



106 Legal Aid Atlanta

CELEBRATING YESTERDAY.
TRANSFORMING TOMORROW.



2024
Annual Report

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A Letter from the Executive Director

The year 2024 was a celebratory one for Atlanta Legal Aid!



One Hundred Years!

Our most significant celebration was the centennial of our founding on June 3rd, 1924. We held a party at Zoo Atlanta for staff, Board members, donors, and many friends on the evening of September 12th. While we celebrated decades of successes, we focused on ensuring that we continue to be relevant and serve our community for the next hundred years.



The Celebrations Continued! We also celebrated our centennial with our largest funder, the Legal Services Corporation (LSC, www.lsc.gov), which marked its 50th anniversary in 2024! Several of us traveled to Washington, D.C. in the Spring to attend LSC's special event marking this milestone, and we hosted the LSC's quarterly Board meeting in Atlanta in the Fall. Legal Aid also hosted two national conferences in 2024—the National Legal Aid and Defender Association (www.nlada.org) and the Management Information Exchange (www.mielegalaid.org). It was fun networking with colleagues from around the country while sharing best practices for meeting the needs of our communities.



Enhancing our Commitment to Clayton County. After serving Clayton County for decades through our South Fulton office, we relocated to 1590 Adamson Parkway, Morrow, Georgia, in Clayton County. We hosted an Open House in the spring to celebrate our enhanced commitment to the residents of Clayton County.

Recognizing Staff Anniversaries. We are fortunate to have many staff who have stayed with us for decades. In the summer, we held an in-person staff meeting at which we presented service awards (anniversaries for years ending in 0 or 5) to our staff! Honorees ranged from 5 years to 50 years!

Compensation & Infrastructure. In last year's annual report, I noted my focus on normalizing staff compensation and improving and enhancing our infrastructure. I am pleased to report that thanks to the generous support of several foundations, I allocated \$500K in 2024 and \$1Mm in 2025 toward salary increases. We also began hiring new executive staff to better support our growing law firm's needs. We hired a firm-wide Director of Pro Bono (long-time staffer, Kate Gaffney), a full-time Director of Human Resources, and a Director of Information Technology to join us in early 2025.

What's in store for 2025? As I write this, there is some uncertainty with respect to the federal budget and thus some of our funding. We will continue to serve our clients to the best of our ability, and share our successes with our funders, stakeholders, and the community at large. We will also continue to pursue new funding from diverse sources including our natural constituency, as well as others who believe in social justice. I will continue my quest to normalize our compensation so we can hire and retain great talent.

To each of you who supported us financially and/or by volunteering, thank you from the bottom of my heart. We need you now more than ever, so I hope you will respond favorably when we reach out to you.

Sincerely,

Rita A. Sheffey
Executive Director





Legal Aid Staff Service Awards Atlanta

In 2024, Atlanta Legal Aid proudly recognized the remarkable dedication of 77 of our employees with service awards ranging from 5 to 50 years. With more than 1,000 years of combined years of employment, our honorees serve the clients of Atlanta Legal Aid with patience, compassion, and excellence.

