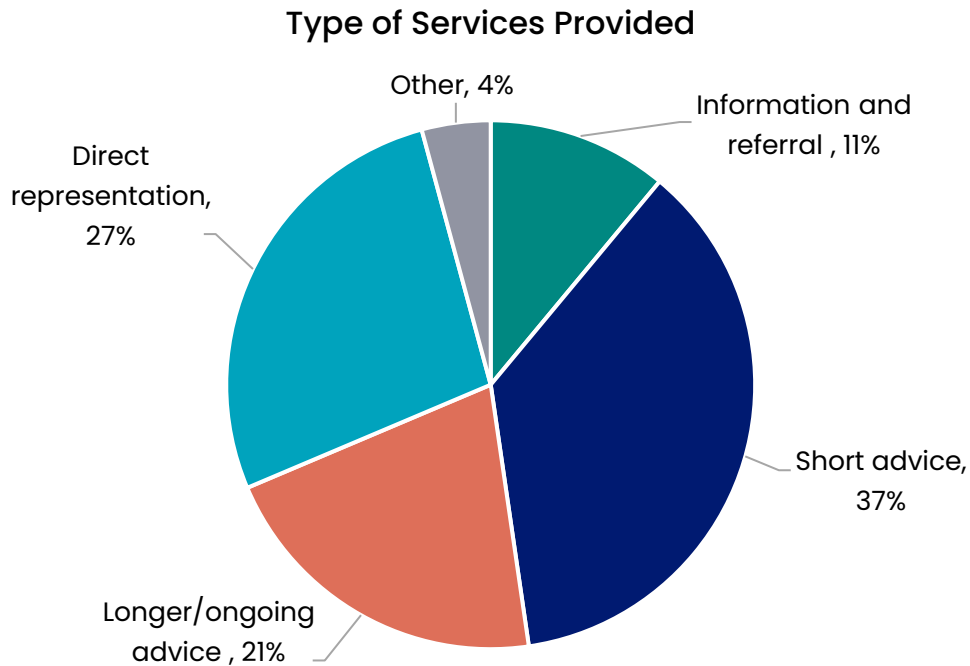


Legal Problem Categories for New Cases Served in 2024 by Connecticut's Legal Aid Providers

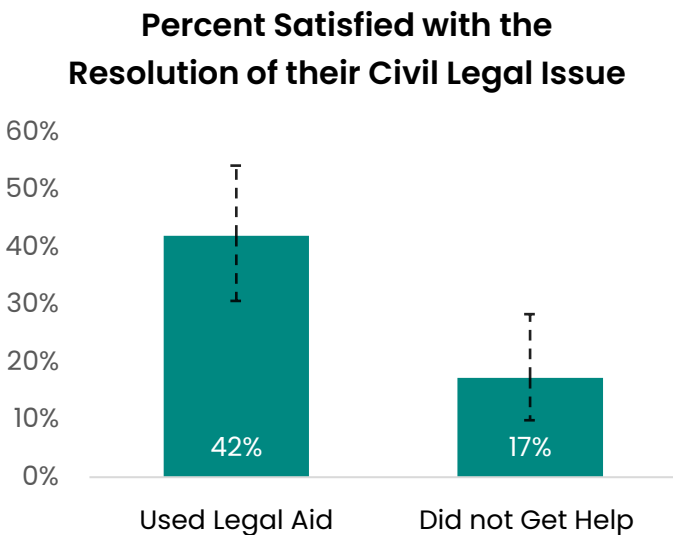


The majority of cases served by legal aid programs (58%) were for Housing issues. About half of these (53%) were disputes between landlords and tenants, and another 28% were related to federal housing rights.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of cases served by Connecticut's legal aid programs were for issues related to Children & Family. Of these, 31% were related to domestic violence, 26% dealt with custody or visitation rights, and 21% were related to divorce, separation, or annulment.



Legal aid programs provide Connecticut's low-income residents with various levels of legal help to meet their needs, ranging from information and referrals (11% of cases) to direct representation in court or administrative proceedings (27% of cases). The majority of legal aid clients (58%) receive legal advice as their primary service, including both short advice (37% of cases) and longer or ongoing advice (21% of cases).





Among Survey respondents, about 42% of those who used legal aid services were satisfied with the resolution of their issue. In comparison, only 17% of those who did not get help from any source were satisfied with the resolution of their issue.⁵ This difference was statistically significant even when accounting for differences between these groups in the type of legal problem. This highlights the efficacy of legal aid in promoting more positive outcomes for low-income residents who face civil legal needs.

Survey respondents provided some examples of ways in which legal aid has helped them successfully resolve their civil legal issue:

“

“The attorney I spoke with provided the legal language I needed to counter the landlord demand for back payment of rent not paid during COVID... This language made their lawyer drop the case.”

“My attorney was knowledgeable, competent and resourceful. She encouraged me to take action on my own. I’ve followed her guidance, and was able to successfully protect myself from a threatening credit collections agency.”

“[The legal aid attorney] helped me beat the eviction case without me having to go to court.”

”

Legal aid programs’ work to expand access to justice goes well beyond direct service to individual clients. Most of the legal aid programs host numerous community legal education and client outreach events, including “know your rights” events, ad hoc legal aid at libraries, and tabling at community events to increase awareness of legal aid. These activities reached an estimated **36,800** individuals across the state in 2024, promoting awareness of legal rights and access to justice at the community level.

⁵ For these analyses, the Survey sample was weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut’s low-income population by county to adjust for differential sampling probabilities by county.





In addition to conducting community-level educational outreach, Connecticut's legal service providers engage in statewide systemic advocacy to promote access to justice for all. In interviews, providers expressed a strong interest in expanding this work to challenge the systems that serve as barriers to justice for Connecticut's low-income residents, addressing the root of the problem rather than dealing with the consequences of systemic inequities on a case-by-case basis.

Providers described efforts to reform eviction record policies, acknowledging the reality that *"landlords are looking for any reason not to rent to someone."* They highlighted work in family advocacy, striving to improve how police respond to domestic violence cases. Legal aid providers spoke proudly of their law reform work increasing access to cash assistance benefits, reducing discriminatory barriers to housing, reducing some of the harmful outcomes of required commitment or conservatorship, and supporting increased affordable housing development.

“

“We try to fight really hard to be strategic, judicious in our use of our resources for both individual and systemic advocacy... We can't do either without the other. We could not do the systemic work without the individual. Could we do the individual work without the systems work? No, we would simply burn out, would be overwhelmed and emotionally and resource-exhausted by the volume and intensity of the need if we weren't doing the systemic work as well.”

– Legal Director in one of Connecticut's Legal Services Providers

”

Legal aid providers also reported that they partner with other community organizations to expand services and maximize resources. Providers shared that these partnerships were an effective way to reach difficult-to-serve populations and meet the multifaceted needs of their clients, and they played a key role in promoting advocacy on systemic issues.



“

“[There is] only so much work from a legal perspective that we can do without access to ancillary services.”

“Our strong partnerships help us accomplish our goals, because we are not siloed.”

”

Legal Aid Hotlines

Connecticut’s legal aid hotline serves as an entry point for people seeking help with civil legal problems. Its purpose is to provide eligible low-income residents with timely information, brief legal advice, and referrals to appropriate services. By triaging and screening callers for eligibility and the type of legal issues they face, the hotline helps connect individuals to the right resources quickly, reduce the burden on the other legal aid programs who provide direct representation, and ensure that resource-limited legal aid program capacity is directed to those with the greatest need.

Connecticut operates two statewide hotlines that low-income individuals can call to access legal advice and get connected to other legal aid programs.

- The [main hotline](#) is intended to function as a common entry point for accessing legal aid in Connecticut. The hotline is open on Mondays to Fridays from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM and from 1:00 to 2:00 PM. Callers are screened for eligibility based on residence in Connecticut, their household income and the nature of their legal problem, and then eligible callers are transferred to attorneys who can provide free legal advice and/or refer them to another legal aid agency or social service organization that can assist them. Callers must have a household income below 125% of the federal poverty level to be eligible for legal aid.
- Connecticut also operates the [Right to Counsel \(RTC\) hotline](#), which provides free legal advice and referrals to legal aid programs for eligible tenants facing eviction or a loss of housing subsidy.

In 2024, the legal aid hotlines received a total of **139,117** incoming calls. Of these, **13,166** callers spoke with a screener through the main hotline and **6,632** callers spoke



with a screener through the RTC hotline. Across both hotlines, about **7,525** calls were transferred to an advocate for legal advice or referral. The hotline also received **2,163** online applications, with 76% eligible for services. Some reasons why many callers did not speak with a screener or advocate are discussed in Chapter 8.

Altogether, **7,239 new cases** were opened via the hotline. Most of these (4,419 cases; 61%) were provided with legal advice by an advocate, and 1,028 (14%) were referred to other legal service providers.

The high call volume demonstrates that people are aware of the hotline service and that it can be an effective mechanism for entry to the civil legal aid system. By screening applicants for eligibility, triaging based on need, and providing legal advice where appropriate, the hotline helps to alleviate the burden on legal aid providers.

Services Provided by the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

Court Service Centers and Public Information Desks

The State of Connecticut Judicial Branch assists patrons, including self-represented individuals, at fourteen Court Service Centers (CSC) and eight Public Information Desks (PID) located in courthouses throughout the state. Staff at CSCs and PIDs can provide information about court rules and processes; answer general questions about how the court works, how to get a case heard, or court deadlines; look up case files; provide court forms; and share contact information for legal aid programs. These locations also provide workspaces as well as printers, scanners, computers, and phones so patrons can fill out forms and prepare their paperwork. However, staff at CSCs and PIDs do not provide legal advice or assistance with a case.

In 2024, court support staff provided assistance to **186,635** self-represented parties.

Court support staff primarily serve self-represented parties. In 2024, 80% of patrons who visited CSCs and PIDs were judged by staff to be self-

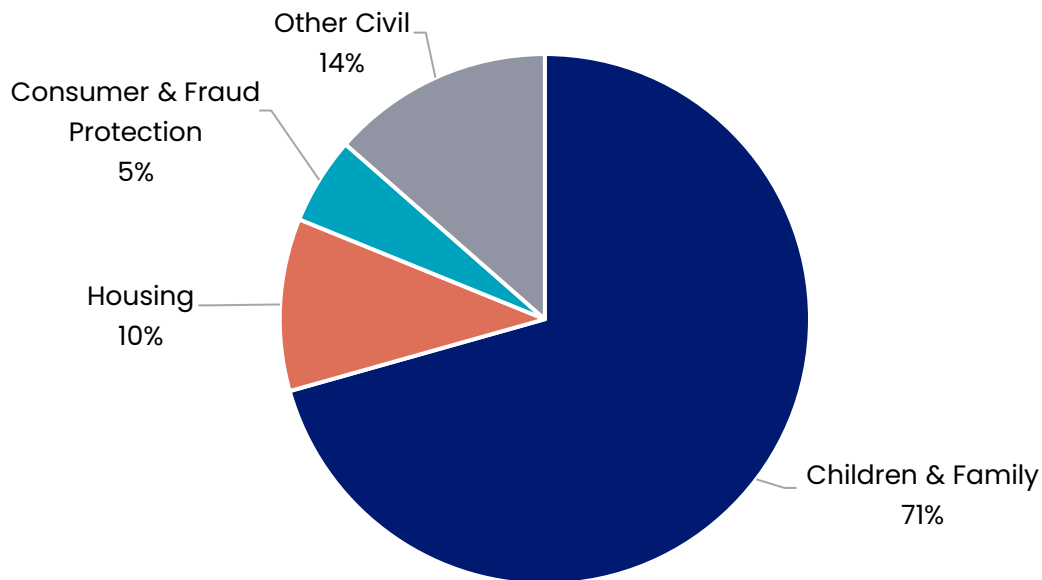
represented. In total across the year, court support staff served **186,635** self-represented parties.

