

JUSTICE

IS FOR EVERYONE

SUMMIT
LEGAL AID








VETERAN



2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMIT LEGAL AID

Summit Legal Aid is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit legal aid organization funded by federal, state, and local contracts, along with private grants and donors. We provide free legal services to qualified residents in our ten-county region in Western Pennsylvania. Summit Legal Aid is dedicated to equality, justice, and removing barriers.
Our legal advocates work to provide services that empower our clients by keeping families protected, homes secured, and finances stabilized.

Our Mission

Our mission is to provide civil justice to vulnerable people in need of legal help. Our services empower our clients by keeping families protected, homes secured, and finances stabilized.
Our #1 Priority is to ensure that people in our communities who are in need of help are served with quality legal representation and advice and that everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

Our Vision

We envision our clients thriving beyond meeting the basic necessities of safety, housing, and financial security.
We see barriers broken, lives improved, and communities uplifted thanks to the hard work of our dedicated legal staff.

The Importance of Civil Legal Aid

Civil legal aid is a cornerstone of equal justice. It provides free legal help to people facing serious civil legal problems that affect their safety, housing, health, and financial stability. Without civil legal aid, thousands of people in Southwestern Pennsylvania would have no access to legal help when they need it most.

For low-income residents, the stakes are high. An eviction notice, the loss of wages, the threat of domestic violence, or the denial of essential benefits can quickly spiral into homelessness, hunger, or unsafe living conditions. Private legal representation is far beyond reach for most families living at or below the poverty line. Civil legal aid steps in to ensure that these individuals are not forced to face complex legal systems alone, giving them the tools and representation needed to protect their rights and stabilize their lives.

Civil legal aid services avert more severe legal crises from escalating, ultimately saving the Commonwealth and taxpayers money. A recent study from the Pennsylvania IOLTA Board found that Pennsylvania reaps $12 in economic benefits from each dollar invested in legal aid.

A YEAR OF GROWTH & IMPACT

SUMMIT LEGAL AID



Every day, our staff works tirelessly to provide equal access to justice for our neighbors, no matter their circumstances.

Their work embodies the mission of Summit Legal Aid: to protect rights, promote stability, and ensure equal access to justice for all.

Brian V. Gorman, Esq.
Executive Director

This past year, **case numbers increased by 12.5%** across our 10-county region, indicating a clear sign that the need for civil legal assistance in Western Pennsylvania is growing. Each case represents more than a number; it represents a family keeping their home, a survivor of abuse finding safety, or a community member securing access to critical, life-sustaining benefits.

While the demand for our services continues to rise, our funding has faced uncertainty and remains so as we look ahead to the coming year. This uncertainty could have real consequences: when people cannot access legal help, the ripple effects deepen poverty, destabilize families, and strain entire communities.

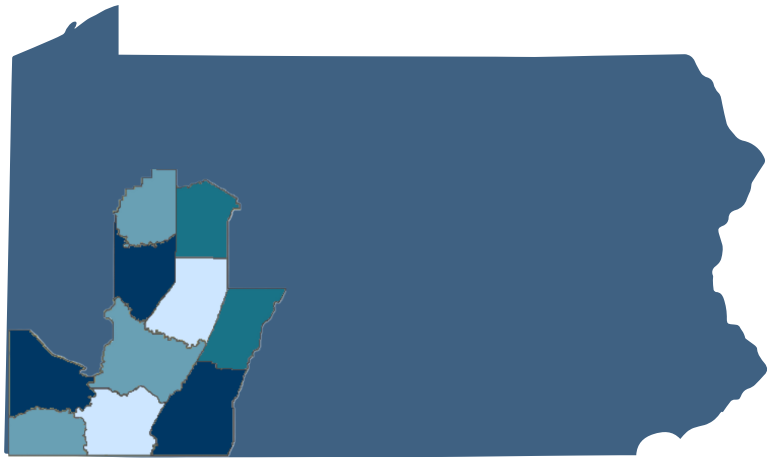
Despite these challenges, our **commitment is unwavering**. We are dedicated to ensuring that people in need receive the help they deserve, and we will continue to serve our community to the fullest extent possible. Every day, our staff works tirelessly to provide equal access to justice for our neighbors, no matter their circumstances.