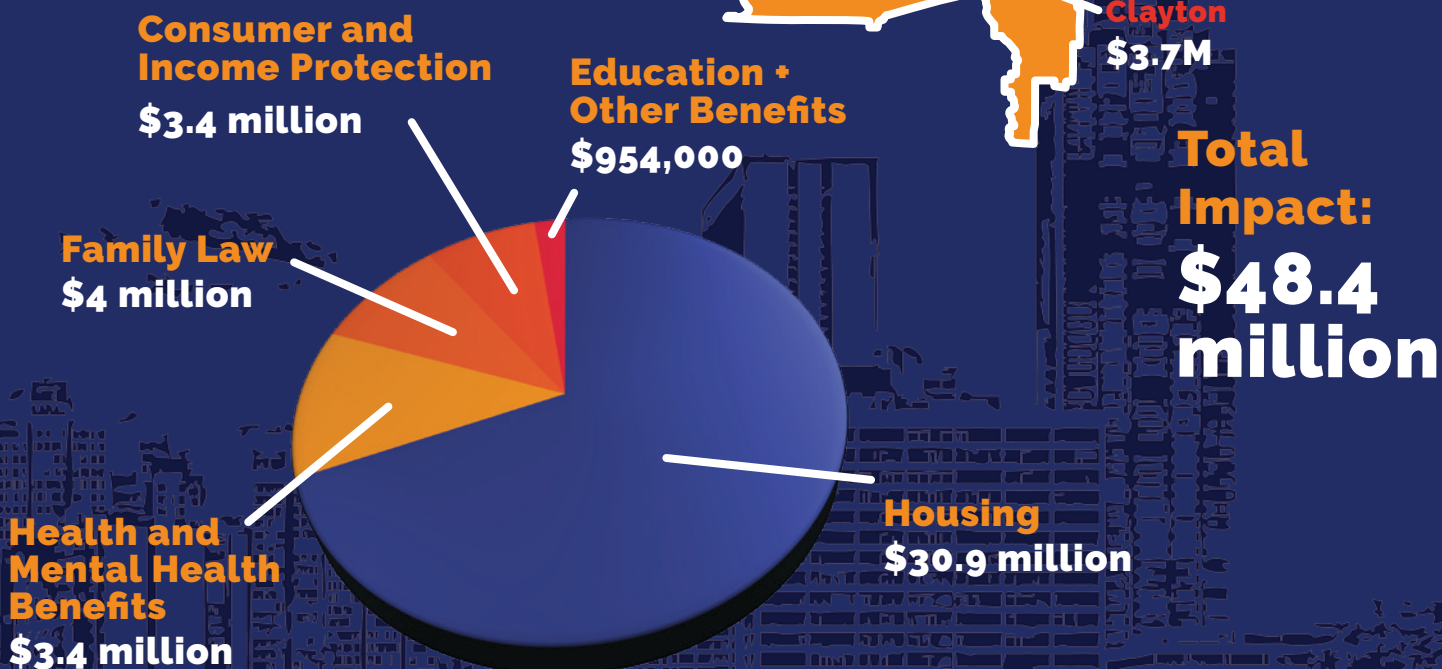
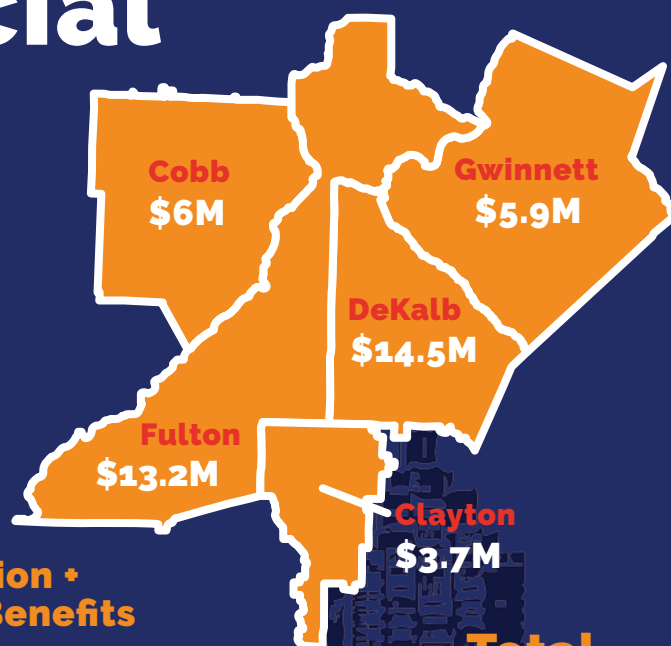
Each of our recipients play a vital role in our success. Their loyalty, hard work, and passion have helped drive our mission forward. **A special tribute goes to our 50-year awardee, Shirley Bailey**, whose exceptional dedication and legacy have left a lasting mark on all of us.

To all our honorees: we celebrate your remarkable commitment to Atlanta Legal Aid, through decades of change. Thank you for your years of service, your daily efforts, and the pride you bring to our team.



Client Financial Outcomes

Atlanta Legal Aid Society's mission is to help low-income people meet basic needs, removing barriers to justice through civil legal assistance.



