



PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES

Equal Access to Justice

IMPACT REPORT

Standing strong in a time of crisis.

ADVOCACY.

”

In the face of incredible uncertainty, **Prairie State Legal Services** was quick to ADAPT to ensure that low-income Illinoisans still received the legal services they needed.”

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & BOARD PRESIDENT



Mike O'Connor
Executive Director



Steven Greeley
Board President

Dear Friends,

2020 was a year unlike any other, and it presented us with challenges that we had not imagined, much less anticipated. It was a year of resourcefulness, resilience, reflection, and reevaluation.

Over the past year, with many businesses and government agencies physically closed to the public and struggling to keep pace with the demand for social services and other life-sustaining assistance, Prairie State Legal Services met the challenges of COVID-19 head on with creativity and fortitude. We stood strong in this time

of crisis and continued to provide legal help to thousands of clients whose lives were upended by the pandemic. Even in normal times, there are almost 700,000 people in the 36 counties we serve who live in poverty, but the pandemic caused thousands more to lose their jobs, creating a huge need for legal help with a wide range of issues from unemployment insurance denials to foreclosure.

There has long been a “justice gap”—a lack of resources to adequately help people who are facing important legal problems—and the pandemic only

widened that gap. In addition, the pandemic caused courts and government agencies to move their services online, placing them out of reach for many who lacked access due to disability, age, or poverty.

As with many other organizations that provide essential services to the community, we were faced with the challenge of learning how to perform our work in a whole new way. Our talented IT team worked quickly to provide our staff with the tools they needed to work remotely and to expand our ability to communicate with our clients via phone and internet instead of face-to-face meetings. Thus, we made the transition to remote work with little interruption in our services.

Conducting outreach and community legal education has always been part of our strategy to ensure that our clients know and understand their legal rights, but the pandemic required us to develop new approaches and use technology in new ways. We sent email and text blasts to thousands of clients to inform them of their legal rights, and made greater use of social media to get the word out. Thursdays at noon, our staff offered a Facebook Live session with updates on the eviction moratorium and valuable advice to help our clients take advantage of the many programs

available to assist with rent, utilities, and other essential needs.

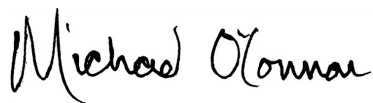
As weeks of quarantine and shut-down turned into months, we heard of the many hardships our clients faced and the fears that kept them up at night. Many clients could not work, due to closed schools and no childcare, and many others suddenly had no job to go to. We heard things like: "I can't pay my rent and my landlord is trying to evict me, even though I have never had any issues until now." State and federal eviction moratoria provided protections against eviction, but only to those who could understand and navigate the complex requirements. And, in the face of the eviction moratoria, landlords often took the process into their own hands through illegal lockouts, turning off utilities, and physical intimidation. Our staff helped more than 4,000 clients in 2020 who faced the loss of their home in the midst of the pandemic.



There has long been a
'justice gap'...the
pandemic only widened
that gap."

While evictions have received much attention in the media, we saw increased demand for many other issues, including problems getting unemployment insurance, food stamps, and medical assistance. The pandemic also caused an increase in domestic violence. During the pandemic, victims of abuse were often isolated with their abuser, and some abusers thought there would be no consequences to their actions. Prairie State was there to help, and in 2020, we obtained protective orders for 803 survivors with 1,246 children. In these cases, we also obtained court orders of support with an annual value of \$353,062 to help provide financial support for these victims.

Since the onset of the pandemic last March, Prairie State has provided legal services in 16,436 cases for 14,643 people. But we can't begin to meet the need alone, and our successes are the product of the support and efforts of many.



MIKE O'CONNOR

Executive Director

We thank the hundreds of attorneys who volunteered their time and talent to provide pro bono representation to 2,122 clients in 2020, with services ranging from brief advice over the phone to extended representation in their court cases. And we are deeply grateful to our donors, funders, community partners, and all those who work to make equal access to justice a reality.

In the following pages you will read about the impact and services we provide to people in the areas of Safety, Housing, Health and Stability. Working together, we were successful in meeting the challenges of 2020, and we are confident that together we will meet the challenges of 2021 and beyond.



STEVEN GREELEY

Board President

OUR MISSION

The mission of Prairie State Legal Services is to ensure equal access to justice and fair treatment under the law by providing legal advice and representation, advocacy, education, and outreach that serve to protect basic human needs and enforce or uphold rights.

Prairie State envisions a community where all low-income people, victims of abuse, veterans, and older adults have ready access to legal services to meet their basic needs and where everyone knows, understands and can exercise their rights and be treated fairly in their pursuit of justice.

