



NH CAMPAIGN FOR LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Access to Justice for All

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

DEFENDING
ACCESS TO
JUSTICE

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Campaign for Legal Services

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If you need legal assistance: nhlegalaid.com or 1-800-639-5290



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Dear friends,

2020 was challenging for all of us, as people and businesses grappled with how to adapt our lives with an overarching focus on safety and controlling the spread of COVID-19. It felt like every week, we adapted to the ever-shifting forecasts, and legal aid was no exception.

Like the seaglass that legal aid client Rolande adapts into jewelry, we will surely all find ourselves transformed by these years.

Legal aid in New Hampshire adapted to ensure that domestic violence victims could still access protections during lockdown, and providing online video clinics for people facing evictions or denials of unemployment.

Whenever things began to look better for some sector of our community, I've been reminded that significant challenges remain. New variants of the covid virus continue to threaten our communities, and as long as the health threat remains, some of our neighbors are vulnerable to losing their livelihoods, homes and basic safety.

Eviction and foreclosure moratoriums that have protected people from losing their homes since the pandemic began are set to expire. People continue to wait nervously for unemployment benefits to arrive while others are told they need to pay back assistance they have received. Instances of discrimination and domestic violence remain high.

While the challenges remain great, I am confident that a brighter future is ahead. I was honored to be involved this spring in the launch

of 603 Legal Aid, the result of a merger two years in the making, bringing together the Legal Advice and Referral Center (LARC) and the Pro Bono Lawyer Referral Service of the NH Bar Association.

603 Legal Aid will work closely with New Hampshire Legal Assistance (NHLA) to provide a centralized intake center and is poised to expand civil legal aid capacity across our entire state. Advocates will be able to directly help clients without sending them to other agencies and creating unnecessary complication and confusion.

603 Legal Aid and NHLA could not assist low-income Granite Staters without your continued support. Thanks to you, we were able to help more than 16,000 people in New Hampshire stay in their homes, secure child support, and access essential benefits and services.

This report is an opportunity to look back at 2020, to celebrate the incredible work done by staff attorneys and paralegals and volunteers before the merger, and to acknowledge the hard roads we've traveled, while we know there are still mountains ahead to climb.