7,156 calls answered at GA Senior Legal Aid	186 education/outreach events	675+ free legal clinics	20,986 cases worked
81 Attorneys	77 Other Professional Staff	600+ Volunteers	

Celebrated 100 Years of the Atlanta Legal Aid Society

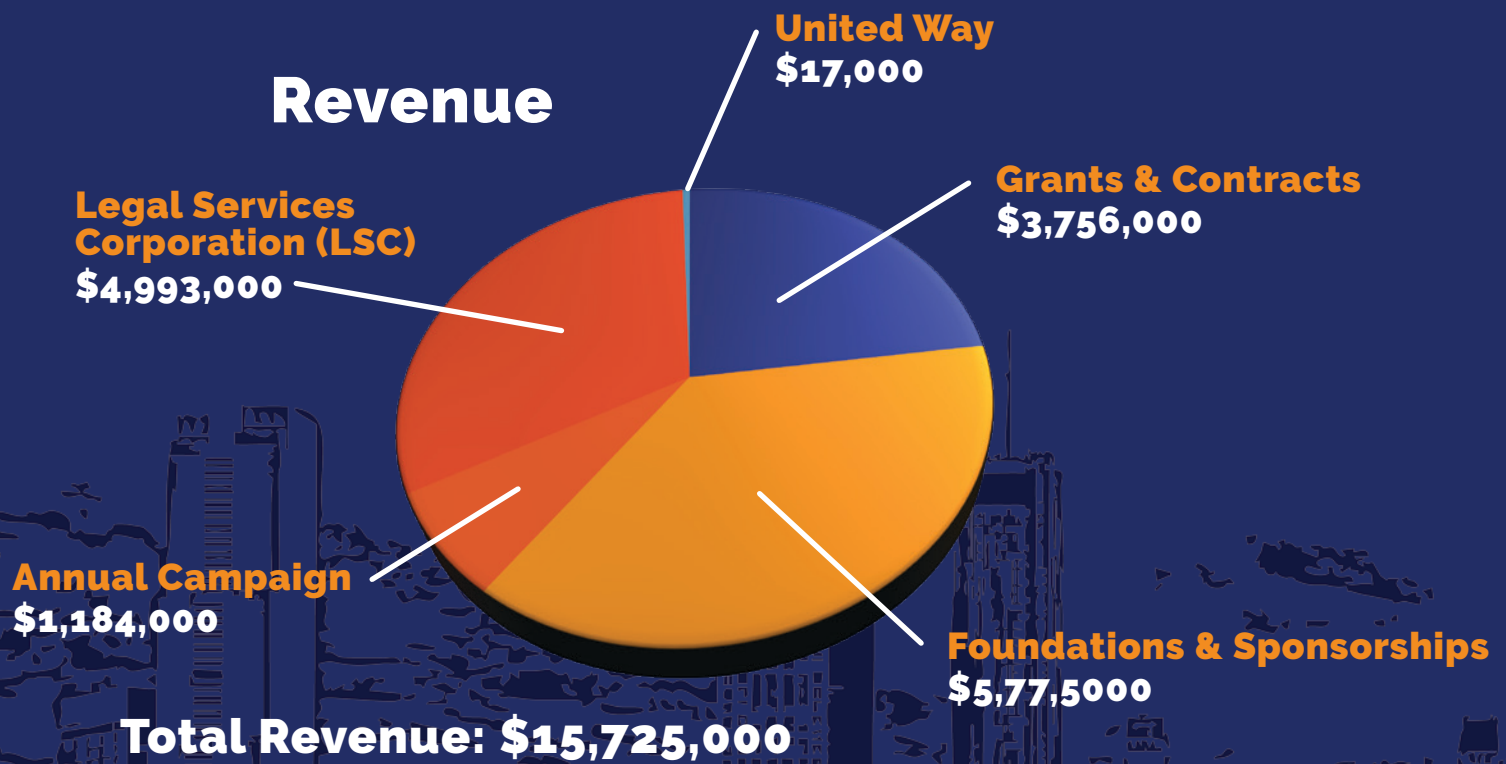
Founded in 1924, Atlanta Legal Aid Society has made history by providing civil legal assistance and education the most vulnerable families in our community for 100 years