//

"I was able to get a new job because of the services I received from Prairie State Legal Services. They greatly improved my life."

-- Alice

//

"My attorneys represented me in several civil cases against a neighbor who was harassing me. They were well-prepared, kind, and reassuring. I always felt safe and well-represented."

-- Jan

//

"I don't know what I would do without your support."

-- John

Justice.

ABOUT PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES

CIVIL LEGAL AID

Since 1977, Prairie State Legal Services has provided dignity, hope, self-sufficiency, and justice through quality civil legal services for low-income individuals.

Every day, people across Illinois are denied the basic rights to which they are entitled under the law simply because they cannot afford a lawyer. It's our mission to change that.

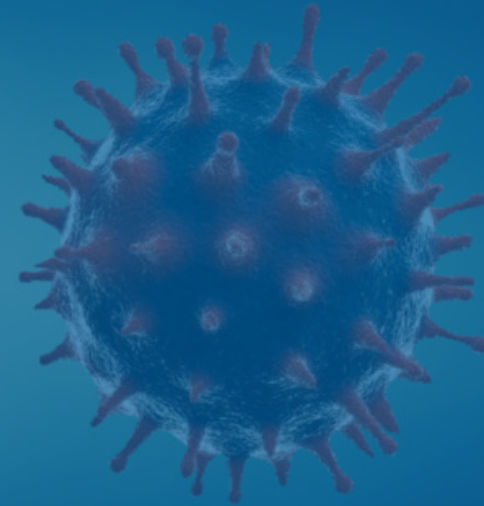
The availability of civil legal aid can make all the difference to our neighbors who are fighting to stay in their homes, escape domestic violence, secure benefits for veterans or people with disabilities, or address many other legal challenges that go to the heart of their security and well-being. They live in the communities we call home. Our communities are a better place for all of us when help is available when it's needed.

Prairie State Legal Services is headquartered in Rockford, IL, and has 11 office locations serving 36 counties in northern and central Illinois.

Civil legal aid organizations across the nation provide advice and representation at no cost to low-income people who otherwise would not receive help with serious legal issues related to housing, healthcare, immigration, employment, education, disability, consumer problems, family law and domestic violence.



RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC



2020 has been a time like no other in our lives. The pandemic forced millions of Americans into unemployment and poverty, swelling the numbers of those in desperate need of our help. At the same time, the pandemic forced us out of our offices and required us to quickly learn new ways to operate--changes of a scale that few could have imagined.

We stayed in close contact with current and former clients throughout the pandemic, both to address new and continuing legal issues, and to help them access new benefits programs, including federal stimulus funds that were predictably most difficult to access for Americans who needed them most.

We also worked hard to disseminate accurate information, share critical resources, help clients access safety-net benefits, and provide ongoing targeted legal assistance to existing clients. And amidst all of this, the killing of George Floyd (and the reckoning that followed) weighed heavily on our hearts.

And yet, with resourcefulness and dedication, we kept the focus on our mission and ensured access to justice just when it was needed the most.



OUR OFFICES



Bloomington Office
Livingston, McLean, and Woodford Counties
201 West Olive Street, Suite 203
Bloomington, IL 61701

Galesburg Office
Henderson, Knox, McDonough, and Warren Counties
311 East Main Street, Suite 302
Galesburg, IL 61401

Joliet Office
Grundy and Will Counties
18 West Cass Street
5th Floor
Joliet, IL 60432

Kankakee Office
Iroquois and Kankakee Counties
187 S. Schuyler Avenue, Suite 350
Kankakee, IL 60901

Ottawa Office
Bureau, LaSalle, and Putnam Counties
1021 Clinton Street
Ottawa, IL 61350

Peoria Office
Fulton, Marshall, Peoria, Stark, and Tazewell Counties
411 Hamilton Boulevard, Suite 1812
Peoria, IL 61602

Rock Island Office
Henry, Lee, Mercer, Rock Island, and Whiteside Counties
1600 Fourth Avenue, Suite 200
Rock Island, IL 61201

Rockford Office
Boone, Carroll, Jo Daviess, Ogle, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties
303 North Main Street, Suite 600
Rockford, IL 61101

Waukegan Office
Lake County
325 W Washington Street, Suite 100
Waukegan, IL 60085

West Suburban Office
DeKalb, DuPage, Kane, and Kendall Counties
31W001 East North Avenue, Suite 200
West Chicago, IL 60185

Woodstock Office
McHenry County
400 Russel Court
Woodstock, IL 60098

FAIRNESS.

IMPACT: NUMBERS TO KNOW

DID YOU KNOW?