Although data are not available on the household incomes of self-represented parties served by court support staff, it is likely that many self-represented parties



feel that they cannot afford to hire an attorney. Court support staff thus serve a critical function in ensuring that lower-income residents have access to justice through the court system.

**Legal Problem Categories of Patrons Assisted at Court
Service Centers and Public Information Desks**



The majority of patrons assisted at CSCs and PIDs had cases related to Children & Family issues (71%). Another 10% had cases related to Housing, 5% were related to Consumer & Fraud Protection, and 14% were related to other civil legal needs.



Services and Amenities Provided to Patrons at Court Service Centers and Public Information Desks

Service/Amenity	Total	%
Procedural Information	124,839	20%
Workspace	104,065	15%
Forms Assistance	94,290	16%
Forms Provided	86,278	14%
Copier	58,568	9%
Notary Service	40,833	6%
Miscellaneous	56,277	9%
Computer Use	29,966	5%
Other Languages spoken by staff	19,458	3%
Phone	9,659	2%
Fax	3,507	1%
Attorney Scanning	4,183	1%
Self-Rep Scanning No Assistance	195	0%
Self-Rep Scanning Assistance	422	0%
Language Telephone Services	615	0%
Total	633,155	100%

In 2024, CSCs and PIDs provided procedural information to 124,839 patrons, supplied a workspace for 104,065 patrons, assisted with legal forms for 94,290 patrons, and provided legal forms for 86,278 patrons. Supporting access to justice for speakers of languages other than English, CSCs and PIDs provided in-person or phone services in other languages for 20,073 patrons. CSCs and PIDs also provided computer use for 29,966 patrons, helping to address technological barriers to accessing justice.

Although court support staff are not permitted to provide legal advice to patrons, they can refer patrons to legal aid programs for advice and support. In 2024, CSC and PID staff referred **8,762** patrons to legal aid programs. They also referred 7,289 patrons to a law library.

Survey respondents provided some examples of how court support staff have helped them access justice:



“

“In my years-long experience I came across a few remarkable, notable court staff that helped me in the best ways they could, without stepping outside of job duties. Those professionals explained things as simple as possible, filed documents/motions without bias to my case, and made me aware I had a right to use the legal library in court houses.... If it had not been for some court staff who did their job to the best of their ability without overstepping, I'm not sure I would have succeeded in my fight for my children.”

“The court staff were always thorough in their answers and as helpful as they could be. They were also good at keeping clear boundaries when they could not help.”

“[Court staff were] helpful with forms and what to submit.”

”

Connecticut Law Librarians

The Connecticut Judicial Branch also operates Law Libraries at twelve courthouses across the state. These libraries are staffed by law librarians who assist the public with accessing legal references and resources. However, law librarians are not permitted to provide legal advice or interpretation of the law.

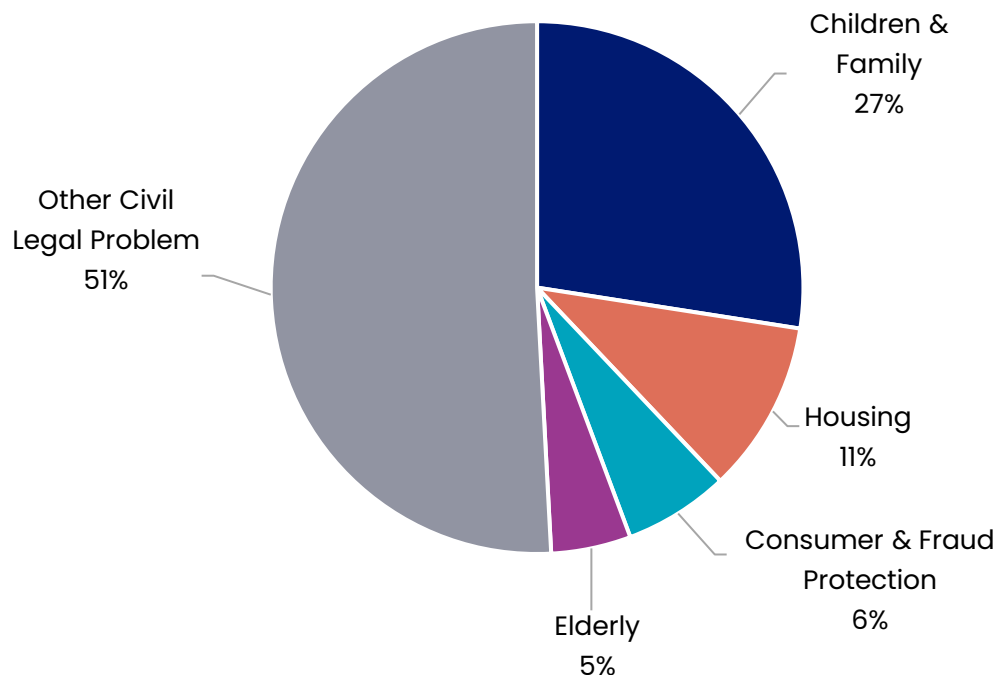
There are various ways by which law librarians are accessible to the general public. Individuals may visit a law library in person, submit a question to a law librarian using an online [“Ask us a Question” form](#) accessible from the “help” page on the Judicial Branch website, email a librarian at lawlibrarians@jud.ct.gov (via the “Ask a Librarian” link on the Judicial Branch “help” page or via the “Contact Us” or “Email Us” buttons on the Law Library website), engage in a live chat with a law librarian on the Judicial Branch website, or call a librarian.

In 2024, a total of **1,711** questions were submitted via the Judicial Branch’s “Ask us a Question” form that were judged by a law librarian to be originating from a member



of the general public or a self-represented party.⁶ This constituted 96% of all questions that were submitted in 2024. Law librarians also responded to **696** questions sent to lawlibrarians@jud.ct.gov that were judged to be from the general public or a self-represented party, constituting 79% of all questions received at this email address.

**Legal Problem Categories of Questions Submitted via
the Judicial Branch "Ask Us a Question" Form or Emailed
to lawlibrarians@jud.ct.gov**



Roughly one in four (27%) questions received by CT Law Librarians via the “Ask Us a Question” form or the lawlibrarians@jud.ct.gov email address were recorded as being related to Children & Family issues, 11% related to Housing, 6% related to Consumer & Fraud Protection (i.e., small claims), and 5% related to Elderly issues (i.e., probate). About half (51%) of questions received by law librarians related to other civil legal problems.

⁶ Law librarians recorded their subjective judgment of whether the person submitting the question was a member of the general public/self-represented or an attorney. This judgment was based on the individual’s email address (e.g., not a law firm or .gov email address) and the nature of the question.





In 2024, law librarians provided in-person assistance to **16,895** self-represented parties and members of the general public.

In 2024, law librarians provided in-person legal reference assistance to **16,895** individuals judged to be self-represented or members of the general public, representing 70% of

all individuals assisted in-person at CT law libraries over the year.⁷ Additionally, law librarians provided legal reference assistance regarding civil legal matters to **6,170** individuals by phone, **3,344** individuals by email (including direct emails to specific law librarians), and **229** individuals via live online chat.⁸

“

“The librarian in the law library and the person at the help desk are very helpful.”

”

Judicial Branch Online Self-Help and CT Law by Subject Resources

In addition to support provided by staff at Court Service Centers, Public Information Desks, and Law Libraries, the Judicial Branch provides access to a limited selection of self-help resources on their website and the CT Law Library maintains an online catalogue of legal resources organized by subject (e.g., adoption, bankruptcy, etc.).

The Judicial Branch’s self-help website provides access to legal forms grouped by subject, instructions on how to complete selected forms, educational videos and pamphlets about legal procedures, tips and FAQs for the self-represented, and links to information about a limited selection of topics including child support, landlord/tenant/housing issues, small claims, civil procedures, and court rules. In 2024, the Judicial Branch’s self-help homepage received a total of **38,514** visits.⁹

⁷ This count includes self-represented parties and members of the general public requesting assistance with both civil and criminal legal matters. The number of patrons assisted specifically with civil legal matters was not tracked separately by type of patron.

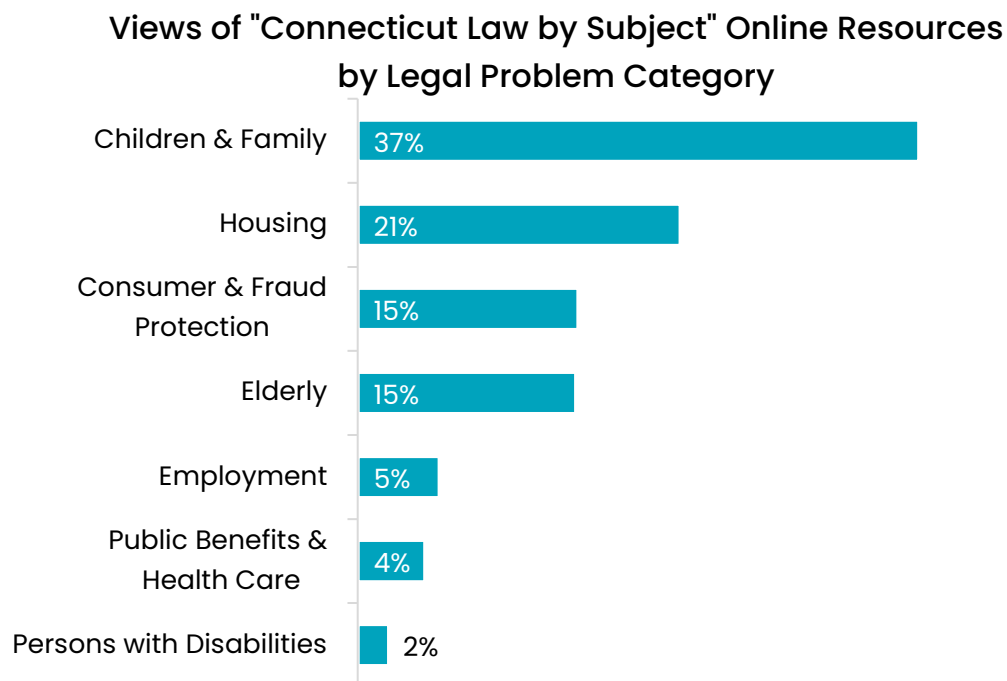
⁸ These counts include both self-represented parties and other individuals requesting assistance with civil legal matters, including attorneys, judges, court staff, and the general public. The number of requests for assistance specifically regarding civil legal matters was not tracked separately by the type of requestor.

⁹ The Judicial Branch did not provide data on the number of visits to specific self-help online resources for this report.



The CT Law Library's "Connecticut Law by Subject" page includes links to resources organized by legal subject, including CT Law Library research guides, legal practice guides, relevant websites, and relevant laws and regulations.

There were a total of **192,819** views of resources accessible on the CT Law Library's "Law by Subject" pages related to the areas of civil legal need included in this report. The highest number of views were in the Children & Family category (37%), followed by Housing (21%), and Consumer & Fraud Protection and Elderly issues (15% each). All other categories each accounted for 5% or fewer of total views. Notably, the "Law by Subject" pages did not include any resources related to immigration.



CTLawHelp.org

CTLawHelp.org provides plain-language online self-help resources intended to help Connecticut residents understand their legal rights and legal problems. The website is designed to be easy to navigate, with informational resources organized by 11 major categories (for example, benefits & social services, family & safety, homes & apartments).