Grand Opening: Legal Aid's Clayton Office

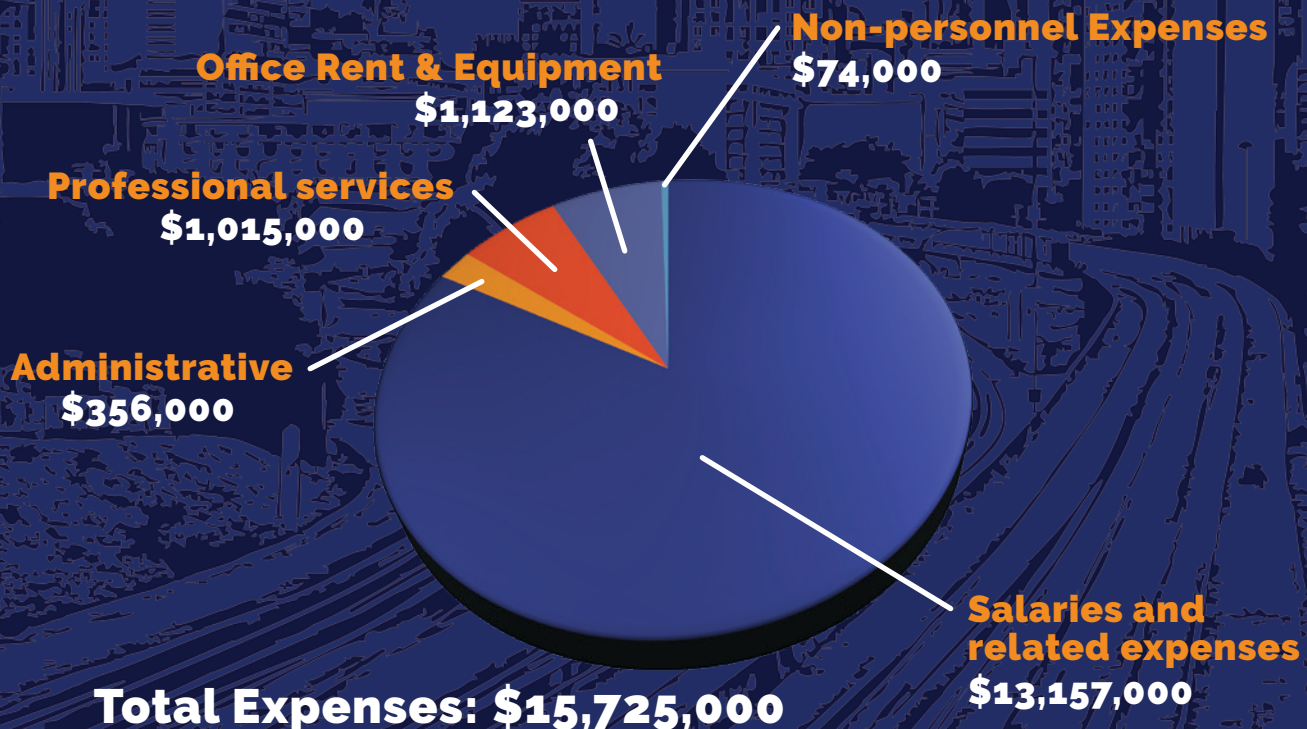
Made possible through Congressional appropriations, Legal Aid opened an office in Clayton County on April 3, 2024

2024 Financials

Revenue



Expenses



1924

Atlanta Legal Aid Society founded

1966

Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) funds legal services nationally as part of LBJ War on Poverty

1974

Expansion outside of Atlanta to county offices in Cobb and DeKalb. Congress created Legal Services Corporation

1975

Senior Citizens Law Project created

1977

helped found AVL

1981

The Mariel Cubans case - Atl. Legal Aid lawyers argued that indefinite detention is unconstitutional

1982

Founded Georgia Law Center for Homeless

1988

Home Defense Project created

1989

AIDS Legal Project (now Health Law Unit)

1993

Fleet Finance case related to predatory lending

1995

LSC funding cuts, LSC dictates no class actions, lobbying, or representing undocumented immigrants

1996

Southside office closes. Legal Aid lost 10 lawyers and almost \$1 million due to LSC funding cuts

1997

Grandparents project created (now Kinship Care Project)
Predatory lending that led to the Great Recession

1999

Olmstead U.S. Supreme Court Decision - people with developmental and mental disabilities can live in the community.
Southside office reopens



Legal Aid Atlanta

Centennial Celebration:

Celebrating Yesterday. Transforming Tomorrow.