IN 2020, **16,436** CASES WERE HANDLED AND CLOSED BY
PRAIRIE STATE LEGAL SERVICES

CASES BY PRIORITY AREA



SAFETY

22%



HOUSING

24%



HEALTH

4%



STABILITY

50%

CASES BY OFFICE



6%

Bloomington



4%

Ottawa



12%

Waukegan



3%

Galesburg



14%

Peoria



24%

West Suburban



7%

Joliet



7%

Rock Island



5%

Woodstock



4%

Kankakee



14%

Rockford

IMPACT: NUMBERS TO KNOW

"Prairie State took care of me like I was family."



In 2020, we obtained protective orders for 803 victim households with 1,246 children. Within these cases, we obtained court orders of support with an annual value of \$353,062.



We provided legal assistance to more than 220 veterans, service members, and their families in civil legal issues affecting their basic human needs.



We served 3,574 unique individuals 60 years old or over.



Volunteer attorneys helped with 2,122 cases.

Client Testimonials

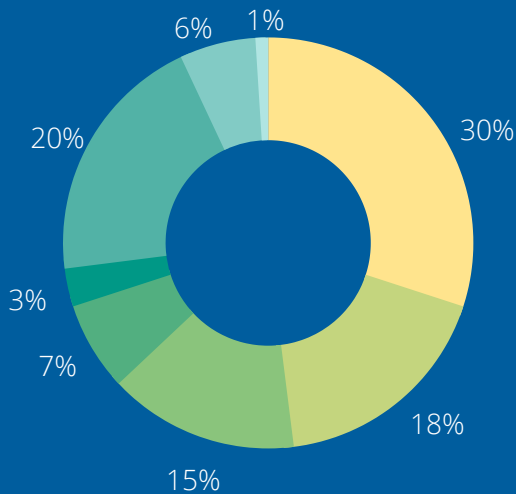
"Makes things easier for me and my kids."

"Now I feel that justice has been done for me."

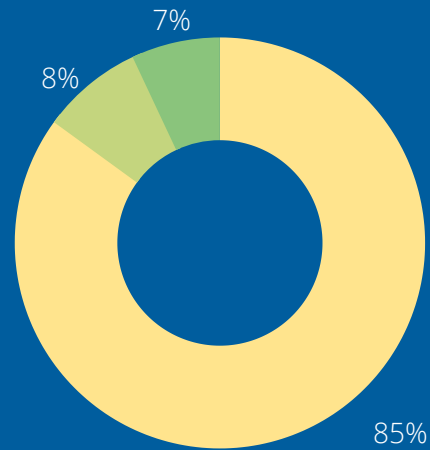
"Thank you for your help in a stressful situation."

2020 FINANCIALS BY PERCENTAGE

REVENUE



EXPENSES



\$15,488,687

\$14,594,604

Legal Services Corporation	30%
Crime Victim Assistance	18%
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois	15%
Older Americans Act - Title III	7%
United Way allocations	3%
Other Grant Funds	20%
Contributions	6%
Other Income	1%
<hr/>	
	100%

Personnel	85%
Operating Costs	8%
Space & Occupancy	7%
<hr/>	
	100%

*Sometimes grant timelines do not correspond with our fiscal year. The income includes funds awarded for expenses to be paid at a later date.

When we have income exceeding expenses, we place such funds in reserve to help us through challenging times such as when government agencies delay payments or when we face funding reductions. This planning provides continuity in services for our existing clients.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

December 31, 2020
With Comparative Totals for 2019

ASSETS	2020	2019
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 6,505,910	\$ 5,426,556
Support receivables, net	3,275,560	3,165,685
Prepaid expenses and other assets	336,681	242,903
Funds held in trust at Community Foundation of Northern Illinois	313,642	280,570
Client escrow deposits	16,004	7,443
Property and equipment, net	97,884	105,124
Total Assets	\$ 10,545,681	\$ 9,228,281
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
LIABILITIES		
Accounts payable	\$ 86,453	\$ 61,003
Accrued expenses	910,032	983,785
Liability under operating leases	147,572	84,923
Client deposits	16,004	7,443
Refundable advances	459,451	59,041
Total Liabilities	\$ 1,619,512	\$ 1,196,195
NET ASSETS		
Without donor restrictions:		
Board designated	313,642	280,570
Property and equipment	97,884	105,124
Other	6,390,459	5,430,215
Total without donor restrictions	\$ 6,801,985	\$ 5,815,909
With donor restrictions:		
Will County Legal Assistance Program, Inc. (WCLAP)	193,062	191,774
Donor restricted	1,931,122	2,024,403
Total with donor restrictions	2,124,184	2,216,177
Total net assets	8,926,169	8,032,086
Total liabilities and net assets	\$10,545,681	\$ 9,228,281