Without the commitment and compassion of our staff, entire communities would be left without the help they depend on. Their work embodies the mission of Summit Legal Aid: to protect rights, promote stability, and ensure equal access to justice for all.

Even in times of uncertainty, our team continues to do what they do best: stand beside those who need it most and make justice possible for everyone.

OUR 10-COUNTY SERVICE AREA

SUMMIT LEGAL AID



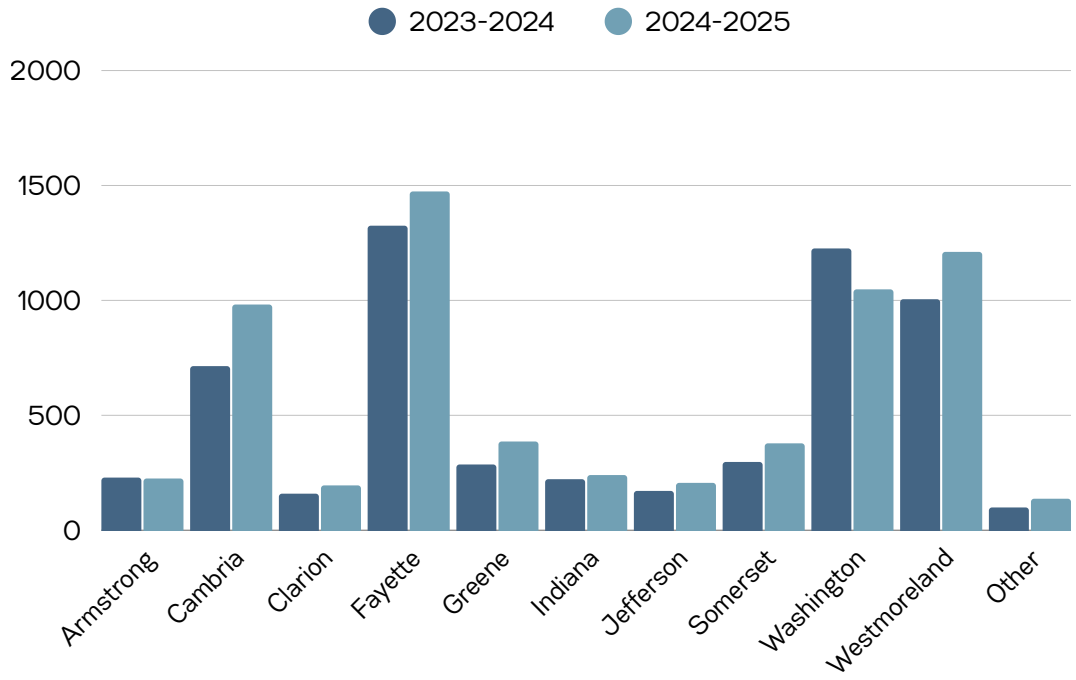
7,754 Square Miles
1,166,908 Total Population

220,030 People Below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level*

ATSDR CDC Social Vulnerability Index

Households Helped by County

County	Households
Armstrong	225
Cambria	982
Clarion	195
Fayette	1,474
Greene	469
Indiana	240
Jefferson	206
Somerset	378
Washington	1,048
Westmoreland	1,211
Other	137