On September 12th, 2024, Atlanta's legal community celebrated Atlanta Legal Aid Society and its 100 years of serving low income residents and families in metro Atlanta. Nearly 300 supporters joined us for our Centennial Celebration at Zoo Atlanta. Thank you to our sponsors who helped us make our centennial a night to remember!



We shared client stories and testimonies that

demonstrated the impact of our work in housing, healthcare, income and benefits protection, and family law that protect our clients' rights and help them meet their basic needs. Our new executive director, Rita Sheffey, spoke to the future of Atlanta Legal Aid and the transformative potential of our work in the next 100 years.



2000

Atlanta. Legal Aid predicts mortgage meltdown and testifies before Congress

2005

Health Law Partnership (HeLP) created.

2008

Chronicle of Philanthropy names Atlanta Legal Aid one of five national non-profits best prepared for recession. Great Recession

2009

HeLP expands to Children's Healthcare at Hughes Spalding

2010

Endowment grows to \$4 million amid program reductions. National Poverty increases by 34%

2015

Enhanced Services Project began, to follow up with clients to provide continued support

2016

Successful legal challenge to Georgia garnishment statute to protect surviving spouses on reverse mortgages

2018

1st office opens in Clayton County; Harbor Fair Housing Case

2019

Launched Online intake and Property tax project

2020

ADA Food Stamp case. Covid-19 Pandemic begins

2021

Atl Legal Aid challenged unemployment delays

2023

Extended Stay Motels case

2023

Steve Gottlieb steps down as Executive Director after 43 years of dedicated service. Former board chair Rita Sheffey hired as Executive Director

2024

Centennial Year - 100 years of dedicated service

Our History



In 1924, members of the Atlanta Bar Association, including E. Smythe Gambrell and other Atlanta lawyers, came together to establish Atlanta Legal Aid Society. With just one lawyer on staff, Atlanta Legal Aid began serving World War I veterans and single mothers with consumer and family law cases. Gambrell served as Atlanta Legal Aid's first president for almost two decades.

The program remained small throughout its first decades, with the work of a few full time staff supplemented by volunteers from the legal and charitable communities. In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty offered opportunities for the expansion of civil legal aid as a tool to fight poverty. The legal aid movement of this era ushered in a golden age of civil legal aid. The founding of the Legal Services Corporation in 1974 cemented the ideals of this movement by providing civil legal aid with a steady source of funding.

In subsequent decades, Atlanta Legal Aid expanded to serve five counties – Fulton, DeKalb, Cobb, Gwinnett, and Clayton – and steadily grew into one of the most important nonprofits in the metro area. We've changed lives in Georgia and across the country through our work.

When Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson, two women with developmental disabilities, were kept in a psychiatric institution in Georgia despite being ready to transition to community programs, Atlanta Legal Aid took their case to the U.S. Supreme Court and prevailed. The *Olmstead* ruling affirmed the right of people with disabilities to live and receive services in the community, rather than in institutions, under the RS - Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). It transformed lives by reducing institutionalization and increasing community living arrangements and support for people with disabilities in their homes.

At Atlanta Legal Aid, we continue to advocate for fairness and equality. Our attorneys, recognized as experts in their fields, provide direct support to thousands of individuals and work systemically to create lasting change. We partner with major law firms and corporate counsel offices to expand our reach through tailored pro bono projects. Together, we are building a fairer future where everyone can thrive.



100
Legal Aid
Atlanta



Meeting Legal Needs in Clayton County

Atlanta Legal Aid opens full-service office in Clayton County

Residents of Clayton County face significant challenges stemming from the lingering effects of the pandemic and generational poverty, which threaten housing and financial stability, access to healthcare, and personal safety. To address these critical needs, Atlanta Legal Aid opened a full-service office in Clayton County on April 3, 2024.