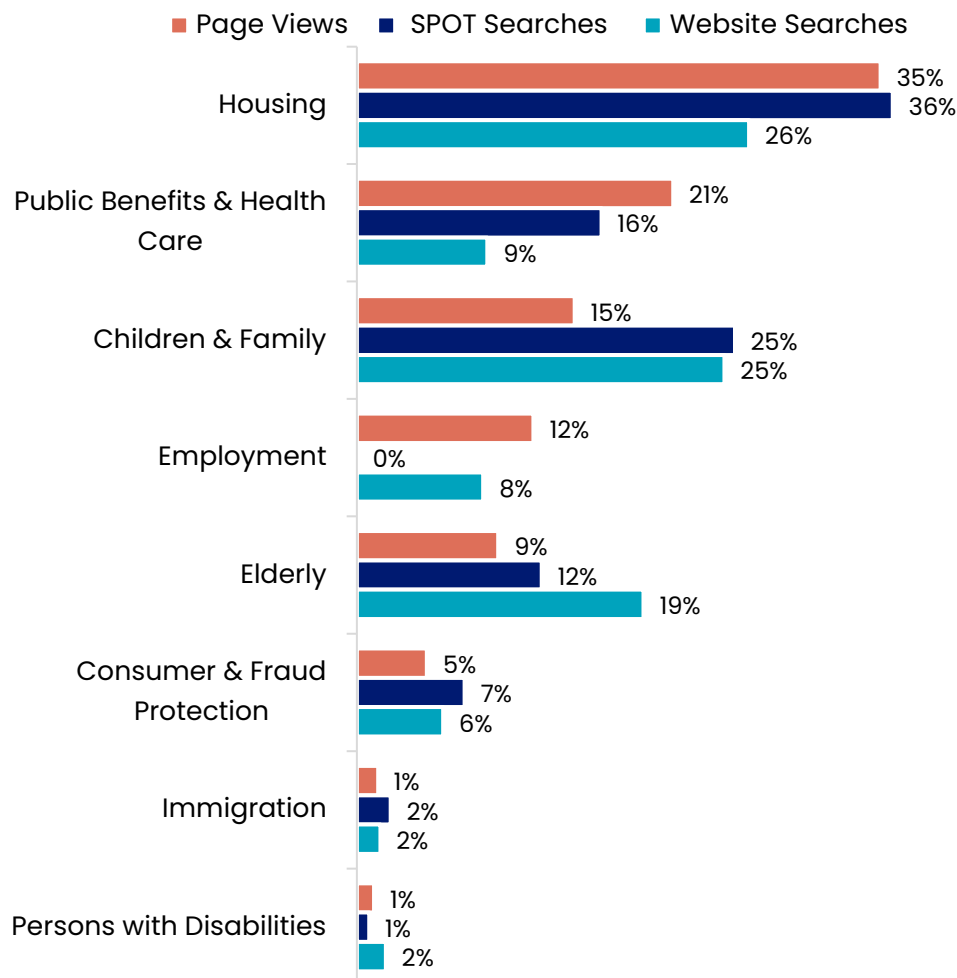




In addition to providing resources organized by major categories, the site features a Legal Help Finder search tool using a natural language processing algorithm called SPOT which allows users to simply describe their problem in their own words and be directed to the resources that are most likely to be relevant to their problem. Alternatively, users who don't want to use the SPOT search tool can answer a series of questions about their problem through the Legal Help Finder and get directed to the same resources. The site also features a standard website search bar. Finally, the site includes a live chat service staffed by law students who can help users locate the information they are looking for or get connected with a legal aid organization or attorney.

The CTLawHelp website was viewed nearly **678,000** times in 2024.

CTLawHelp Page Views, SPOT Searches, and Website Searches by Legal Problem Category





Pages with the highest number of views were related to Housing (35%), Public Benefits & Health Care (21%), and Children & Family (15%). This was followed by Employment (12%), Elderly (9%), and Consumer & Fraud Protection (5%). All other categories constituted 1% or fewer of total views. However, it is worth noting that Immigration-related pages accounted for 9% of pages viewed in Spanish. The most viewed category of Spanish-language pages was Public Benefits & Health Care (33%).

In 2024, a total of 16,755 searches were conducted through the Legal Help Finder's SPOT search tool.¹⁰ SPOT searches were most commonly related to Housing (36%), followed by Children & Family (25%), Public Benefits & Healthcare (16%), and Elderly (12%).

The top two categories of legal problems for searches entered via the standard search bar were the same as the SPOT searches: Housing and Children & Family. The next highest categories of searches were Elderly issues (about 19% of general search bar searches), Public Benefits & Health Care (9%), Employment (8%), and Consumer Fraud & Protection (6%).¹¹ It is possible that the higher frequency of searches for legal problems related to Elderly issues could arise from a greater difficulty of locating these resources via other approaches and/or a preference for using the standard search bar among older adults.

¹⁰ SPOT is an AI-powered legal problem identification tool developed and run by Suffolk University that uses natural language processing to identify the most likely legal problem that matches the problem description.

¹¹ Search terms entered into the standard search bar were categorized by a machine learning algorithm implemented using Python.





About the Data

This section utilizes administrative data provided by Connecticut's eleven legal aid programs on the clients they served during the 2024 calendar year. This includes programs' 2024 Grantee Caseload Annual Reports to Connecticut Bar Foundation and supplemental case data provided by all legal aid programs for this report. Cases opened by SLS that were referred to another legal aid program for service are excluded from the total case counts across providers to avoid double-counting these cases. Program-level data were compiled and analyzed by CTData.

Findings regarding the legal aid hotlines are derived from CTData's analyses of raw Zoom call center data shared by SLS for this report.

This section also utilizes data provided by the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch on services provided to patrons at Court Service Centers, Public Information Desks, and Law Libraries located at courthouses across the state. These data include records of patrons assisted in-person at these locations, as well as questions answered by Law Librarians by email, phone, or live online chats.

Findings regarding the utilization of online resources are derived from web analytics data provided by the Judicial Department and CTLawHelp.

Some findings reported in this section draw from interviews that CTData conducted with legal aid providers about their work.

CHAPTER 8

Gaps and Unmet Legal Needs





8. Gaps and Unmet Legal Needs

In Connecticut's Access to Justice system, eligibility factors such as geography, income, and case type help guide how legal aid services are delivered and the level of legal service provided in order to prioritize support for residents with the greatest need. While this guidance can sometimes limit access, what is clear is that the demand for legal aid is strong—and far greater than current resources allow—highlighting both the vital role legal aid services play in communities and the need to expand their reach.

Residents' Experiences Seeking Legal Help

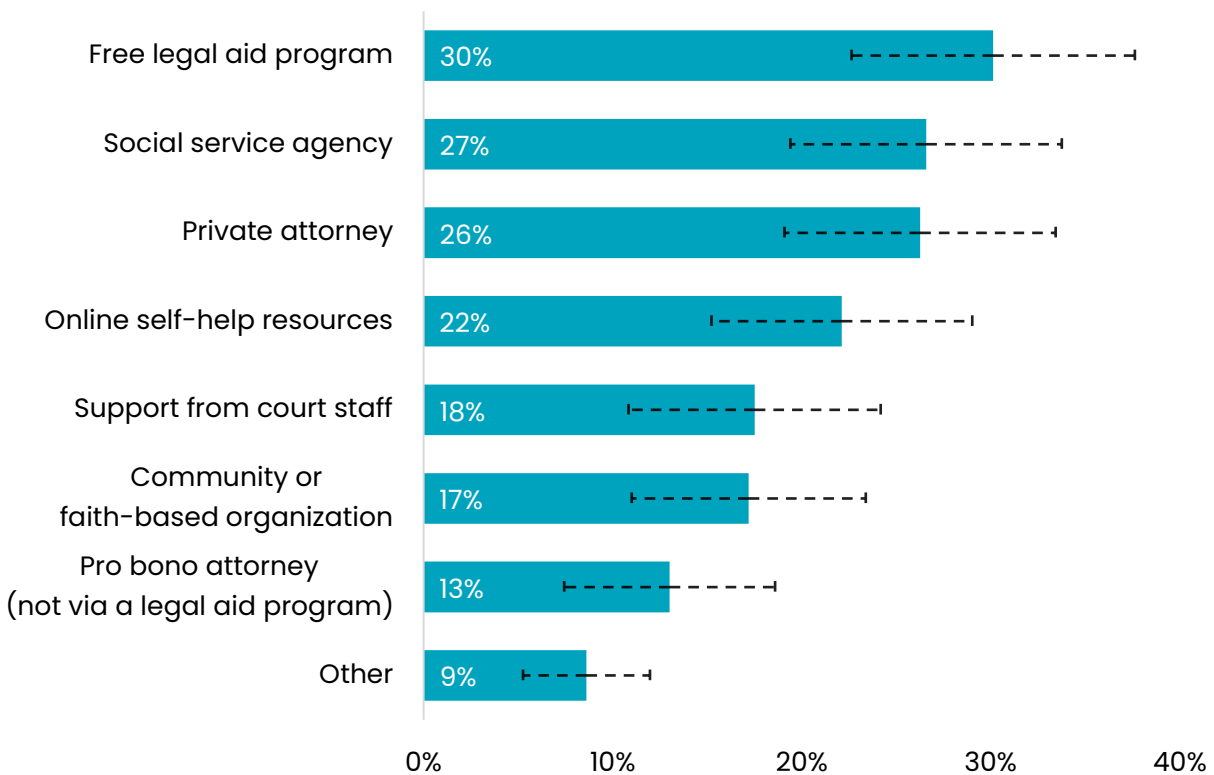
The Survey revealed that, among those who experienced a civil legal need, about three in four (74%) sought help with resolving the issue.¹² This means that about one in four low-income residents (26%) do *not* seek help when they experience a civil legal need.

26% of Connecticut's low-income residents do not seek help when they experience a civil legal need.

¹² Respondents were asked whether they or their family member sought help for their most recent civil legal issue. 90% Confidence Interval: 66% – 81%.