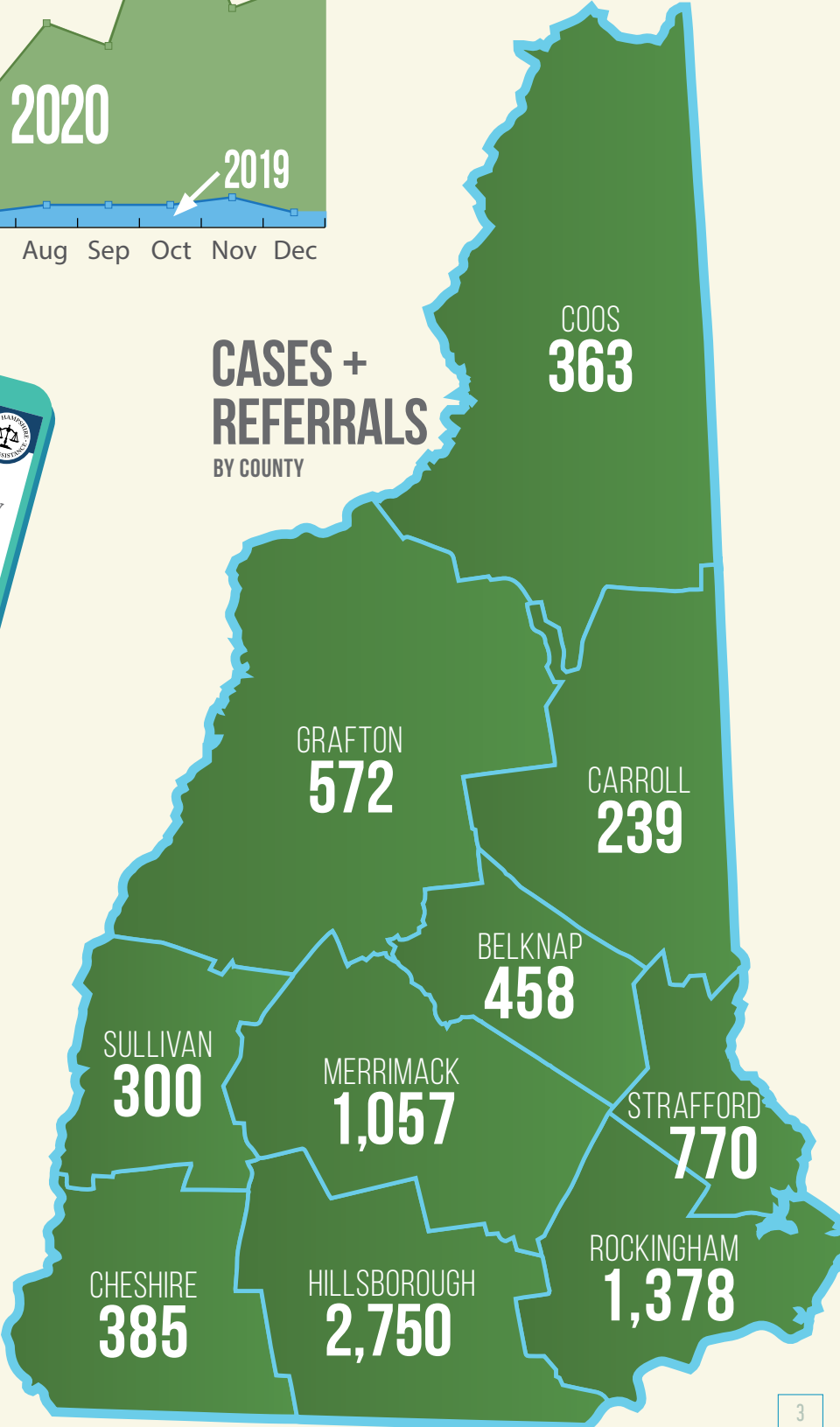
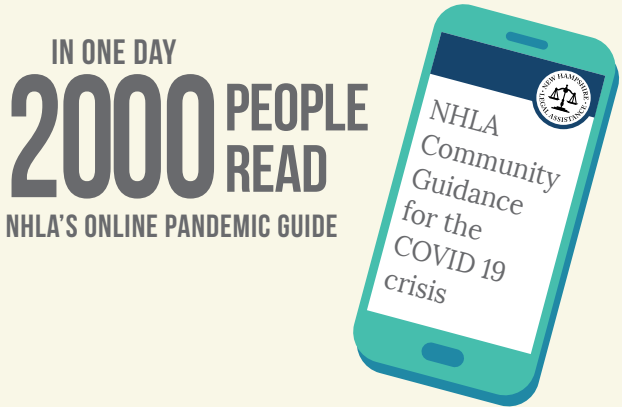
Thank you for being part of the legal aid community when we have needed you most. You have proven time and again that you are up to the challenge of ensuring the scales of justice are balanced for all citizens.

Michael Delaney
Campaign Leadership Council Chair



“... we will surely all find ourselves transformed”

OVERVIEW: LEGAL AID IN NEW HAMPSHIRE





WEATHERING THE UNEMPLOYMENT STORM

*A*s a self-employed artist, Rolande's plans to sell her handmade seaglass jewelry in Florida over the summer of 2020 ended when the COVID-19 pandemic prompted all in-person gatherings to be suspended. Although she receives Social Security retirement benefits, most of her regular income came from craft fairs and art shows.

"I would not be doing shows if we could get along on Social Security," she said. "It doesn't cover everything, like repairs on cars or even food which is why I continue to do art shows."

Rolande filed for unemployment at the end of March. With the benefits, she felt that she could weather through the pandemic. But then in August, she received a notice of overpayment, demanding she repay \$13,000.

"Needless to say, I freaked out," she said. "I responded immediately to unemployment telling them I did not understand and that I had submitted all the documentation they requested. I even sent a letter to the Director of unemployment stating my plight."

Unfortunately trying to fix the situation proved difficult. State departments were operating under reduced hours and reduced staff due to the pandemic.