Attorneys in the Clayton Office provide a wide range of services to help individuals and families navigate complex court systems, ensuring stability in housing, income, and safety. Additionally, outreach programs in Clayton County offer civic education and resources to empower residents to address legal issues effectively.

At the opening event, Atlanta Legal Aid honored Congressman David Scott, who secured \$260,000 in federal funding to make this milestone possible. Congressman Scott highlighted the importance of legal services in uplifting marginalized communities, stating: "This office will provide an invaluable resource for families in Clayton County who are struggling to recover from the pandemic's impact."

Atlanta Legal Aid also recognized Chief Magistrate Judge Keisha Wright Hill with the 2024 "Champion of Service" Award for her dedication to serving low-income, homeless, and housing-insecure populations in Clayton County. Judge Wright Hill's tireless efforts to ensure access to justice have earned her this well-deserved honor.



Housing Law



Healthy and stable housing is vital for employment, children's educational success, and physical and mental health. Low-income residents and families in Atlanta face immense obstacles in finding and maintaining affordable housing. The alarming increase in eviction filings since the pandemic leaves many in our community vulnerable to displacement and has forced others to live in unsafe environments. The trauma of eviction or the stress of unaffordable rent creates financial instability, making it difficult to meet even basic needs.

Atlanta Legal Aid's Housing Law attorneys offer a beacon of hope, representing our most significant commitment. Our attorneys advocate for healthy, stable, and affordable housing, working tirelessly to prevent eviction and displacement through essential legal services. We support clients facing landlord-tenant conflicts, unlawful evictions, and housing code violations. In 2024, our dedicated legal team successfully preserved homes for over 1,400 clients, providing them with the stable foundation necessary to build a better future.

NOTABLE HOUSING LAW OUTCOMES

\$1.9M+

in rental assistance

\$19M+

in EPI rental assistance obtained

263 people

received improved housing conditions

1,472 people

remained in their homes for at least 30 days, avoiding eviction

\$1M

in section 8 housing benefits secured for 450+ families and individuals

Advocacy in Action

When a job change made Michelle* eligible for a rent reduction, her landlord's delay in processing it led to over \$16,000 in unpaid rent and an eviction filing. Michelle sought help from Atlanta Legal Aid. In mediation, our attorney advocated for a correct rent calculation, successfully reducing her debt by nearly half to \$8,120.

Legal Aid then assisted Michelle in applying for and securing rental assistance, which covered her balance. As a result, the eviction case was dismissed, allowing Michelle to remain in her home.

Michelle's case highlights how crucial legal representation can be in preventing unjust displacement. Without Legal Aid's intervention, she could have lost her housing due to an error beyond her control. Our advocacy



provided Michelle with a fresh start and the stability she needed. **(name changed for privacy)*



Health Law



Recognizing that healthcare access is crucial for low-income individuals and families to thrive beyond poverty, Atlanta Legal Aid delivers comprehensive and compassionate legal services that directly impact their health and quality of life. We support those living with or affected by serious health conditions, helping them overcome a wide range of illness-related legal barriers that can disrupt their access to care and focus on recovery.

Our Health Law attorneys tackle issues from employment rights and insurance challenges to securing public benefits, maintaining income, ensuring stable housing, and preparing wills and advance directives. Demonstrating our commitment to evolving community needs, we expanded in 2016 to address transgender legal issues and deepen our partnership with Grady Healthcare for Social Security assistance.

NOTABLE HEALTH LAW OUTCOMES

\$1M+ **benefits secured for Personal/Skilled Care**

900+ **cases opened related to Health Law**

\$5.1M+ **Secured in health benefits for 330+ clients**

218 clients **Retained Medicare/Medicaid/PeachCare benefits**

Advocacy in Action

*Ronald's Qualified Medical Beneficiary (QMB) status termination led to unexpected Social Security deductions, making it hard to cover basic expenses. He was unaware that Medicare premiums are deducted in advance, resulting in a large, one-time withdrawal.