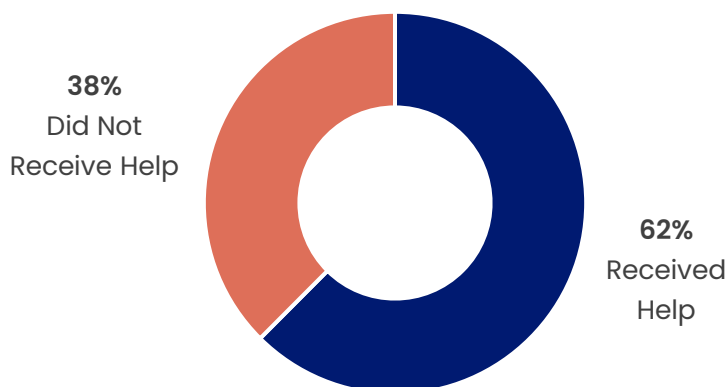


Sources of Help Sought in Response to the Most Recent Civil Legal Need



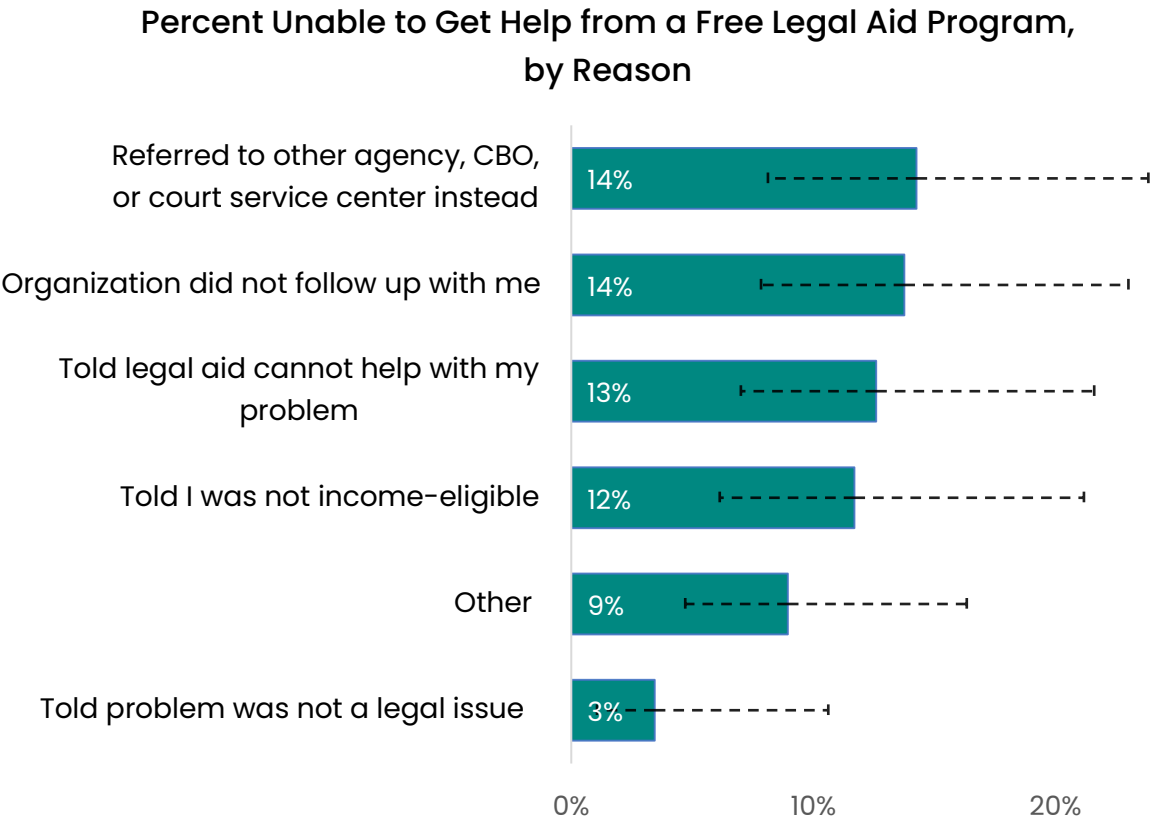
About three in ten low-income residents who experience a civil legal need try to get help from a free legal aid program (30%), a social service agency (27%), or a private attorney (26%). About one in five access online self-help resources (22%) or try to get help from court staff (18%).

Among Those Who Sought Legal Aid ...





Among the 81 survey respondents who sought help from a free legal aid program for their most recent civil legal need, a majority (62%) reported that they were able to get help from legal aid.¹³ However, this means that **nearly two in five (38%) tried and were unable to get help.**



About 14% of those who sought legal aid said they were referred to another social services agency, community-based organization, or court service center instead. Fourteen percent (14%) said the organization did not follow up with them, 13% said they were told legal aid could not help with their problem, and 12% said they were told they were not eligible for free help due to income requirements.¹⁴

¹³ The data are weighted to match the geographic distribution of Connecticut’s low-income population by county. 90% Confidence Interval: 51% – 73%.

¹⁴ Respondents were invited to select all responses that apply, so some respondents may have selected more than one reason why they were unable to get help.





The **legal aid hotline data** also revealed some barriers to access for those who sought legal aid:

- **In 2024, more than 25,000 calls (nearly one in five incoming calls) were received while the hotlines were closed, and another 9,000 were received during emergency-only hours and did not reach a screener.**
- **Nearly 31,000 calls – 46% of all calls that reached a queue to speak with a screener or operator – were automatically disconnected due to high call volume.**

The volume of calls received outside of the hotline’s operating hours or disconnected due to high call volume highlights the need to extend the hotline’s capacity to meet the demand.

Geographic Disparities in Access to Legal Aid

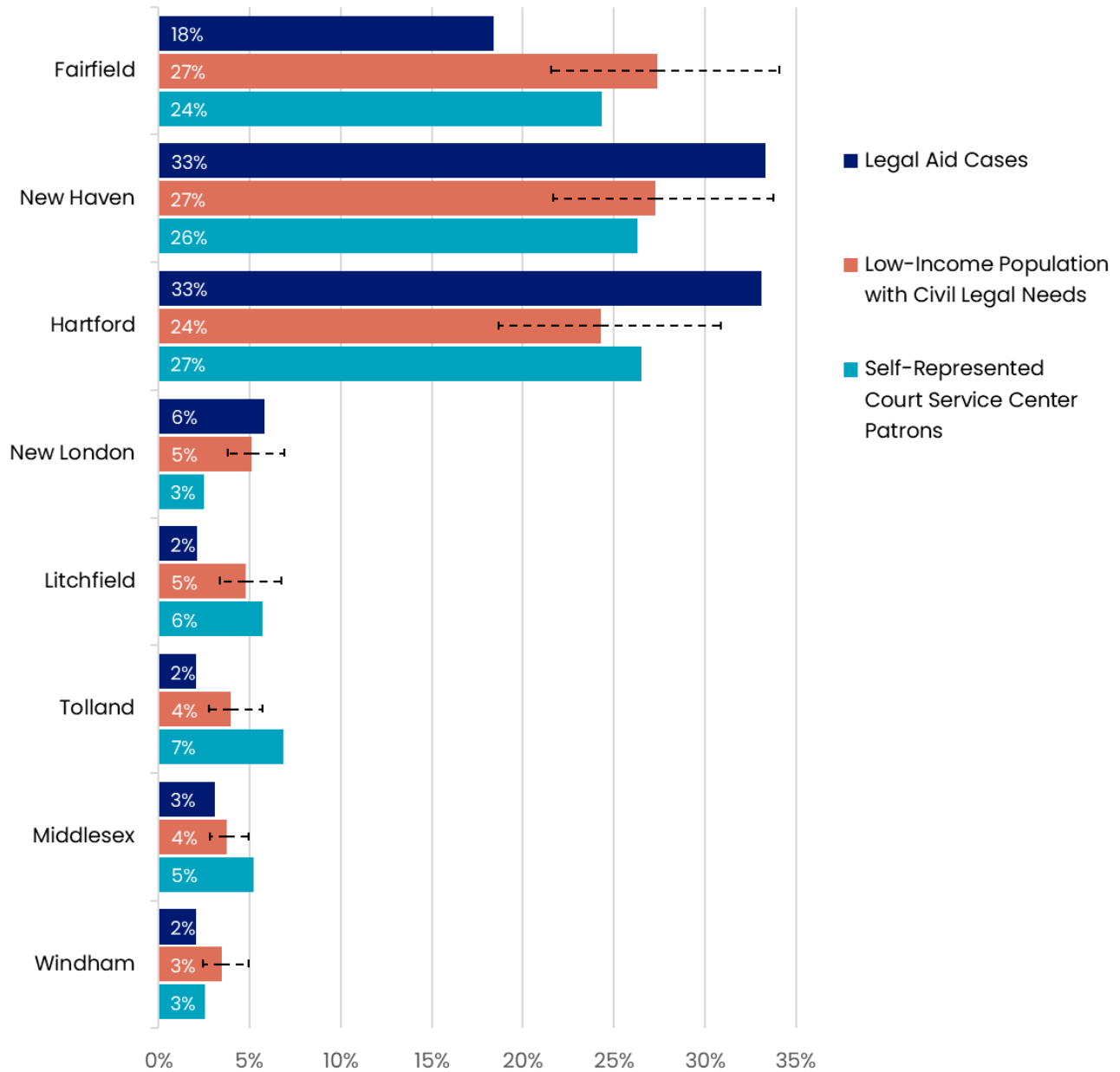
Each legal service provider has a geographic boundary they serve; some providers serve the entire state, and others serve specific regions or towns. The physical locations of legal service providers can also present barriers to in-person services for those who do not live near their offices.

One way to look at geographic disparities in access to legal aid services is to compare the distribution of Connecticut’s low-income population with civil legal needs (from the Survey-based population estimates) to the distribution of legal aid cases served by Connecticut’s legal aid providers. Geographic areas constituting a greater percentage of the population with civil legal needs compared to their proportion of legal aid cases indicate relative service gaps. The geographic distribution of self-represented patrons at Court Service Centers throughout the state can serve as another estimate of civil legal need.





County of Residence of Legal Aid Clients vs. Estimated Prevalence of Civil Legal Needs¹⁵



¹⁵ Data for legal aid cases are from administrative case data provided by Connecticut's legal aid providers. Data on the low-income population with civil legal needs are from the Survey, weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's low-income population by county and demographic characteristics. Error bars represent 90% confidence intervals on the Survey estimates. Data on self-represented Court Service Center patrons are from administrative records provided by the Judicial Branch, aggregated by the county in which the CSC is located.



This analysis suggests potential **gaps in legal aid services for residents in Fairfield, Litchfield, Tolland, Middlesex, and Windham Counties.**

- Residents of Fairfield County represent 18% of all legal aid cases but they constitute an estimated 27% of the population of low-income adults with civil legal needs in Connecticut. In addition, courthouses in Fairfield County receive 24% of all self-represented patrons assisted at Court Service Centers.
- Residents of Litchfield County represent 2% of all legal aid cases but an estimated 5% of the population of low-income adults with civil legal needs, and courthouses in Litchfield County receive 6% of all self-represented patrons assisted at Court Service Centers.
- Residents of Tolland County represent 2% of all legal aid cases but an estimated 4% of the population of low-income adults with civil legal needs, and courthouses in Tolland County receive 7% of all self-represented patrons assisted at Court Service Centers.
- Residents of Middlesex County represent 3% of all legal aid cases but an estimated 4% of the population of low-income adults with civil legal needs, and courthouses in Middlesex County receive 5% of all self-represented patrons assisted at Court Service Centers.
- Residents of Windham County represent 2% of all legal aid cases but an estimated 3% of the population of low-income adults with civil legal needs. Courthouses in Windham County receive 3% of all self-represented patrons assisted at Court Service Centers.

In contrast, residents of Hartford and New Haven Counties make up a greater percentage of Connecticut's legal aid cases relative to their estimated percentage of the total population of Connecticut's low-income adults with civil legal needs. This difference may reflect the way legal aid services are organized across the state, as Hartford and New Haven Counties are served by legal aid programs dedicated to those areas, while other regions are served through broader, multi-county service structures.





The largest gap between the estimated demand for and receipt of legal aid is in Fairfield County.

In accordance with this finding, one Survey respondent noted:

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“I wish there were more legal centers/clinics that offer free legal advice closer to Stamford. I had to drive to Hartford to get my advice – but it was well worth it.”