9%
Of Clients Aged 60+ were Veterans

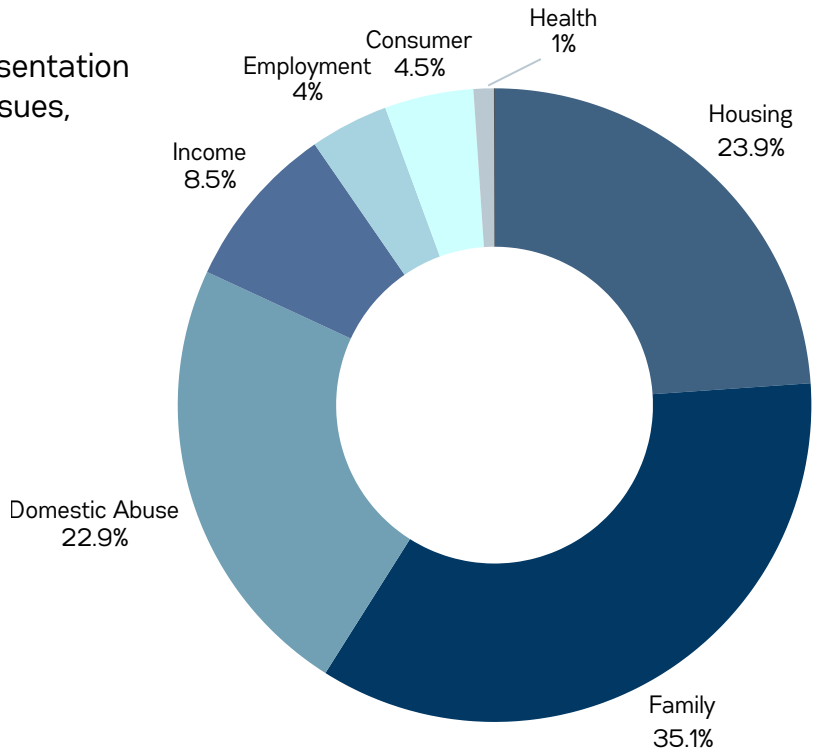
31%
Of Clients Identified as Having a Disability

19%
Of Clients Aged 18-35 Years Experienced Domestic Violence

76%
Of Clients were Female

AT A GLANCE: OUTCOMES

Summit Legal Aid provided free civil legal representation and support to **6,565 households** facing legal issues, directly benefiting **13,887 individuals**.



Case Type	Households
HOUSING	**1,569**
Mortgage foreclosure, unlawful eviction, and denial of access to public or government-subsidized housing	
FAMILY	**2,302**
Child support, child custody, parental rights, divorce, juvenile law, and guardianships	
DOMESTIC ABUSE	**1,506**
Protection from Abuse and Protection for Victims of Sexual Violence	
INCOME SUPPORT	**557**
Termination of Social Security Disability, SSI, unemployment compensation, and public benefits	
EMPLOYMENT	**263**
Expungements, pardons, discrimination, wage claims, driver's licenses, and agricultural worker issues	
CONSUMER	**298**
Illegal taking of property, wage garnishment, denial of credit, predatory and fraudulent consumer practices, federal & state taxes	
HEALTH	**68**
Healthcare coverage, eligibility and coverage issues, and Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP-related issues	
OTHER	**2**
Individual rights	

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

6,219 people attended community education presentations and participated in workshops and civil legal aid clinics hosted by Summit Legal Aid.