Atlanta Legal Aid explained the QMB program, which covers Medicare costs for low-income beneficiaries, and assisted Ronald in reapplying. His QMB status was reinstated, stopping the deductions. Ronald now saves nearly \$600 monthly, regaining financial stability and peace of mind. **(name changed for privacy)*



Family Law



Family stability is central to the mission of Atlanta Legal Aid. A stable home fosters security, reduces stress, and supports the well-being of parents and children, enabling families to better face adversity. When support is needed, our dedicated Family Law attorneys help remove barriers and restore stability.

Our Family Law attorneys address legal matters encompassing marriage, divorce, child custody, adoption, domestic violence, paternity, and guardianships.. Our legal teams equip clients with the knowledge to navigate the legal system and rebuild their lives after challenging experiences.

NOTABLE FAMILY LAW OUTCOMES

\$4M+

**Secured in Family Law
benefits for low-
income families**

**Nearly 7000
opened cases related
to family law**

650+

**Women and children protected
from domestic violence**

1800+

**cases opened involving adoptions,
custodial rights, visitation agreements**

Advocacy in Action

Jaleesa*, caring for her two biological sons and two stepchildren after their mother's death, obtained a TPO against her abusive husband, who then left. Though he left the stepchildren with her, Jaleesa lacked legal custody and sought help from Atlanta Legal Aid.

Our attorney secured Equitable Caregiver status for Jaleesa for her stepchildren during the divorce. When her ex-husband defied a court order to return the older children, a Guardian ad Litem investigated his alienation efforts.

After nearly two years, the stepchildren returned to Jaleesa's care, realizing their father's dishonesty. Legal Aid also secured Jaleesa child support and ownership of the marital home. Legal representation was crucial for Jaleesa's Equitable Caregiver claim and her continued



relationship with her stepchildren, providing family and financial stability free from domestic violence. **(name changed for privacy)*



Consumer Protection



Low-income consumers do not always have the resources to help them make decisions in their best interest. Often, vulnerable populations—especially the elderly and disabled—are targeted by online scams and deceptive advertising. Legal teams at Atlanta Legal Aid protect the financial interests of our clients in cases that address false advertising and scams, predatory practices in financing or sales contracts, harassment by debt collectors, unfair credit reporting, and identity theft.

NOTABLE CONSUMER LAW OUTCOMES

\$646,520

Consumer debt eliminated

\$12.6M+

Homeownership protection outcomes

\$10,408

Garnishments dismissed

\$905,440

Other consumer related outcomes

\$176,715

Utility assistance

\$8,065

Medical debt eliminated

Advocacy in Action

Eileen* bought a used car with a bad title and was arrested for driving a stolen vehicle, causing her significant humiliation. The dealer delayed fixing the title issue. Atlanta Legal Aid sued the dealer and employees.

The dealership defaulted due to lacking legal representation, as required for corporations in Georgia. A jury trial against the responsible manager resulted in a \$93,000 judgment for Eileen, finding him personally liable.

On appeal, the Georgia Court of Appeals affirmed the judgments, upholding the dealership's default and the manager's personal liability for fraud, noting that corporate officers can be liable for torts they participate in. The appellate court sided with Eileen against all defendants. **(name changed for privacy)*





Public Benefits Access and Retention



Many low-income clients face hurdles in accessing benefits that will supplement their basic living needs. Bureaucratic hurdles and delays can often mean that our clients have trouble accessing and retaining housing assistance, SNAP benefits, Medicaid and Medicare, Social Security disability and SSI benefits, unemployment benefits and Veterans benefits. Advocates at Atlanta Legal Aid assist clients with navigating the systems that control these benefits. Attorneys and paralegals represent clients in administrative hearings and court hearings.

NOTABLE PUBLIC BENEFITS OUTCOMES

\$639,497

**SSI/SSDI benefits
retained**

\$14.4M+

Rental assistance

\$532,650

SNAP benefits

\$173,540

Unemployment benefits

\$38,022

VA benefits

Advocacy in Action

Maria* was furloughed from her job as a personal trainer at the start of the pandemic. When she returned to her job her hours were dramatically reduced. She applied for unemployment benefits and pandemic unemployment assistance but unfortunately was denied eligibility for both programs. The Department of Labor claimed she failed to timely certify for unemployment benefits and Legal Aid appealed Maria's case to Superior Court. As a result she received unemployment benefits for 2020 and 2021. Legal Aid also successfully advocated for Maria to receive pandemic unemployment assistance for the weeks in 2021 where she had submitted the required certifications to the Georgia Dept of Labor under the pandemic unemployment assistance program instead of the unemployment program. **(name changed for privacy)*



Special Project Spotlight

Senior Citizens Law Project

(est. 1975)

Provides direct legal representation to older adults.