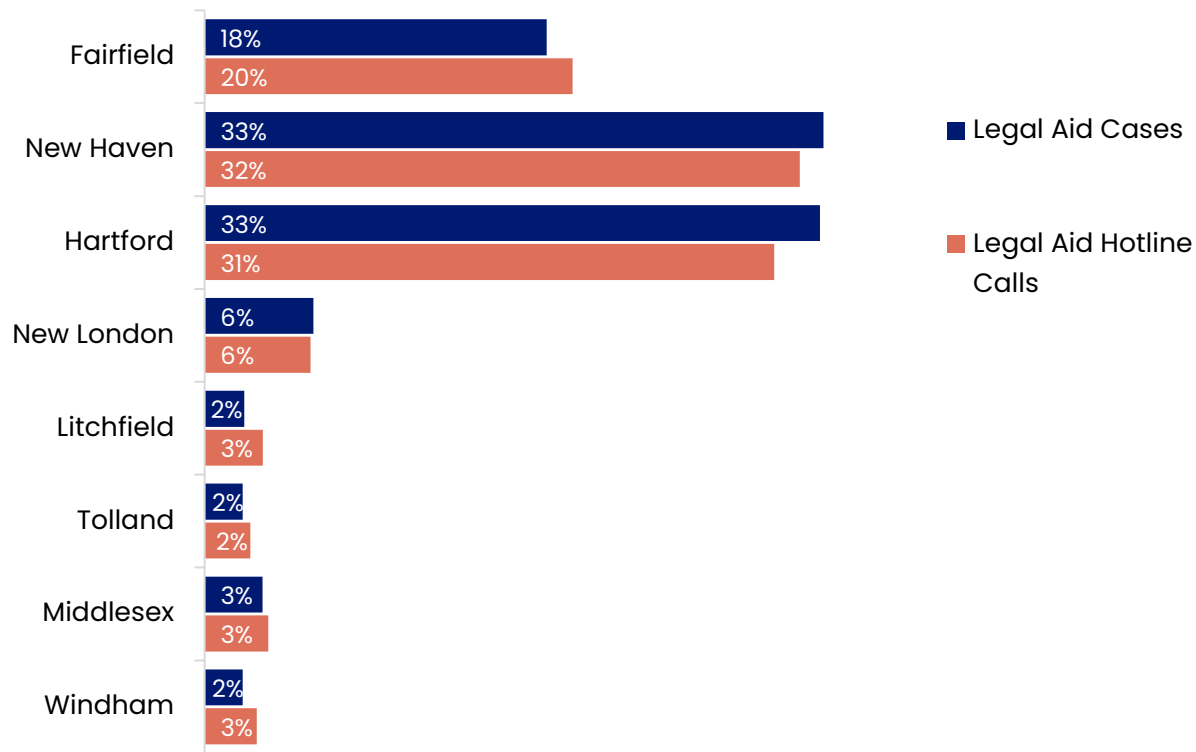
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Another approach to examining gaps in legal aid services by county is to examine the distribution of callers to the legal aid hotlines in comparison to legal aid cases by the client’s county of residence. However, it is important to remember that not all individuals who experience civil legal needs will call the legal aid hotline, and calling the hotline is not the only means by which Connecticut’s low-income residents access legal aid.





County of Residence of Legal Aid Clients vs. Legal Aid Hotline Calls¹⁶



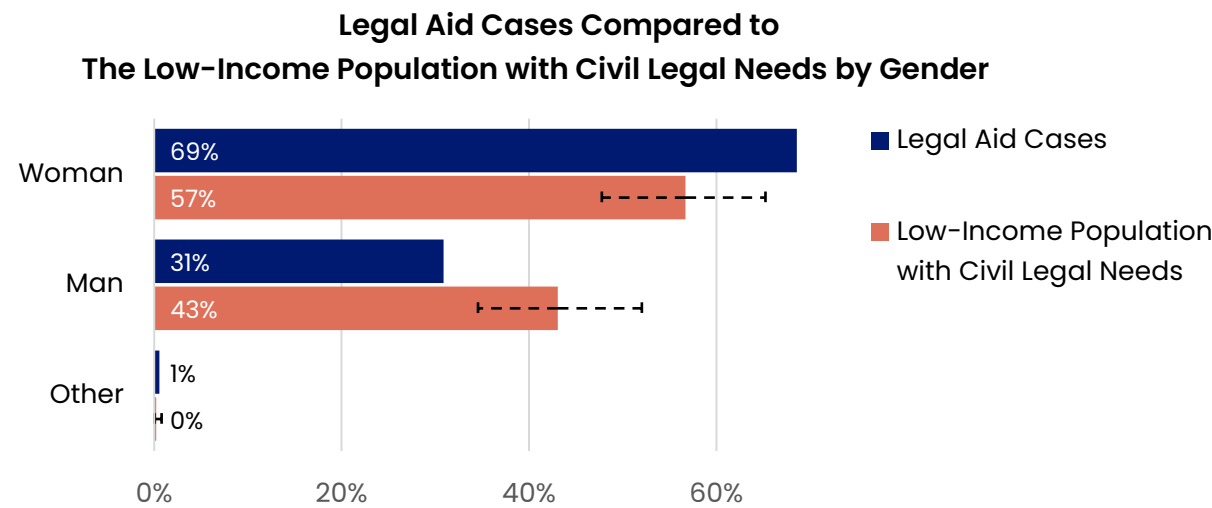
Residents of New Haven and Hartford Counties made up a slightly larger percentage of legal aid cases (33% each) compared to their percentage of all legal aid hotline calls (32% and 31%, respectively). Conversely, residents of Fairfield County made up a slightly smaller percentage of legal aid cases (18%) compared to their percentage of all legal aid hotline calls (20%). These disparities are in the same direction as, but much smaller than, those found when comparing the distribution of legal aid cases to Survey-based estimates of the prevalence of civil legal needs among Connecticut's low-income population by county. This analysis further hints that there may be gaps in legal aid services for residents outside of Hartford and New Haven Counties, in particular for those in Fairfield County. However, this analysis also suggests that some of these gaps may be due in part to differences in the likelihood of seeking legal aid.

¹⁶ County of residence for hotline callers is based on the zip codes they entered during the automated phone tree at the beginning of the call. Callers to both the main hotline and the RTC hotline are included. Zip code data were missing for 51% of all incoming hotline calls in 2024.



Access to Legal Aid for Vulnerable Populations

Disparities by Gender

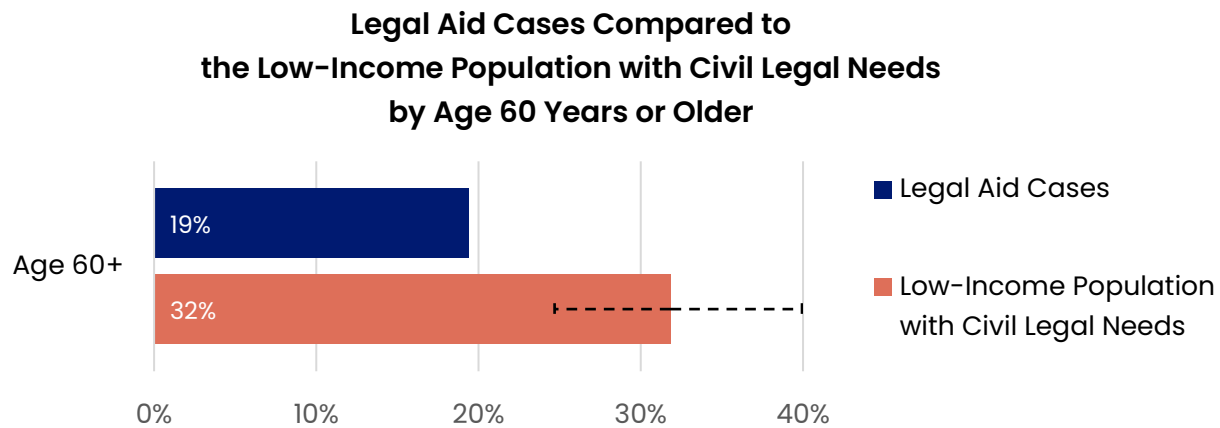


Women make up about 57% of Connecticut’s low-income population with civil legal needs, but they account for nearly 70% of legal aid cases. This means women are more likely than men to receive help from legal aid. The Survey data also show that men are less likely to use legal aid when they face a civil legal problem—only about one in four men reported using free legal aid compared to about two in five women. However, it is important to note that the Survey did not ask about the severity of the civil legal need. It is possible that women are more likely to experience serious legal problems that require intervention, such as eviction filings, where women are disproportionately affected.¹⁷

¹⁷ CTData Collaborative (2024). *Connecticut’s Housing Crisis: Analyzing Eviction Disparities and Policy Impacts*. <https://www.ctdata.org/evictions-report-2024>



Disparities by Age

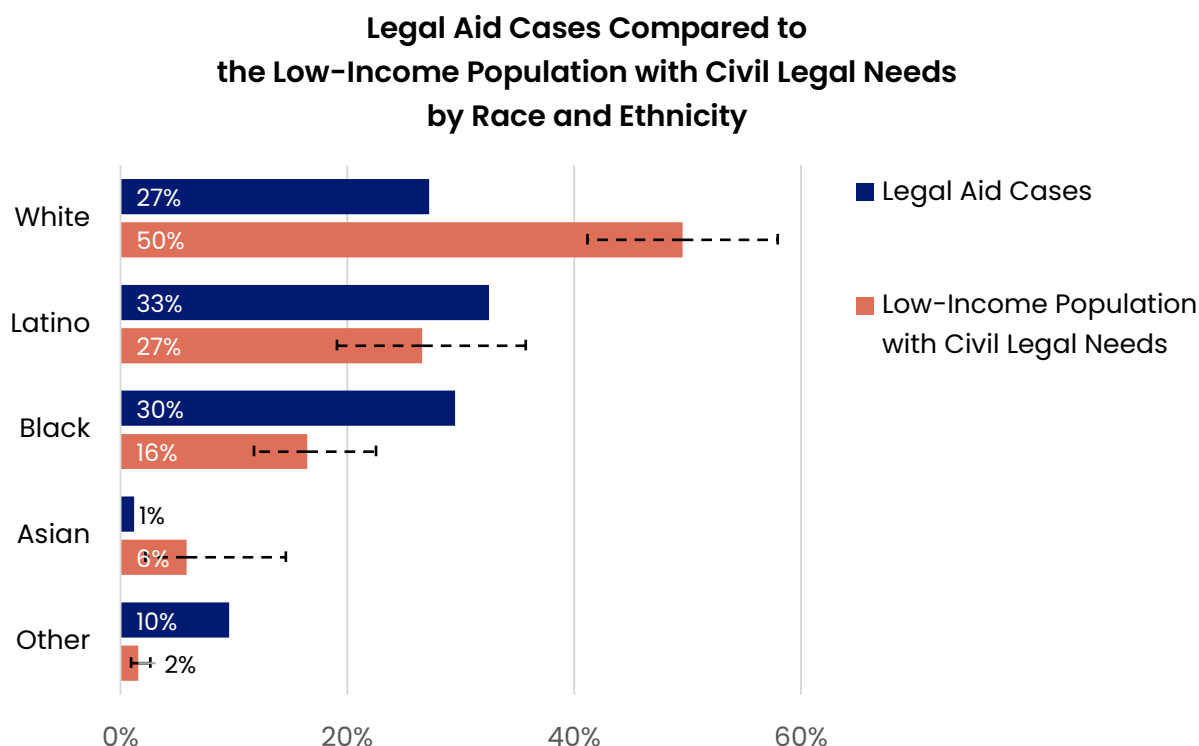


Older adults over the age of 60 account for 19% of all legal aid cases in Connecticut but make up 32% of the estimated population of low-income residents with civil legal needs. This suggests that **there is a gap between the demand for and receipt of legal aid for older adults**. It is possible that technology and mobility challenges may play a role in this gap.

In contrast, analyses of Survey data on the self-reported use of legal aid services do not provide evidence for a difference in the likelihood that older versus younger adults who have experienced a civil legal need access free legal aid. The older adults who responded to the online survey may tend to be more comfortable with technology, which may facilitate their access to legal aid.