OTHER SERVICES PROVIDED

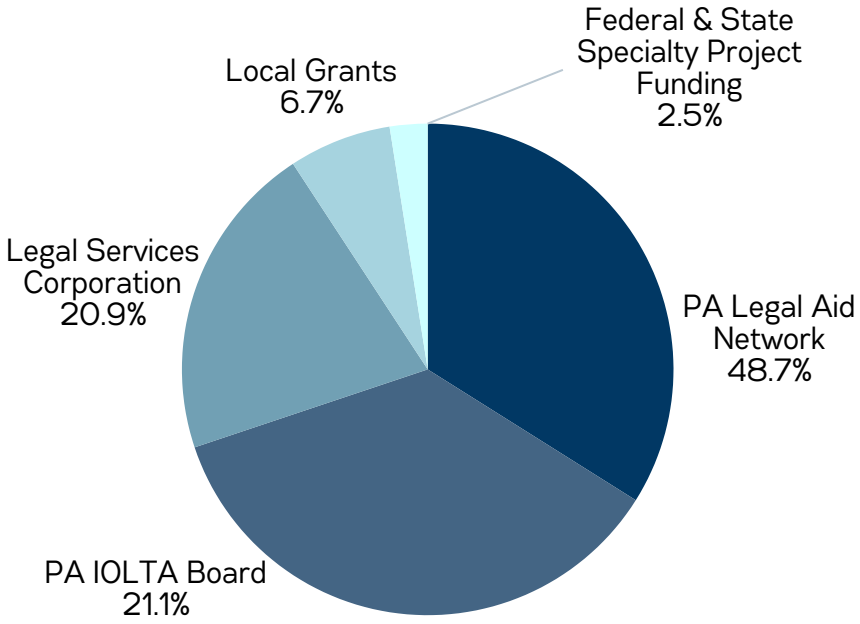
Over the past year, we made **11,176 referrals** connecting clients to additional legal assistance, private attorneys, and community resources. These connections reflect our dedication to addressing the full range of needs that impact our clients' lives.

DIGITAL ADVOCACY

52,111 first-time visitors turned to summitlegal.org for legal information and support.