- Focus on income benefits, healthcare access, elder abuse, and financial exploitation

Disability Integration Project

(est. 1988)

Nationally known for litigating *Olmstead v. LC*, the leading civil rights case for people with disabilities.

- Advocates for clients to receive services in the community rather than institutions
- Expanded in 2016 to include children with disabilities and education-related issues

Home Defense Program

(est. 1988)

The Home Defense Program (HDP) connects attorneys with homeowners who face the loss of their homes due to predatory mortgage lending or the unlawful denial of loan modifications.

- 143 people saved equity in their home
- 215 people avoided foreclosure
- 47 people received property tax savings through our Tax Appeal project
- 72 people resolved a property title issue

Kinship Caregiver Program

(est. 1998, formerly Relative Caregiver Project)

Assists grandparents, relatives, and non-relatives raising children not biologically their own.

- Helps with custody, guardianship, adoption, education issues, and access to public benefits
- Trains and supports pro bono attorneys for adoption cases

Georgia Senior Legal Aid Hotline

(est. 1998)

A statewide advice and brief services line for all Georgians 60 and older, with no income restrictions.

- Staffed by experienced attorneys and pro bono volunteers, including retired judges
- Expanded in 2017 to include specialized support for senior Veterans

Health Law Partnership (HeLP)

(est. 2005)

A medical-legal collaboration with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Georgia State University.

- Helps families resolve legal issues affecting child health, such as housing and access to education or benefits
- Trains healthcare and legal professionals through interdisciplinary teaching

The Veteran's Law Project

(est. 2022)

Assists veterans who are unhoused or experiencing housing instability with legal matters that are creating barriers to achieving housing stability.[ce](https://www.veteranslawproject.org/)

- Support through holistic legal services, as well as collaborations for services with local law schools and courts, the VA hospital, and veteran services organizations.
- Handles a variety of civil legal matters including eviction defense, VA benefits, public benefits and health insurance.

The Eviction Prevention Initiative (EPI) **(est. 2023)**

A rental and utility assistance program offered by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

- Data:
 - Over \$23,682,973 (as of 8/1/25) in assistance
 - More than 1,953 families served
- The EPI program ends on September 30, 2025, in line with U.S. Department of Treasury guidelines.

Grady Health System Medical-Legal Partnership **(est. 2024)**

Provides legal assistance to patients in partnership with Grady's care teams.

- Focuses on housing insecurity, benefits denials, insurance issues, and end-of-life planning
- Includes targeted services:
 - AIDS Legal Project
 - Cancer & ALS Initiative
 - Breast Cancer Legal Project



600+
volunteers

LSC
Protecting the Promise

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Pro Bono Report

For more than 100 years, Atlanta Legal Aid has worked together with the private bar to provide life changing legal assistance. Attorneys, law students, and other volunteers work in partnership with our staff, expanding our capacity to provide legal services to a greater number of clients and communities. All pro bono referrals are screened by our attorneys and legal professionals.

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A4TE

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Atlanta Beltline Partnership

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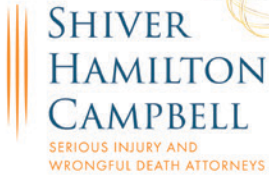
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Office Locations

Fulton County / Downtown

Headquarters
54 Ellis St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30303

Cobb County

30 South Park Sq.,
Marietta, GA 30060

Gwinnett County

324 W. Pike St., Suite 200,
Lawrenceville, GA 30046

Clayton Legal Aid

1590 Adamson Parkway
Suite 360
Morrow, GA 30260

DeKalb County

246 Sycamore St.,
Suite 120
Decatur, GA 30030



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