Disparities by Race and Ethnicity



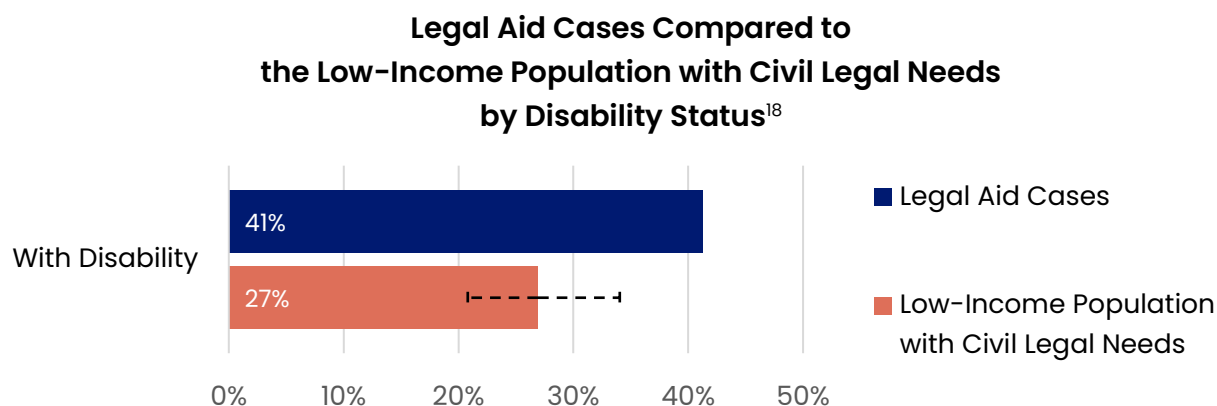
Racial disparities in service delivery reflect both historic inequities and present-day barriers. According to the Survey, although White non-Hispanic adults make up roughly half of Connecticut's low-income population with civil legal needs, they represent only about one-quarter of legal aid clients. Black and Latino residents, by contrast, each account for a smaller share of the low-income population with civil legal needs but each make up approximately one-third of legal aid cases. Asian residents are markedly underrepresented, comprising 6% of the low-income population with civil legal needs but just 1% of cases.

These differences cannot be understood without acknowledging the long history of racially discriminatory housing, employment, and lending practices that have shaped where people live, the stability of their housing and jobs, and their exposure to civil legal problems. Generations of structural disadvantage have left Black and Latino communities more vulnerable to acute legal crises, such as eviction or benefits termination, that meet legal aid's urgency thresholds and drive service demand. At the same time, the data suggest that White and Asian residents with legal needs may encounter different barriers. Lower awareness of free legal services, cultural



stigma around seeking help, or limited language access may dampen their use of legal aid.

Disparities by Disability Status



Individuals with disabilities face compounded civil legal challenges and are overrepresented among those receiving legal aid. Forty-one percent (41%) of Connecticut’s legal aid clients report a physical or mental disability, compared with findings from the Survey which indicate an estimated 27% of the state’s low-income residents with civil legal needs have a reported disability. This striking difference underscores how disability both creates and magnifies legal vulnerabilities. Barriers to stable employment, accessible housing, and adequate healthcare, rooted in long-standing patterns of economic exclusion and insufficient accommodation, leave many individuals with disabilities more exposed to civil legal crises, particularly in housing.

Survey data reinforce this pattern. Nearly half (45%) of low-income residents with a disability who experienced a civil legal need reported ever using free legal aid, compared with 35% of those without a disability. While this difference is not statistically significant due to sample size, it points toward a meaningful trend: people with disabilities are more likely to turn to legal aid when problems arise, suggesting both higher need and effective outreach.

¹⁸ Twenty-three percent of legal aid clients declined to report their disability status. These individuals are included in the denominator for calculating the percent of all legal aid cases that served a client with a disability. Fifty-three percent of those clients who reported their disability status were recorded as having a disability.



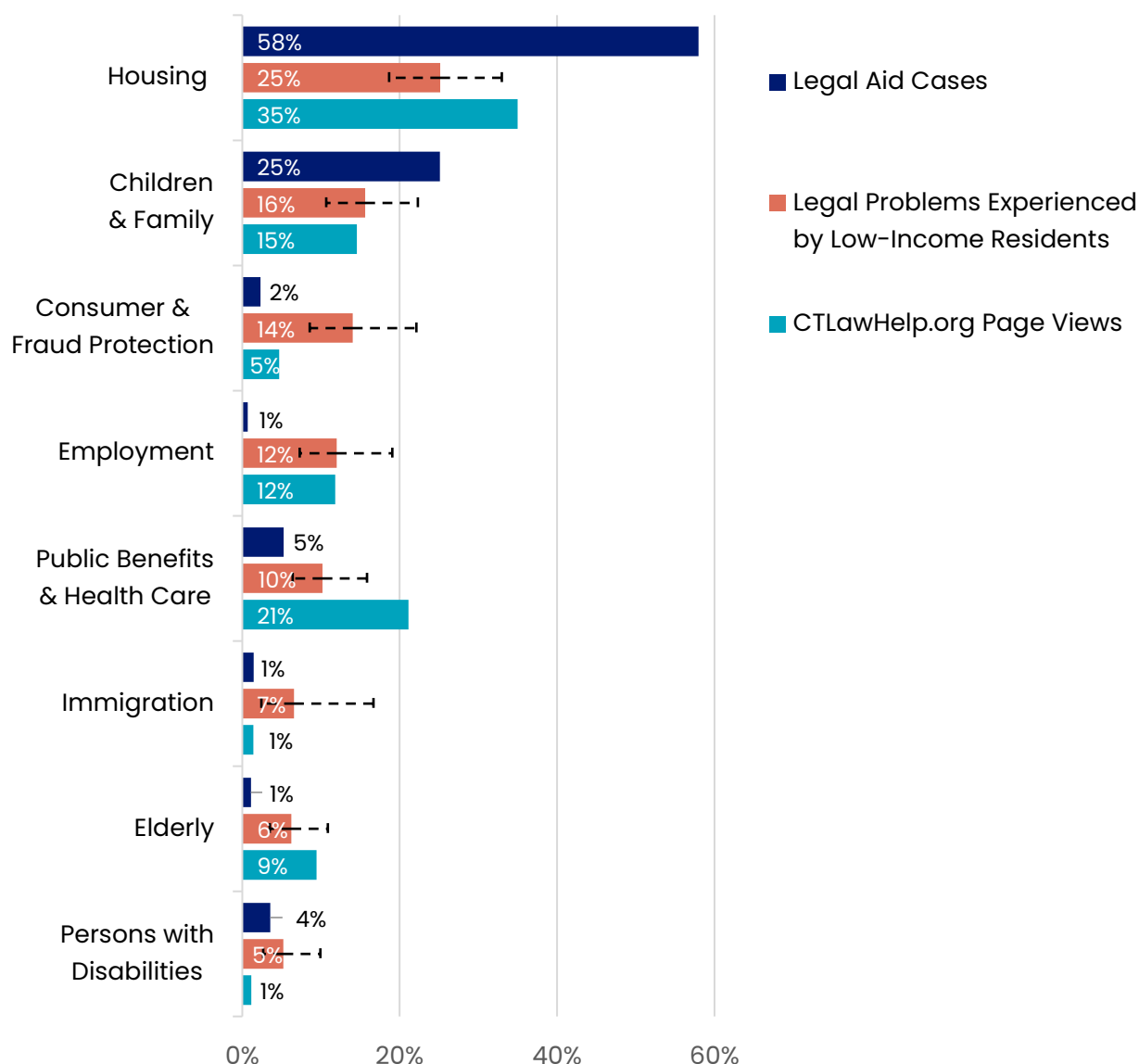
These findings highlight the critical importance of collecting and reporting disability status as a core demographic variable. Disability intersects with poverty, race, and family structure in ways that compound disadvantage. Ensuring robust, accessible legal aid, particularly in high-impact areas such as housing, advances equity and affirms the right of individuals with disabilities to fully participate in society.





Disparities in Access to Legal Aid by Type of Legal Problem

Legal Problem Areas of Legal Aid Cases vs. Legal Problem Prevalence Estimates¹⁹



Nearly 60% of legal aid cases were for Housing-related issues, and another 25% were related to Children & Family issues. Other areas of legal need, such as Consumer &

¹⁹ Legal problems experienced by low-income residents are Survey-based estimates of the most recent civil legal need, among those who ever experienced any civil legal needs. The data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's low-income adult population by county of residence and demographic characteristics.



Fraud Protection, Employment, or Public Benefits & Health Care, each accounted for 5% or fewer of all legal aid cases. However, the Survey suggested a broader distribution of areas of civil legal need. Among those who had ever experienced a civil legal need, Consumer & Fraud Protection, Employment, and Public Benefits & Health Care were each the most recent area of civil legal need for at least 10% of respondents. In addition, 7% of respondents said their most recent need related to Immigration and 6% to Elderly issues. This suggests that **a larger proportion of civil legal needs related to Consumer & Fraud Protection, Employment, Public Benefits & Healthcare, Immigration, and Elderly issues are not being served by legal aid.**

The CTLawHelp.org web analytic data also showed that a greater proportion of views of online self-help resources were related to Consumer & Fraud Protection, Employment, Public Benefits & Healthcare, and Elderly issues, compared to the percentage of legal aid cases related to these issues. This further suggests that there is a high rate of civil legal needs in these areas that are not receiving legal aid services. The availability of online self-help resources in these areas is critical to ensuring that all individuals at a minimum have access to plain-language information about their legal rights and how to defend them.

It is possible that these legal problem areas are not as well covered by legal aid service providers due to a lower proportion of legal aid organizations and attorneys specializing in these areas. Indeed, five of the eleven legal aid organizations in Connecticut focus specifically on issues related to Housing or Children & Family.²⁰

It is also possible that individuals experiencing these types of civil legal needs are less likely to reach out to legal aid for help. Indeed, examining the percentage of the main hotline calls that pertain to each civil legal need, it is apparent that for Consumer & Fraud Protection, Employment, and Elderly issues, calls to the hotline were lower than the Survey-based estimated prevalence of civil legal needs in these areas. It is possible that individuals experiencing these issues may be less likely to see them as a civil legal need that warrants a legal remedy. It is also possible that individuals experiencing housing-related civil legal needs are particularly likely to reach out for

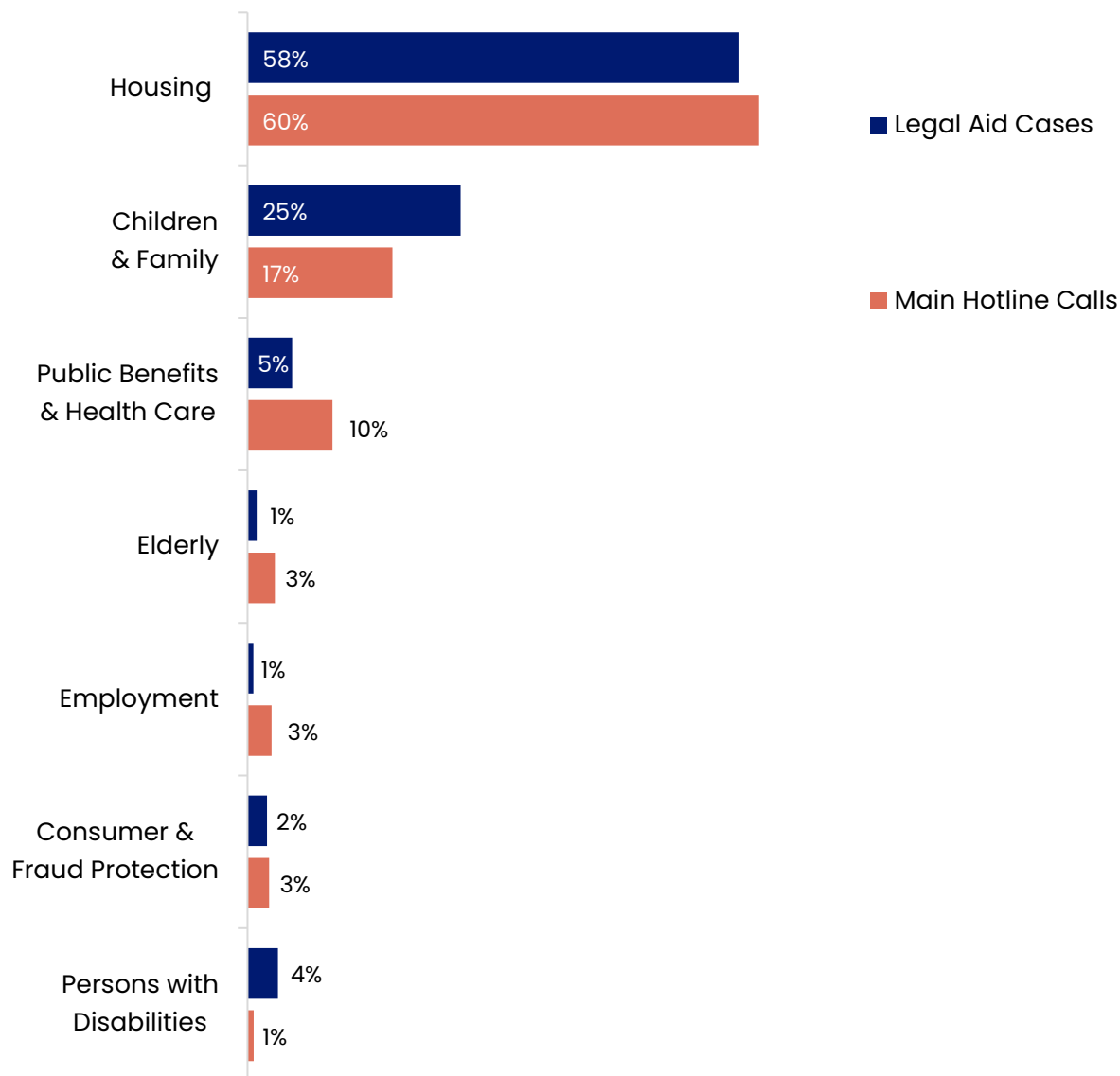
²⁰ It is important to note that this does not mean that the demand for legal aid related to Housing and Children & Family issues in 2024 was met, as the analyses focus on percentages of respondents' most recent civil legal needs by area of need rather than the estimated *number* of Connecticut's low-income residents who experienced each area of need in the past year. These numbers cannot be estimated because Survey respondents were not asked about which civil legal needs they had experienced *in the past year*.