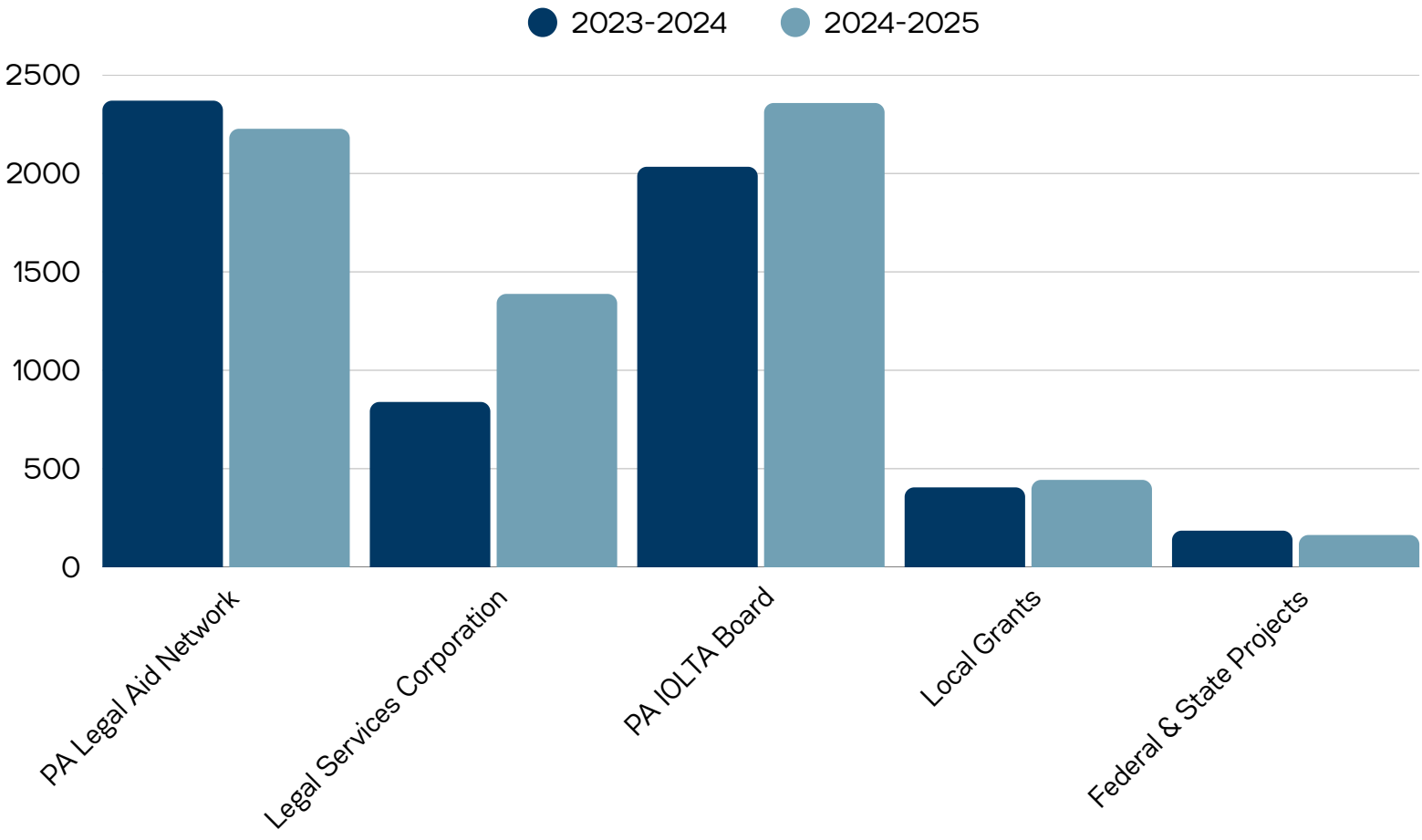
AT A GLANCE: CASES BY FUNDERS

SUMMIT LEGAL AID



6,565 Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network:	2,227
PA IOLTA Board:	2,358
Legal Services Corporation:	1,372
Local Grants:	443
Federal & State Funded Specialty Projects:	163



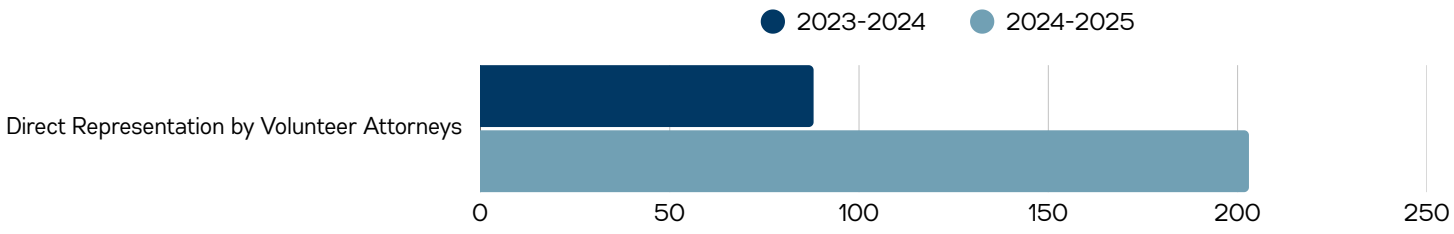
PRIVATE ATTORNEY INVOLVEMENT & PRO BONO PROGRAM

"The Private Attorney Involvement Program plays a critical role in ensuring that access to justice is not limited by income. By engaging private attorneys, this program extends the reach of legal aid, helping more individuals resolve issues that affect their safety. Through PAI, I often represent plaintiffs in Protection From Abuse actions. Many are taking their first courageous steps toward ending an abusive relationship. Having a lawyer to guide them, to explain their rights, and stand beside them in the courtroom can make all the difference in securing a court order for their protection.

Programs like this are essential to achieving justice. Legal aid provides abuse survivors with the support of private attorneys to access the courts and move toward safety and stability. I'm honored to be part of Summit Legal Aid's effort." -**Bobby Gordon, Esq., Fayette County PAI Attorney**

Direct Referrals Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Bankruptcy/ Debtor Relief:	1
Other Employment:	7
Child Custody/ Visitation:	28
Divorce (for cases with no assets):	7
Support:	1
Name Change:	1
Domestic Abuse:	153
Homeownership/ Real Property:	1
Private Landlord/ Tenant:	3
Immigration/ Naturalization	1
Total:	203