"It was so, so confusing and stressful. I filed an appeal; I wrote to the commissioner twice; I called the help line; I tried to get in touch with the payments department; I did everything possible to resolve this and it was making me sick."

Eventually, Rolande searched the internet for additional help and came across New Hampshire Legal Assistance. Attorney Mary Krueger began assisting Rolande with the overpayment issue and prepared to represent Rolande at her hearing.

"After Mary put some of my fears to bed, I was able to breathe and sleep a little bit better," Rolande said. "Mary was easy to work with and made me feel confident that I would come out of this okay."

Mary compiled all the documentation to prove that Rolande was qualified for the benefits she had received and had already sent all the info to the unemployment office.

Rolande logged online to see her unemployment profile later that night and found that the overpayment demand notices were no longer there, and her standard benefit had started again. Even better, Rolande was found eligible for retroactive benefits adding up to \$11,000.

Rolande is relieved knowing she now has money to keep paying her mortgage and other bills.

"I would encourage people to seek help. That there is help out there, even if they don't have the money to pay for it. Legal aid is valuable and will be there for them. Without Mary this would not have happened," she said. "I would have not had the clout or the legal wherewithal to convince unemployment that they were making an error. I will always be grateful to Mary and to legal aid."

“ *I did everything possible to resolve this and it was making me sick.* ”



PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

*G*ary had never needed help with bills or legal issues until 2020 dealt him a double whammy. The pandemic put him out of work, and shortly after his boss needed him back, a serious illness and major surgery left him disabled.

Gary fell \$7,000 behind on rent, and in December, while he was in and out of the hospital, his landlord started eviction proceedings. Gary's local welfare office agreed to pay one month's rent but only if Gary's landlord dropped the eviction. The landlord declined, and in February Gary learned the court had approved the eviction.

No one told Gary the Center for Disease Control had halted evictions until March 31. And no one told him he could apply for up to \$2,500 in federal rent assistance at his local Community Action Program.

"This is the first time anything like this has happened to me. I had no clue what to do," Gary said. "I always made a good paycheck. I've never been in dire need – ever."

Gary was just days away from being locked out of his apartment when called the Legal Advice & Referral Center (LARC). With nowhere else to go, he feared he'd be homeless. It was paralegal Steve McGilvary who told Gary how to go back to court and use the eviction moratorium to hold onto his home.

"When he told me I had to file a form with the court, I was so nervous," Gary said. "He said,

'Gary, relax. We are going to do this step by step. You are almost at the finish line.' He was heaven-sent. He saved me."

Steve recalls how lost and scared Gary was the first day they spoke. "Once he received LARC's crash course on tenant rights, protection under the CDC moratorium, and the various government programs providing rental assistance, he began to see that he had options," Steve said.

Gary called Steve the next day to share the good news: a judge had stopped the eviction.

"Gary's situation isn't unique," Steve said. "My colleagues and I at LARC have talked with dozens of tenants each week over the last year who had similar stories. The pandemic hit, household members lost work, rental arrearage quickly ballooned, and equally desperate landlords started the eviction process. Add a serious illness to the mix and you quickly understand why so many folks like Gary have reported feeling hopeless."

Halting the eviction gave Gary time to apply for Social Security disability benefits and start an application for a new round of federal rent assistance. And he's hoping a second surgery will allow him to return to work.

Gary becomes emotional when he talks about his experience with legal aid. "You guys have made me feel cared for," he said. "You made me feel like I am not alone."

“ He said, ‘Gary, relax. We are going to do this step by step. You are almost at the finish line.’ ”



HELPING SURVIVORS START OVER

Gina was scared to call the police and equally scared not to. She knew she and her 8-year-old son had to escape her husband's escalating physical and mental abuse. But she didn't have a job or means of supporting them.

She finally made the call when her husband grabbed her by the neck and threatened to kill her.

"My son was witnessing everything, and I didn't want him to grow up thinking this was okay," Gina said. "I didn't know what to expect when I called the police or where my life was going to go. I just knew I had to do it, not only for myself but for my son."

The police charged Gina's husband with assault, criminal threatening, and false imprisonment. A judge awarded Gina a temporary protective order.