legal aid – thereby increasing their relative prevalence among both hotline callers and legal aid cases – due to the severe consequences of losing access to housing.

Legal Problem Areas of Legal Aid Cases vs. Main Hotline Callers²¹



²¹ Legal problem areas of main hotline calls are based on the legal problem category that callers selected during the phone tree at the beginning of the call, supplemented by legal problem codes recorded by the screener where available. Legal problem data are missing for 52% of all incoming main hotline calls. Incoming calls to the RTC hotline are excluded to avoid skewing the hotline call data toward housing issues. Legal problems related to immigration are not included because immigration issues are not eligible for services via the hotline.



Comparing the distribution of legal problems among main hotline calls compared to those of legal aid clients also revealed a somewhat broader distribution of civil legal needs among the hotline calls, particularly for problems related to Public Benefits & Healthcare (10% of hotline calls vs. 5% of legal aid cases). There were also a slightly greater percentage of hotline calls dealing with Elderly issues – specifically Power of Attorney (3% of calls vs. 1% of cases) – and Employment (3% of calls vs. 1% of cases).

In interviews, some legal aid providers shared that capacity increases are needed in the immigration, education, and employment practice areas.

From the Survey-based estimates, **nearly one in five residents (19%) who chose not to seek help from legal aid for their most recent civil legal issue reported this was because they did not believe that legal aid provides help for their issue.** Additionally, of the 30 Survey respondents who tried but were unable to access help from a legal aid program, 36% were told their problem was not one that legal aid could help with.

Some Survey respondents shared their frustrations with feeling that their legal problems were not prioritized by legal aid providers:

“

“They are overwhelmed and can only help those facing eviction and have been served papers. There's no help for HUD ignoring you for years and discrimination from landlords because I'm on Social Security.”

“A problem all around CT – used to have a lot of options for people with disabilities, but it doesn't seem that way anymore ... not much protection and advocacy specifically post-COVID...”

“[Said they're] not taking [bankruptcy] cases. Every one of them does not do bankruptcy.”

“These agencies sound good but were not able to help [with] my type [of] case. Many people are frustrated with narrow case type acceptance.”

”



Barriers to Access

Awareness

The Survey revealed that lack of awareness of free legal aid programs was the top reason why Connecticut's low-income residents did not seek help from legal aid when they experienced a civil legal issue. **More than one third (35%) of those who did not seek help from legal aid for their most recent civil legal issue said this was because they were not familiar with legal aid.**

Overall, **more than half of Survey respondents (58%) said they had not been aware of the services provided by legal aid programs before responding to the Survey.**

Even among those who had used legal aid, about one in four (26%) reported that they were uncertain of which legal aid program they should go to.

Many Survey respondents' write-in comments also pointed toward a lack of familiarity with legal aid:

“

“How would you find any of these services??”

“Where do I find these organizations?”

“[I] would like to see more of this information put out there so more of us could be aware of it.”

“I had no idea that free legal aid exists... Will definitely look into free legal advice and whatever help I can get...”

“...I live in a senior complex, government subsidized... Most of us can't afford a lawyer but I would say probably 95% or more of the residents wouldn't know where to start to find legal aid help.”

”



Income

Income eligibility helps to prioritize no-cost legal aid for the poorest residents, but having income above 125% of poverty level does not mean that the individual or family has access to an attorney in the private bar. This notable gap in access was referenced in interviews with several legal aid providers. Legal aid providers shared concern about an “income gap” that affects individuals and families whose income falls just above the threshold for free legal services, but who still lack the resources to hire a private attorney. One provider explained, “People are begging for assistance, but they don’t always qualify.” This gap leaves a significant portion of the population without access to essential legal support, that if not met, might send people into greater poverty.

The Survey reveals that **roughly one in four low-income Connecticut residents (26%) who do not seek help from a legal aid program after experiencing a civil legal need do so because they do not believe that they qualify for legal aid.** In addition, of the 30 respondents who reported that they tried but were unable to get help from a legal aid program for their most recent issue, one-third (33%) were not eligible due to their income.

The hotline call data show that there were at least 2,046 callers who were denied legal aid services due to being over-income in 2024 (10% of all callers whose income eligibility is known). Moreover, as evident from the Survey responses, many individuals don’t even try accessing legal aid because they do not believe they will be income-eligible.

Nearly all Survey respondents (94%) said that, assuming they were eligible, they would be “somewhat” or “very” likely to use free legal aid if they had a non-criminal legal issue in the future. In contrast, only 30% of respondents who had experienced a civil legal need reported having ever used legal aid.



Language

More than one in four (27%) of Connecticut's adults who are living below the federal poverty level speak a language other than English in the home.²² The availability of legal aid services, civil legal information, and court support services in languages other than English is crucial for ensuring that all of Connecticut's low-income residents – regardless of their fluency in English – are able to navigate the legal system and stand up for their rights.

On the Survey, four percent (4%) of those who had used legal aid services in Connecticut reported that they experienced language-related difficulties while accessing these services. Twelve percent (12%) of Survey respondents who had used legal aid services reported that they spoke a language other than English in the home. This suggests that the majority of those who speak a language other than English were able to access help in a language with which they are comfortable. The relatively low prevalence of language-related barriers is a testament to the efforts of legal aid organizations to provide help in the languages spoken by the populations they are serving.

As further evidence of the commitment of Connecticut's legal aid organizations to minimizing language barriers to justice, the self-help resources on CTLawHelp.org are translated into Spanish, Polish, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, and Korean. Web analytic data from CTLawHelp reveal that approximately 8% of visitors from the Connecticut area in 2024 had their browser's default language set to Spanish, and fewer than 1% of visitors had a default browser language set to each of the other languages into which the site is translated. The only other default browser languages tracked for 30 or more site visitors from the Connecticut area in 2024 were French (137 visitors), Ukrainian (54 visitors), and Italian (34 visitors).²³

Court Service Centers also play an important role in minimizing language barriers to justice. In 2024, staff at Connecticut's Court Service Centers and Public Information Desks provided assistance in languages other than English to 19,458 patrons, and an additional 615 patrons were provided with telephone-based language assistance.

²² Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, Table B16009.

²³ The analyses of CTLawHelp.org web analytics data were restricted to users who were geolocated to Connecticut or an immediately neighboring state to account for the low precision of geolocation based on IP addresses.





Technology

Lack of internet access severely restricts individuals' access to information about the law and their civil rights, legal procedures, the availability of legal aid, and communications related to their civil legal needs. While CTLawHelp.org and the Judicial Branch's online self-help resources provide a wealth of legal information, this information is not easily accessible to all. Eleven percent (11%) of Connecticut's adults who are living in poverty lack any internet access in their home.²⁴

The elderly face particular challenges in accessing legal information online, as they are less likely to have an internet-connected device in the home and are more likely to have difficulty navigating online resources.

An internet accessibility survey of patrons at Court Service Centers across the state, conducted by the Judicial Branch, revealed that about 5% of patrons have no access to the internet at home. Although this is a relatively small percentage of all patrons, this underscores the important role that Court Service Centers and Law Libraries play in helping to ensure that all residents have access to legal information and forms.

On the Judicial Branch's internet accessibility survey, over half of patrons (61%) reported only having internet access on a mobile device. Similarly, web analytic data reveal that over half of visitors to CTLawHelp.org accessed the site on a mobile device (59%). This highlights the importance of online self-help resources being available in mobile-friendly formats.

“

“The digital divide still impacts casework... [causing] delays, deadlines are missed, impacting how the case advances.”

– Connecticut Legal Aid Provider

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²⁴ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata.





Challenges Faced by Legal Aid Providers

Limited Financial Resources

Closing the access-to-justice gap will require an increase in financial resources for legal aid organizations to support hiring and retaining more qualified attorneys and expanding service provision. In interviews, many legal aid providers expressed that they struggle to attract and retain qualified attorneys, especially given the difficulty of offering competitive salaries. Providers expressed frustration with the gap between their salary levels and those offered by the private sector. Challenges with compensation limit recruitment and retention, which impacts the services available to clients.

Inconsistent Data Governance & Processes

Effective data governance and processes are essential for legal aid organizations to understand their impact, advocate for their clients, and secure resources that would allow them to close the access-to-justice gaps discussed above. However, interviews with legal aid providers revealed inconsistencies and challenges in how legal aid organizations in Connecticut collect, manage, and utilize data.

Several providers expressed a desire to use data more effectively to support revenue cultivation and development, but suggested there were not enough resources or expertise to advance their data work. Interviews revealed a tension between the need for data to demonstrate impact and the resource constraints faced by legal aid organizations. Collecting and analyzing data requires time, staff, and financial resources that often come at the expense of providing direct services to clients.





About the Data

Data on the characteristics and experiences of Connecticut's low-income residents who have experienced a civil legal need are from the Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs ("the Survey"). There were 297 Survey respondents who reported ever having experienced a civil legal need, excluding those who responded to the Survey link distributed by Statewide Legal Services (who are excluded from the sample to avoid bias). For analyses using this sample, the data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's population of adults with household incomes below 200% of FPL by county of residence, gender, age, education, race and ethnicity, disability status, military service, and income range.

There were 76 Survey respondents who tried to get help from a legal aid program for their most recent civil legal need, excluding those who responded to the Survey link distributed by Statewide Legal Services. For analyses using this sample, the data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's population of adults with household incomes below 200% of FPL by county of residence only, to correct for the differential survey sampling probability by county. The data are not weighted by demographic characteristics due to the small size of the sample. Findings from this sample should not be assumed to generalize to the full population of those who seek legal aid in Connecticut.

Data on legal aid cases are from administrative case data provided by Connecticut's legal aid providers. Data on self-represented Court Service Center patrons and the Judicial Branch's Internet Accessibility Survey are from administrative records provided by the Judicial Branch. Data on legal aid hotline calls are from Zoom hotline call system data provided by Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut. Data on CTLawHelp.org page views and site visitors' default web browser language are from website analytic data provided by CTLawHelp. Themes and quotes from legal aid providers are from CTData's interviews with legal aid providers.