Legal Clinics Offered 2023-2025

5 Legal Clinics, **38** Volunteer Attorneys, **113** People Served

HELPING FAMILIES

Legal aid plays a critical role in protecting and strengthening families by addressing the legal issues that often lie at the heart of instability. Our advocates assist clients with:

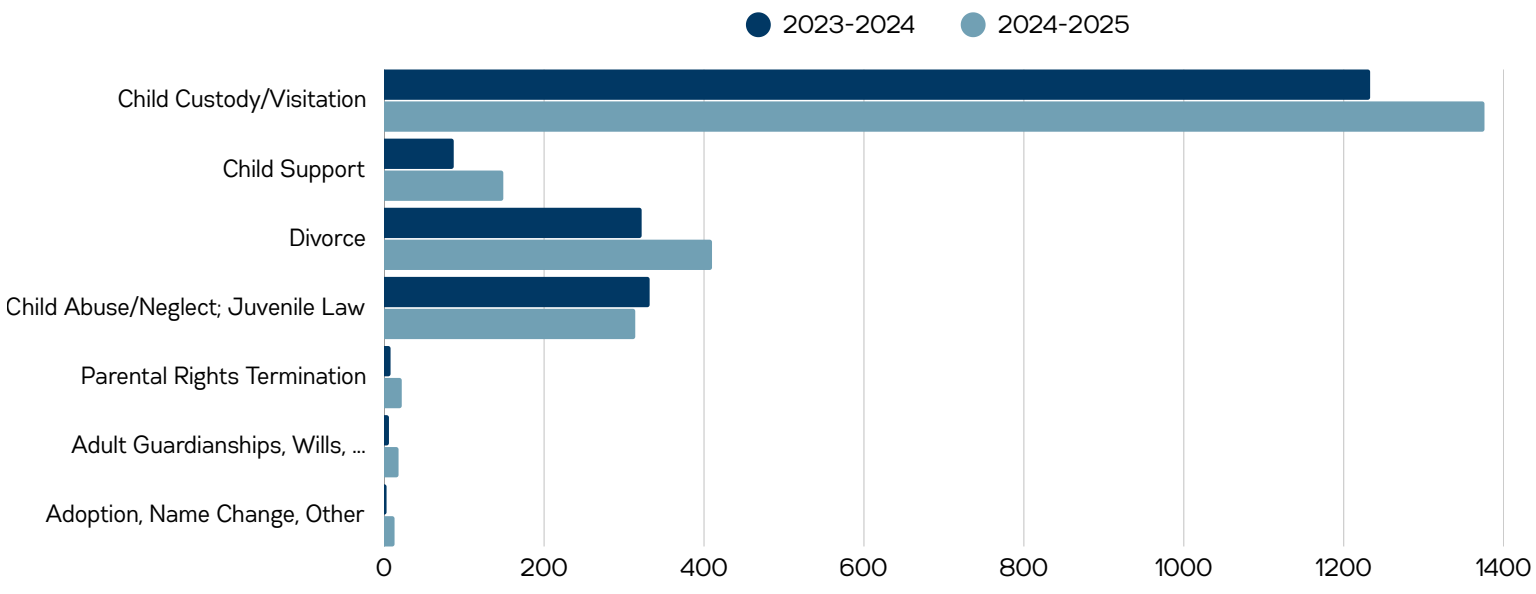
- Custody and divorce matters that protect survivors of domestic violence and secure safe living arrangements for children.
- Minor guardianships and conservatorships that provide children with stable care when parents are unable to do so.
- Cases involving neglected or abused children, ensuring their rights and safety are upheld.
- Legal assistance for older adults, including help with advance directives, powers of attorney, and wills, empowering them to make informed decisions and safeguard their dignity and independence.

By resolving these critical legal issues, Summit Legal Aid helps families rebuild their lives and move toward stability: laying the groundwork for better health, improved educational outcomes, and stronger communities.