But getting child support and custody required Gina to take her husband back to court, a step that intimidated her. That's when she reached out to NH Legal Assistance attorney Stephanie Bray.

Stephanie persuaded the judge to extend the protective order to a year and award Gina custody and monthly child support so she and her son could move into a safe apartment.

But Gina's challenges remained.

The state family assistance that she had been receiving stopped without explanation, the child support payments didn't arrive, and her calls to state agencies went unreturned. Her landlord was threatening eviction for overdue rent. She applied for federal housing assistance but never got a response.

Gina reconnected with Stephanie, who called the same state agencies Gina had been trying to reach. Stephanie was able to reach supervisors within the state system, and to plan a well-timed and coordinated effort to transition Gina away from state family assistance and into state collection of child support.

"It's easy to say, 'there are programs to help people,'" Stephanie said. "But it's not like walking up to an ATM machine. You have to know the rules, the timing, and sometimes it helps to know the right person's phone number."

Just in the nick of time, Gina began receiving child support and housing assistance to catch up on rent.

"Being in a personal crisis, and the public health crisis, has made all of this so much harder. It was a relief that there was someone there to help me and guide me through the process," Gina said. "Stephanie uplifted me the entire time, so it made it easier for me. Without legal aid, I don't know what I would have done."

“ *I just knew I had to do it, not only for myself but for my son.* ”



SUPPORTING KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

When his foster son's school went remote last year, Mike saw the crisis coming, but felt powerless to stop it. His foster son Eric, has special needs that include a problematic internet addiction.

Without daily supervision and support from special ed teachers, Eric's ADHD and obsessive compulsive disorder became unmanageable. He fell behind on his school work, began failing classes, and could not control his internet addiction.

Mike, who had fostered Eric for four years, had cut back on his hours at work to supervise Eric on remote learning days. Playing the role of parent and special ed teacher was causing a rift and wasn't sustainable.

"When COVID came along, I had to shut my entire business down to supervise him online," Mike said. "It got easier in the summer because I could control his internet access. But as fall got closer, I said, 'I can't shut down again.' I'd lose my business if I did."

Mike asked school officials to allow Eric to attend school five days a week. He told them three days of remote learning via a laptop was jeopardizing Eric's learning and falling short of the educational services required by his Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

The school never responded. Eric's state caseworker, who shared Mike's concerns, connected the family with legal aid. NH

Legal Assistance attorneys Michelle Wangerin and Chelsie Rommel contacted Eric's school immediately.

"Michelle and Chelsie were awesome. They looked at the IEP and sure enough, he is supposed to be supervised at all times while he's online," Mike said

Michelle and Chelsie knew that while the state allowed remote learning, in-person learning was still required when needed to fulfill a student's IEP and protect the health and safety needs of the student and the student's family. Michelle and Chelsie believed Eric's and Mike's needs qualified Eric for in-person school, five days a week.

Michelle and Chelsie requested a meeting with school officials to review Eric's IEP and negotiated a compromise. Eric could attend school part-time three days a week and full-time the other two days. Staff would supervise his use of technology at school. On remote days, Eric would be given work that did not require a laptop or internet connection.

Mike shudders to think what the outcome would have been if he had not had legal aid.

"I would have gotten so frustrated being at battle with the school and I certainly didn't have enough money to hire a lawyer and get what's right for Eric."

“ *I said, ‘I can’t shut down again.’
I’d lose my business if I did.* ”

MERGER PRESENTS CLIENT-FOCUSED PATH FORWARD

603 LEGAL AID STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO OFFER ADVICE, REPRESENTATION, AND REFERRALS

In 2020, legal aid staff and volunteer leaders dedicated countless hours to enacting the first monumental transformation for access to justice in New Hampshire in 25 years.

On June 1, 2021, the Legal Advice & Referral Center and the Pro Bono Referral System of the NH Bar Association merged into a new organization, 603 Legal Aid.

603 Legal Aid hosts a centralized call center designed to make it easier than ever for people to access free legal assistance. It will also maintain a vibrant recruitment, training and coordination program for attorneys seeking to volunteer their time and expertise and increase direct representation by staff advocates.