Appendix. Detailed Methodology & Data Sources

Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs

Survey Sampling and Recruitment

The Survey of Low-Income Residents' Civil Legal Needs ("the Survey") was a web-based survey of Connecticut residents with household incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL). The Survey was developed for CT Bar Foundation by the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Survey Center. The survey link was distributed by text messages to Advanced Cellular Frame Random Digit Dialing numbers that were flagged as likely belonging to an individual with a household income of less than \$50,000. The sample of cell phone numbers was generated by and purchased from Marketing Systems Group, located in Horsham, Pennsylvania. To maximize the coverage of Connecticut's eight counties in the Survey sample, an effort was made to obtain an equal number of cell phone numbers from each county. However, fewer numbers were purchased in Litchfield, Middlesex, Tolland, and Windham Counties, as there were not enough cell phone numbers in these counties that met the inclusion criteria.

Text messages with the Survey link were sent by the UNH Survey Center to the sample of cell phone numbers between March 5th and March 31st, 2025. Individuals received up to three text messages.

In addition to the main cell phone distribution method described above, on April 17th, 2025, Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut (SLS) sent text messages with the Survey link to 4,392 clients who had opted in to receive text messages related to their request for legal aid. This includes individuals who submitted an online application for legal aid from SLS regardless of their eligibility for services, and those who called the hotline and were determined to be eligible for legal aid services. The purpose was to supplement the total Survey sample and to increase the number of Survey respondents who had used legal aid services in Connecticut.

Survey responses were received between March 5th and April 21st, 2025. The Survey was closed on April 22nd, 2025.



The response rate for the main cell phone distribution method was 0.5% with 57% of completed responses being from individuals with a household income below 200% of FPL. The response rate for the supplemental SLS distribution method was 1.5% with 92% of completed responses being from individuals with a household income below 200% of FPL.

Respondent Sample

A total of 389 individuals with household incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) responded to the Survey distributed by the UNH Survey Center.

An additional 60 individuals with household incomes below 200% of FPL responded to the Survey distributed by SLS.

Survey Data Analysis

For analyses related to the prevalence of civil legal needs, awareness of and opinions about legal aid, and the characteristics and experiences of Connecticut's low-income residents who have faced a civil legal need, the Survey data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's adults with household incomes below 200% of FPL by county of residence, gender, age range, education level, race and ethnicity, disability status, military service, and income range. The population demographic distributions are based on custom tabulations of the Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year public use microdata. The population distributions by county of residence are based on the Census Bureau's 2021 ACS 1-year public data tables (table S1701). These analyses exclude the 60 individuals who responded to the SLS Survey distribution to avoid biasing the population prevalence estimates by over-representing the characteristics and experiences of those who have accessed legal aid services.

For analyses related to the experiences of the subset of individuals who have used legal aid services, the Survey data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's *legal aid clients* by county of residence, gender, age range, race and ethnicity, and disability status. The demographic characteristics of legal aid clients were compiled from the legal aid organizations' 2024 Grantee Caseload Annual Reports to CT Bar Foundation and case records provided by SLS. The counties of residence of legal aid clients were compiled from administrative data shared by the legal aid organizations for this report. These analyses include the 60 individuals who





responded to the SLS Survey distribution. In total, there were 155 Survey respondents who reported having ever used civil legal aid services.

For analyses of the experiences of those who tried to access legal aid services for their most recent civil legal need, the Survey data are weighted to match the distribution of Connecticut's residents with household incomes below 200% of FPL by county of residence only. These data were not weighted by demographic characteristics due to the small sample size (76 individuals).

Limitations of the Survey Data

Survey Sampling Error and Confidence Intervals

Estimates from the Survey may vary from the true population values due to random chance in which individuals responded to the Survey. This is referred to as "sampling error." Smaller sample sizes are associated with larger sampling error. To be transparent about the degree of uncertainty in the Survey-based estimates, bar graphs of Survey estimates illustrate the 90% confidence interval around each estimate using dashed error bars. Statistically speaking, a 90% confidence interval indicates the range in which the estimate would be expected to fall in 90 out of 100 random samples from the population. Wider confidence intervals indicate greater uncertainty regarding the "true" population value.

Other Sources of Measurement Error

Confidence intervals do not account for all possible sources of error in the Survey data. One other source of error is survey nonresponse bias, which is the degree to which certain types of individuals within the population are more likely to respond to the Survey than others. Nonresponse bias associated with characteristics used in the survey weighting (for example, age, gender, or race and ethnicity) is corrected for by the survey weights, but other potential drivers of nonresponse bias (such as higher response rates among those who have experienced civil legal needs) cannot be controlled.

Another type of error is measurement error, which includes respondents not understanding the survey questions or having a different interpretation of the questions from what was intended. The magnitude of these other sources of error is unknown.





Interviews with Legal Aid Providers

CTData conducted semi-structured interviews and consultation meetings with representatives from all eleven legal aid service providers, Connecticut Bar Foundation (CBF), and a member of the state's judicial system. These interviews and consultations were conducted between June and November of 2024. They served several goals: (1) to support these organizations' strategic collection and use of data to inform their work and measure their impact, (2) to inform the research questions and data sources for this Needs Assessment, and (3) to collect data on the operations, staffing, and data processes used by each organization.

CTData used a thematic analysis of the interview notes to identify key themes and patterns related to the research questions. Content analysis was also used to quantify the frequency of specific topics and issues. The findings from these analyses were confirmed with the executive directors of all 11 legal service providers.

Administrative Case Data from Legal Aid Providers

This report utilizes administrative data provided by Connecticut's eleven legal aid organizations on the clients they served during the 2024 calendar year. This includes programs' 2024 Grantee Caseload Annual Reports to Connecticut Bar Foundation and supplemental non-identified case records provided by all legal aid organizations for this report.

The 2024 Grantee Caseload Annual Reports were the primary source of data on client demographics, the types of legal problems served, and levels of service provided by legal aid organizations, with the exception of cases handled by SLS. Non-identified case records submitted by SLS for this report were the primary source of data for cases handled by SLS. Cases opened by SLS that were referred to another legal aid organization for service were excluded from the counts of cases aggregated across all legal aid providers to avoid double-counting these cases. However, these cases were included in the separate counts of cases arising from the legal aid hotlines.

The total number of new cases opened during the 2024 calendar year and the distribution of new cases by county of residence were aggregated from the supplemental case records provided by all eleven legal aid organizations.





Legal problem codes were categorized into the legal problem areas included in the Survey for comparison purposes.

Legal Aid Hotline Call Data

For this report, Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut provided raw, record-level data exported from their Zoom call system for all calls handled in 2024 by the main legal aid hotline and by the Right to Counsel (RTC) hotline. The data include:

- Whether each call was an incoming or outbound call
- Whether each call was via the main hotline or the RTC hotline
- The data and time of each call
- Whether the call ended in the user hanging up or being disconnected due to high call volume
- Responses entered by each caller to phone tree questions, including the type of legal problem they are calling about, their zip code of residence, and whether they are a veteran
- Which queue(s) each call was transferred to, if any, including queues to speak with a screener or an advocate
- The amount of time the caller spent waiting or talking with a representative
- Disposition codes for calls that were screened but were not transferred to an advocate during the call, including information about the type of legal problem, income-eligibility, and level of service provided

The analyses include all incoming calls received by either hotline in 2024. Calls that were transferred to a screener or operator queue and had a talking duration greater than 0 minutes were assumed to have spoken with a screener or operator. Calls that were in an advocate queue were assumed to have been transferred to speak with an advocate. The data do not permit a determination of whether the caller actually spoke with an advocate, or the outcomes of calls that were transferred to an advocate queue. The outcomes of these calls should be reflected in the case data provided by SLS, which were analyzed separately. The case data cannot be linked to the hotline call system data.

Administrative Data from the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

The CT Judicial Branch provided data on services provided in 2024 to patrons at Court Service Centers (CSC), Public Information Desks (PID), and Law Libraries located at courthouses across the state. These data include records of patrons assisted in-





person at these locations, as well as questions answered by Law Librarians by email, phone, or live online chats.

The CSC and PID data included the number of total and self-represented patrons assisted by location, the types of services provided to patrons, and the types of cases assisted (i.e., types of legal problems). These data also included the results of an Internet Accessibility Survey conducted by the Judicial Branch of patrons at CSCs and PIDs.

The law librarian data included email responses to the “Ask a Librarian” email service and the “Ask a Question” form available on the Judicial Branch website. The data included the type of requestor (self-represented, attorney/law firm, or other), as judged by the law librarian based on the requestor’s email address and the nature of their question. The data also included the subject area (type of legal problem) of the question. Data were also obtained on the number of patrons assisted in-person at CT Law Libraries by type of patron, the number of questions law librarians handled by telephone and email or mail, and the number of live chat sessions recorded via the librarian live chat service.

Web Analytics Data

Web analytics data were provided by CTLawHelp for visits to [CTLawHelp.org](https://www.jud.ct.gov/selfhelp.htm) and by the State of Connecticut Judicial Branch for visits in 2024 to the Judicial Branch self-help website (<https://www.jud.ct.gov/selfhelp.htm>) and to the CT Law Library “Law by Subject” pages (<https://www.jud.ct.gov/lawlib/law/>).

The Judicial Branch data included total visits to the Judicial Branch’s self-help homepage and total views of each URL within the CT Law Library’s “Law by Subject” pages in 2024. The “Law by Subject” pages were categorized into the legal problem areas used in the Survey for comparison (for example, pages on child abuse or custody were categorized under “Children and Family”). A limitation of these data is that no information is available on the percentage of visitors who were attorneys versus self-represented parties.

The CTLawHelp.org web analytics data included site users by location (geolocated based on their IP address), web browser default language, and type of device used, as well as the number of views of each URL within the website in 2024. For the analyses, all site usage data were restricted to users whose IP addresses were geolocated to Connecticut and the neighboring states of New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode



Island. Users geolocated to neighboring states were included in the analyses given the low spatial resolution of IP address geolocation.

For analyses of CTLawHelp.org page views by legal problem area, the list of URLs was first filtered to exclude search bar and Legal Help Finder results pages (which were counted separately), main landing pages, and pages viewed fewer than 100 times over the course of the year. The remaining URLs were then manually categorized into the legal problem areas included on the Survey for comparison (for example, ctlawhelp.org/en/husky-health-insurance-medicaid was categorized under “Public Benefits & Health Care”). Spanish-language URLs were translated to English prior to categorization.

CTLawHelp also provided data on searches conducted in 2024 using the SPOT natural language processing algorithm via their “Legal Help Finder” tool. The SPOT algorithm was developed and implemented by Suffolk University Law School. The legal problem categories identified by the SPOT algorithm were recategorized into the legal problem areas used in the Survey for comparison. For example, “Special Education & IEPs” was categorized under “Persons with Disabilities.”

Finally, CTLawHelp provided counts of all search terms entered into the CTLawHelp.org website search bar in 2024. These search terms were categorized into legal problem areas using the [SentenceTransformers](#) machine learning model in Python. Spanish-language URLs were translated to English before running the model. The model compared each URL with a set of keywords identified by CTData that aligned with each legal problem category. Each URL was assigned to the category with the closest semantic match. Only URLs categorized with a confidence score of at least 0.40 (on a scale of 0 to 1) were retained in the analysis.

Since the resources on CTLawHelp.org are plain-language resources intended for the general public, the vast majority of page views and searches are likely by members of the general public rather than attorneys or other legal professionals. However, it is unknown what percentage of these views and searches are by individuals with low household income.