This year, we saw a **16% increase** in family law cases, reflecting the growing number of parents and caregivers who turn to Summit Legal Aid to protect their children, secure custody arrangements, and find stability during times of crisis.

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Child Custody/ Visitation:	1,376
Child Support:	149
Divorce (for cases with no assets):	410
Child Abuse/Neglect; Minor Guardianships; Other Juvenile Law:	314
Parental Rights Termination:	22
Adult Guardianships; Wills; Advanced Directives:	18
Adoption; Name Change; Other Family:	13
Total:	2,302



PROTECTING SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC & SEXUAL ABUSE

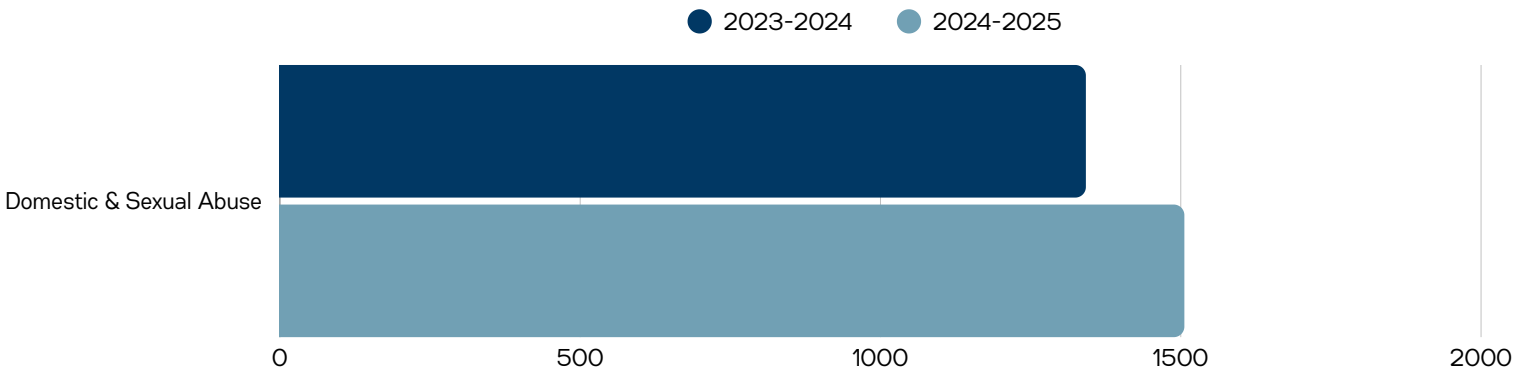
Legal aid is essential in helping survivors secure that safety and start the process of recovery.
Our advocates assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by obtaining Protection From Abuse (PFA) orders, representing survivors in custody and divorce cases, and helping them access critical resources such as housing, benefits, and financial support. For survivors of sexual violence, legal aid provides compassionate guidance and advocacy to ensure their rights are protected throughout the legal process.

Summit Legal Aid attorneys help survivors navigate a complex system, empowering them to make safe choices for themselves and their children.
When survivors achieve safety, the benefits extend far beyond the individual. Children grow up in secure, nurturing environments, and communities become stronger, healthier, and more resilient. Every protection order obtained and every survivor supported represents not only justice for one person, but a safer future for all.

This year, we saw a **12% increase** in requests for help from survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Protection from Abuse and Protection for Victims of Sexual Violence:	1,506
Total:	1,506





Ensuring Family Stability

When Rebecca came to Summit Legal Aid, she had already spent a year caring for her young grandson, Carl. Carl's parents struggled with abuse and substance use, and a Protection Order was in place against the father. While Carl's sibling, Philip, remained with their mother, Carl did not want to leave his grandmother's safe and stable home. He still wanted to see his parents, but not live with them.

Determined to do what was best for both children, Rebecca turned to Summit Legal Aid. Our team collaborated with family members to develop a solution that kept Carl and Philip connected to their parents while ensuring they could grow up in a safe and nurturing environment.
With Summit Legal Aid's help, our client secured custody of her grandson and partial custody of his sibling, bringing stability, safety, and love to both children.