“When it became clear that we could improve our legal services delivery system in New Hampshire, a group of us convened to come up with a better plan,” said Deborah Kane Rein, who chaired the group planning the merger.

“The commitment was extraordinary. Not one person wavered. Everyone kept their eyes on the prize – a better way of providing civil legal services to those in need. 603 Legal Aid exists to bring the possibility of justice to people who face housing and food insecurity, who face violence at home, and who fight for dignity against power every single day of their lives.”

This merger is the result of more than two years of collaborative work, evaluating the legal services landscape of New Hampshire, and envisioning possible improvements. It would not have been possible without the tireless work of planning committee members including Dana Bisbee, Samantha Elliott, Breckie Hayes-Snow, Virginia Martin, Sarah Mattson Dustin, George Moore, Cathy Shanelaris, and Brian Shaughnessy.

Special thanks must also be given to attorney Brad Cook of Sheehan Phinney who provided crucial advice and counsel in guiding the merger agreement and completing corporate documents; attorney Mitch Simon for his guidance on the ethical issues surrounding the merger of two law firms and clearing client conflicts; and NHBA staff members Paula Lewis, Lynne Sabean, and Hank Plaisted for their assistance and consultation regarding business transfers, information technology, and public relations.

Thanks to the hard work of these people and many others, 603 Legal Aid is ready to work hand-in-hand with NH Legal Assistance to serve individuals and families in New Hampshire.



“I have been amazed by the commitment of New Hampshire’s legal aid staff, volunteers, and supporters. We are ready to continue to build on the incredible legacies of two vibrant programs.”

– Sonya Bellafant
Founding Executive Director,
603 Legal Aid

603 Legal Aid Board



Samantha Elliott, Co-chair



Brian Shaughnessy, Co-chair



Kile Adumene



Brittany Hunt



Deborah Kane Rein



Elizabeth Lahey



Rebecca Nann



Kaitlin O’Neil



Rory Parnell



Emily G. Rice



Cathy Shanelaris



Meg Whittemore

“Everyone kept their eyes on the prize – a better way of providing civil legal services to those in need.”

CELEBRATING LEGAL AID

In 2020, the Campaign pivoted all events to virtual, including our Kickoff Breakfast. 2020 Campaign Chairman **Ovide Lamontagne** emcee'd the Breakfast from a television studio in Derry, introducing recorded remarks from a client, from **Tom Raffio**, CEO of our Premier Sponsor Northeast Delta Dental, and from NH Supreme Court Justice **Bobbi Hantz Marconi**, presenting the Tobin Award to Judge **Susan Carbon**. Judge **Fern Fisher** of New York then joined us for live remarks on the importance of access to justice in advancing social equity and justice.

Throughout the year, the Campaign held smaller virtual events to keep supporters connected with our staff and their work. Keynote guests included then-Attorney General **Gordon MacDonald** and US Senator **Maggie Hassan**.



OUR SUPPORTERS

“*The rule of law*, the bedrock of our profession and our society, loses its meaning when the protection of our laws is available only to those who can afford it.” -Jonathan Lippman, former Chief Judge, State of New York.

Thank you to our Pacesetter law firms who have, for more than 20 years, provided the bedrock foundation of support for the Campaign.

Pacesetters

Firms that make a commitment of \$500 or more per NH-licensed attorney

Ansell & Anderson
Christine Anderson
Alyssa Graham Garrigan

Anthony Delyani
Louis Demato
R. David DePuy
Denis Dillon
Laura Dodge
Amy Drake
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Ramey Sylvester
Michael Tule

Edward Vinhareiro
Jeremy Walker
Rebecca Walkley
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Erin Vanden Borre
Lisa S. Wade
Steven L. Winer
John M. Zarembo

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Thomas D. Rath
Alexandria R. Russell

Kevin P. J. Scura
Michael Schowalter
Kathryn E. Skouteris
James J. Steinkrauss
Christopher J. Sullivan
Adam C. Varley
Curt Whittaker
Charles G. Willing, Jr.
Sherry B. Young

A PROFILE OF COMMITMENT

In 2020, the **McLane Middleton** law firm made a commitment to support legal aid in New Hampshire with financial resources, and by participating in the Crisis Response Fellowship program at NHLA.