EQUALITY.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Year Ended December 31, 2020

With Comparative Totals

SUPPORT & REVENUE	TOTAL UNRESTRICTED	TOTAL RESRICTED	2020	2019
Federal Grants:				
Legal Services Corporation	—	\$4,661,659	\$4,661,659	\$3,908,511
Older Americans Act - Title III	\$1,006,878	—	—	906,099
HIV Grants	184,718	—	184,718	183,695
Legal Assistance for Victims	31,810	—	31,810	189,022
Crime Victim Assistance	2,746,411	—	2,746,411	2,269,819
Housing & Urban Development	300,000	—	300,000	300,000
Community Development	299,145	—	299,145	171,537
Other Grants	150,782	—	150,782	156,496
State Grants:				
Illinois Equal Justice Foundation	443,782	—	443,782	563,583
Illinois Attorney General	142,488	—	142,488	144,564
Other Grants	936,526	—	936,526	314,006
Miscellaneous Grants	97,878	648,707	746,585	669,058
United Way Allocations	—	436,660	436,660	481,008
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois	—	2,302,000	2,302,000	2,065,104
Cy Pres Awards	172,840	—	172,840	7,796
Contributions, Net of Provision for Uncollectible Pledges	630,676	10,000	640,676	517,614
Special Events - Fundraising	38,369	—	38,369	24,293
Donated Services and Materials	88,005	—	88,005	87,131
Interest and Dividends	34,147	3,588	37,735	107,797
Miscellaneous revenue	87,021	1,525	88,546	5,080
Unrealized gain (loss) on investment securities, net of fees	33,072	—	33,072	42,870
Net assets released from restrictions:				
Satisfaction of Equipment Acquisition Restrictions	26,393	—	(26,393)	—
Satisfaction of Program Restrictions	4,665,484	—	(4,665,484)	—
Expiration of Time Restrictions	3,464,255	—	(3,464,255)	—
Total Support & Revenue	15,580,680	(91,993)	15,488,687	13,115,083
EXPENSES				
Program Services - Provision of Legal Services	12,439,794	—	12,439,794	11,596,484
Management and General	1,638,806	—	1,638,806	1,644,250
Fundraising	516,004	—	516,004	555,232
Total Expenses	14,594,604	—	14,594,604	13,795,966
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	986,076	(91,993)	894,083	(680,883)
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	5,815,909	2,216,177	8,032,086	8,712,969
Net Assets, End of Year	\$ 6,801,985	\$ 2,124,184	\$ 8,926,169	\$ 8,032,086

OUR SUPPORTERS

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thank you

1,000,000+

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois
Legal Services Corporation

\$500,000+

Illinois Equal Justice Foundation
Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
U.S. Department of Justice
Westside Justice Center

\$250,000+

Department of Human Services
Equal Justice Works
U.S. Department of Housing & Urban
Development

\$100,000+

Michael Beckley
Chicago Department of Public Health
Heart of Illinois United Way
Illinois Attorney General's Office
Internal Revenue Service
Lake County
Northwestern Illinois Area Agency on Aging
Western Illinois Area Agency on Aging

\$50,000+

Caterpillar Foundation
Central Illinois Agency on Aging
Dunham Foundation
DuPage County Community Development
Commission
McHenry County

Northwestern University Pritzker
School of Law
RRF Foundation for Aging
United Way Quad Cities
Will County Community Development

\$25,000+

AbbVie Foundation
City of Peoria
DuPage County Division of Human
Services
Jack & Catherine Herrmann
State Farm Companies Foundation
United Way of Metropolitan Chicago
United Way of Rock River Valley
Winnebago County

\$10,000+

Abbott Fund
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City of Aurora
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East Central Illinois Area Agency on
Aging
Illinois Bar Foundation
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Rock Island County Mental Health Board
Town of Elgin
Town of Normal
United Way of Greater McHenry County
United Way of Knox County
United Way of Peoria
United Way of Will County
University of Illinois College of
Medicine at Peoria

\$5,000+

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United Way of Kankakee County
United Way of Livingston County
Will County Bar Association
Connie Zukowski

\$2,000+

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REPRESENTATION.

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John K. & Danielle F. Kim

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Paola Wisner

Walker & Eva Wyman

Jamie L. Zelvin

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in memory of

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Stephen & Lisa Rice

In memory of William Caldwell, Jr.

Robin M. Belleau

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In memory of Bernard Drew, Jr.

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