Using federal stimulus funds, NHLA borrowed early-career attorneys from three of the state’s largest law firms for four months: Craig McMahon of Rath Young & Pignatelli; Abbygale Martinen of Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green, and Rob Kendall of McLane Middleton. The program allowed NHLA to very quickly add significantly more staff power to address the flood of calls for help from people navigating the complex state and federal unemployment systems.

Answering that call was an easy decision for McLane Middleton’s Managing Director Barry Needleman:

“Somebody was looking for help at a challenging time, and we felt obligated to step up and assist. And, as a firm, we invest in our people. This situation created the opportunity to invest in Rob, and an opportunity where we could support the community.

For McLane Middleton, community involvement is a big part of who we are and of who we’ve always been. We strongly encourage people in our firm to find what excites them and get involved in their communities. But as attorneys, I hope we all frequently think about issues of justice, about the impact of lack of access to justice, and how we can assist, whether that’s doing pro bono work or supporting the Campaign.

For us, community involvement is a core value all the time, not just last year when there was a particular need, but year in and year out. It’s my hope that everybody in our profession would continue to provide the support they are capable of providing.” *See page X for a story about one client helped by crisis fellowship attorneys.*



Thank you!

LEGAL AID IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

LAW FIRMS JOIN CRISIS RESPONSE

The demand for civil legal aid exceeds the available resources in the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis have pushed more New Hampshire families into financial peril, particularly as supplemental unemployment insurance benefits come to an end, eviction moratoriums expire, and many parents struggle to manage childcare with school buildings closed.

In 2020, New Hampshire's civil legal aid providers saw calls for help specifically with unemployment insurance and eviction cases skyrocket.

But reinforcements arrived when most needed. With a CARES Act grant from the state's Nonprofit Emergency Relief Fund, NHLA partnered with three of New Hampshire's largest law firms to launch the Crisis Response Fellowship Attorneys Program.

The innovative Fellowship program brought attorneys from McLane Middleton, Rath, Young and Pignatelli, and Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green to work at NHLA on housing and unemployment insurance cases, helping low-income families avoid homelessness and remain financially stable.

With CARES Act funding available only until the end of the year, the Fellowship Attorneys Program powered up NHLA's resources at a crucial time.

We are deeply grateful to our law firm partners who stepped up immediately when

we asked for their help. Their commitment is emblematic of the New Hampshire bar's enduring commitment to civil legal aid, including a remarkable tradition of attorney volunteerism through the Pro Bono Referral Program. Here's just one story from the Crisis Fellowship:

After graduating from law school, Abbygale Martinen landed a position with Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green – but had barely started there before being given the opportunity to serve as a Crisis Response Fellow at NHLA.

“As a fairly new lawyer right out of law school, this provided me with incredible opportunities to directly help people in the community who needed it most,” she said.

Among the people Abby helped was Louis, an 85-year-old man with a job at a grocery store. When the pandemic began, Louis took a three-month leave of absence because of chronic conditions that put him at high risk for complications if he was exposed to the virus. He filed for unemployment benefits to get by in the meantime.

Last summer, after he had returned to work, he received a notice requesting he repay nearly \$4,000 in benefits, and threatening to withhold his wages if he didn't.

Frightened by the notice, Louis made two payments on the debt before he connected with NHLA.

Abby worked with NHLA Policy Director Dawn McKinney to straighten out the issue with the Department of Employment Security and get Louis his money back.

“NHLA provides extremely important services in our state and it was an honor to help them provide those services, even if just for a short period of time,” Abby said. “The hands-on experience lawyering and counseling clients was invaluable for my own professional development. I can't thank NHLA and my firm leadership enough for allowing me to participate in this incredible opportunity.”

Thank you

NHLA is grateful for the hard work and empathy that our Crisis Response Fellows provided for our clients at the peak of the pandemic.

Rob Kendall

McLane Middleton

Abbygale Martinen

Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green

Craig McMahon

Rath Young and Pignatelli



“The hands-on experience was invaluable for my own professional development.”

OUR SUPPORTERS

Every year, a growing community of generous law firms, businesses, private foundations, and attorneys show their support for civil legal aid in New Hampshire. We are tremendously grateful for their financial support and participation. In 2020, this support broke all previous Campaign records, bringing nearly \$430,000 of private support for equal access to justice.

Visionary Leaders

\$45,000+	\$30,000+	\$20,000+	\$15,000+
McLane Middleton	Boston Billard Club	Northeast Delta Dental	Orr & Reno



Northeast Delta Dental



Champions of Justice

\$10,000+	\$7,500+	\$5,000+
Cross Insurance	Gallagher, Callahan & Gartrell, PC	Bernstein, Shur
Rath, Young and Pignatelli, PC	Nixon Peabody, LLP	Preti Flaherty Beliveau & Pachios
Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green PA		Upton & Hatfield, LLP



OUR SUPPORTERS

Partners in Justice
(\$2,500 - \$4,999)

Fidelity Investments
Pierce Atwood, LLP
The Sedoric Group of Steward Partners

Defenders of Justice
(\$1,000-\$2,499)

Ansell & Anderson, P.A.
Bank of New Hampshire
Brady Sullivan Properties
Cook, Little, Rosenblatt & Manson, P.L.L.C.
Dartmouth Hitchcock
Donahue, Tucker & Ciandella, P.L.L.C.
Downs, Rachlin & Martin, P.L.L.C.
Gottesman & Hollis, P.A.
Jackson Lewis P.C.
Ledyard National Bank
New Hampshire Bar Association
Nixon, Vogelmann, Slawsky & Simoneau P.A.
Primmer Piper Eggleston & Cramer PC

Guardians of Justice
(\$500- \$999)

American College of Trial Lawyers - NH Chapter
Baker Newman Noyes
Bangor Savings Bank
Drummond Woodsum & MacMahon
Enterprise Bank
Flood, Sheehan & Tobin, P.L.L.C.
Hinckley, Allen & Snyder, LLP
Planet Fitness
Upton & Hatfield, LLP
Vapotherm Inc.
WMUR

United Way

The Campaign is grateful to the following people who designated their gifts to the United Way to benefit New Hampshire Legal Assistance.

Shawna Bateman
Kimberly Boone
Susan C. Buxton
James D. Christon
Brad and Kathleen Cook
Stephen R. Eckberg
Alexander K. Feldvebel
Rebeka M. Fortess
Samuel R. Garland
Vasilios N. Gegas
John A. Hattan
Jeffrey Kelcourse
Sean R. Locke
J. C. Marshall
Abby Martinen
Jack B. Middleton
Kathleen M. Mulcahey-Hampson
Jennifer J. Patterson
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Sunniva M. Shea
Torene Tango-Lowy
Heidi Jo K. Turcotte
Norm and Pat Turcotte
Alexander J. Walker
Matthew R. Welch
David Wolowitz



Sustainers Circle

Campaign supporters who make a monthly automatic gift or give via payroll deduction.

Christopher G. Aslin and Rachel A. Goldwasser	Thomas W. Hildreth
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Mark W. Dean	Tina Pickering
R. David DePuy	Mark C. Rouvalis
Patrick Donahue	Alex Savard
Benjamin Folsom	Gregory H. Smith
Claire Gagnon	Cheryl Steinberg
Candace Cappio Gebhart	Marrielle Van Rossum
Donna T. Giddings	Lori A. Wamser
Carolyn Graham	Michelle Wangerin
Brenda Lee Grant	Katherine Wells Wheeler
Lauren Greenwald	Angela Zhang

Commemorative Gifts

Christine Alibrandi, in memory of Larry Alibrandi	James R. Muirhead, in memory of Tom Richards
Patricia Carty, in honor of Megan Dillon	James A. Normand, in memory of Steve Merrill
Betsy Janeway, in memory of Harold Janeway	Jill and John Schiffman, in memory of William A. Baker
Michael J. Donahue, in honor of Paul McEachern	

In honor of **Mitch Simon's retirement** from teaching and as part of NHLA's partnership with UNH Law to provide living stipends for summer legal clerks

Kris Abernathy	Keelan Forey	Matthew Livi
Shireen Bhatia	Ginger Gates	Cassie Manning
Jack Bjorn	Sydney Gillis	Abby Martinen
Liz (Marcotte) Bjorn	Lilly Godfrey	Chris Mignanelli
Ben Chapman	Sofia Hyatt	Audrey Mulliner
Sofia Cunha-Vasconcelos	Derek Kaufman	Danielle Pomeroy
Nicole Demas	Keith Kevelson	Kaitlin Purdy
Janis Emery	Paul Kline	Victoria Saxe
Angela Errico	Rachel Konieczny	Colleen Yoder

CLS Honor Roll 2020

In 2020, the attorneys listed here accepted cases referred by the NH Pro Bono Referral Program, which became part of 603 Legal Aid in June 2021.

** indicates attorneys who accepted more than one Pro Bono case in 2020*

James Allmendinger
Michael Atkins
Gail Bakis
Anne Barber
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While neither retired State Sen. Martha Fuller Clark or her husband, Dr. Jeff Clark of Portsmouth are attorneys, they both hear the call to ensure equal access to justice. And they want more people — both within and beyond the legal community — to hear how access to justice affects people’s lives well beyond a court room.

Access to justice means access to basic living needs, Fuller Clark said, especially during the covid-19 pandemic crisis. “I’m a great admirer of what legal aid does. I don’t think there is any other organization that provides the safety net that legal aid provides, particularly for women and girls. It’s very important that there be equal opportunity and a fair chance for the more vulnerable citizens of our state to have advice and representation when they’re interacting with the court system.

“What goes on in a court room and how people are treated by the court system is something that most ordinary citizens have no any familiarity with and simply don’t have any understanding of how stressful it can be to have to go through the courts to resolve these cases . That is why it is so important we don’t leave people to go through the court system on their own.” Of the many ways legal aid assists people, the impact of access to justice for women concerns Fuller Clark the most.

“During covid, women were more negatively impacted than men, both in terms of losing their jobs or not having access to child care. And women are in many instances at a greater disadvantage economically than men to begin with.”

Fuller Clark and her family have a vision for New Hampshire. It’s one where the sense of community is strong enough that people who are succeeding can also recognize and support people who are hurting: “We are a state where many are doing very well economically, but, at the same time, many others, who through no fault of their own, are struggling.

“Too often there’s a tendency to blame people for the hardships they are undergoing with no recognition that both individuals and families can experience devastating events in their lives over which they have no control. We must strengthen our sense of community support and compassion for those facing hard times and make sure they can access the safety net when they need it.”



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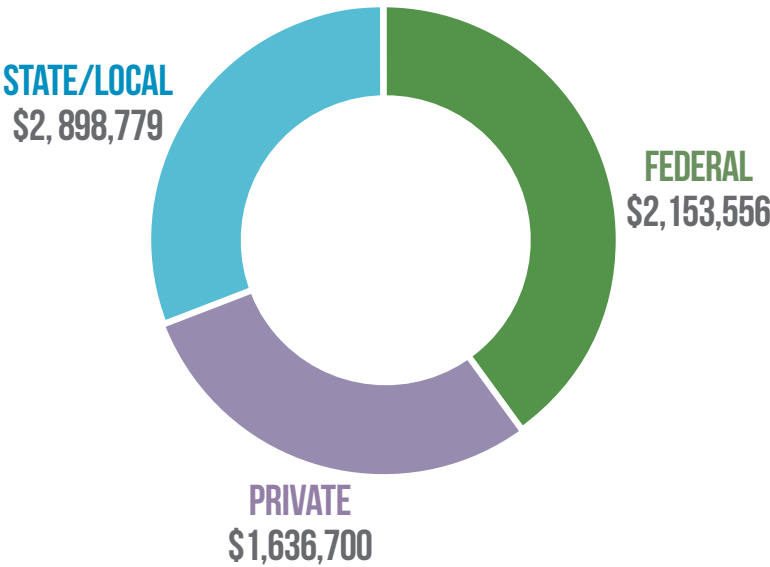
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