Protecting Victims of Abuse

When Morgan came to Summit Legal Aid, she was living in fear. Her young son needed medical treatment after enduring severe abuse at the hands of his father. The violence was escalating, and local authorities were involved. Morgan knew she and her children were not safe.
Summit Legal Aid stood by her side in the courtroom. With our representation, Morgan was granted a three-year Protection from Abuse Order, gained primary custody of her children, and began the process of rebuilding her life by planning to file for divorce.
Today, she and her children are safe and no longer live in fear. With Summit Legal Aid's help, they now have the chance to heal, grow, and move forward.



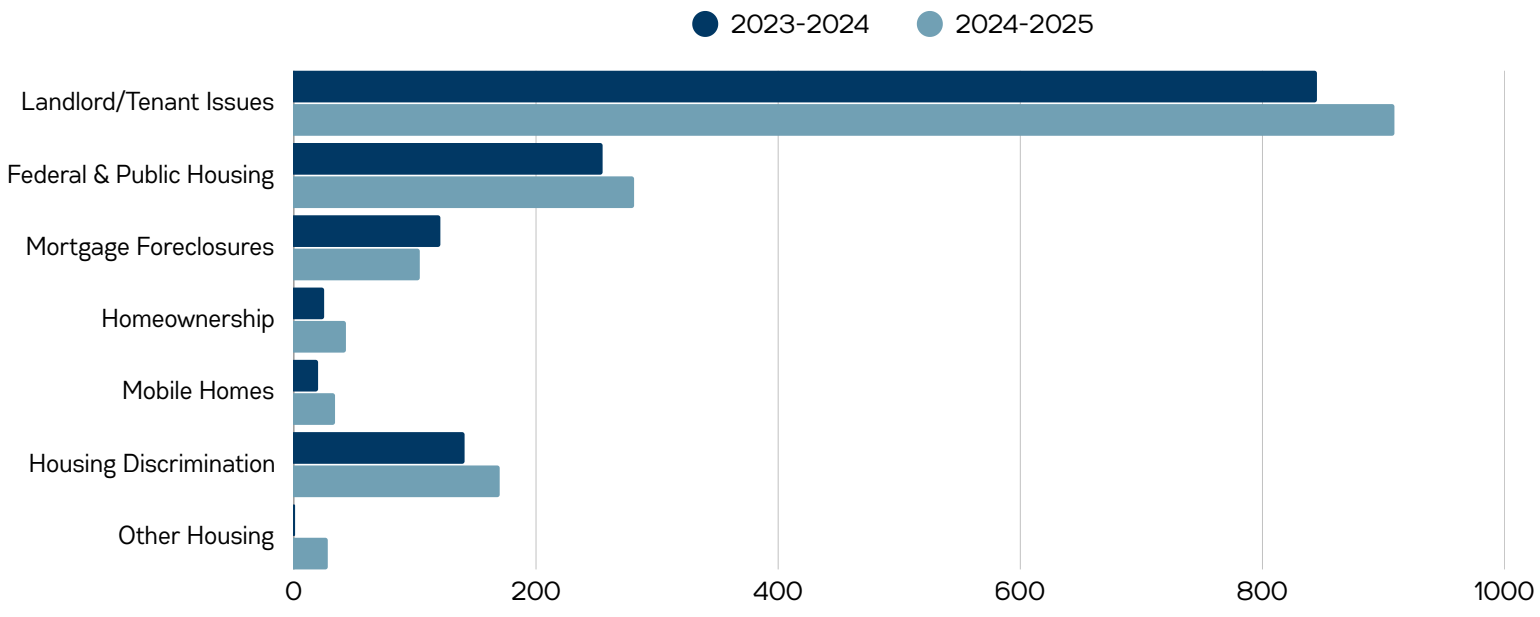
SECURING HOUSING

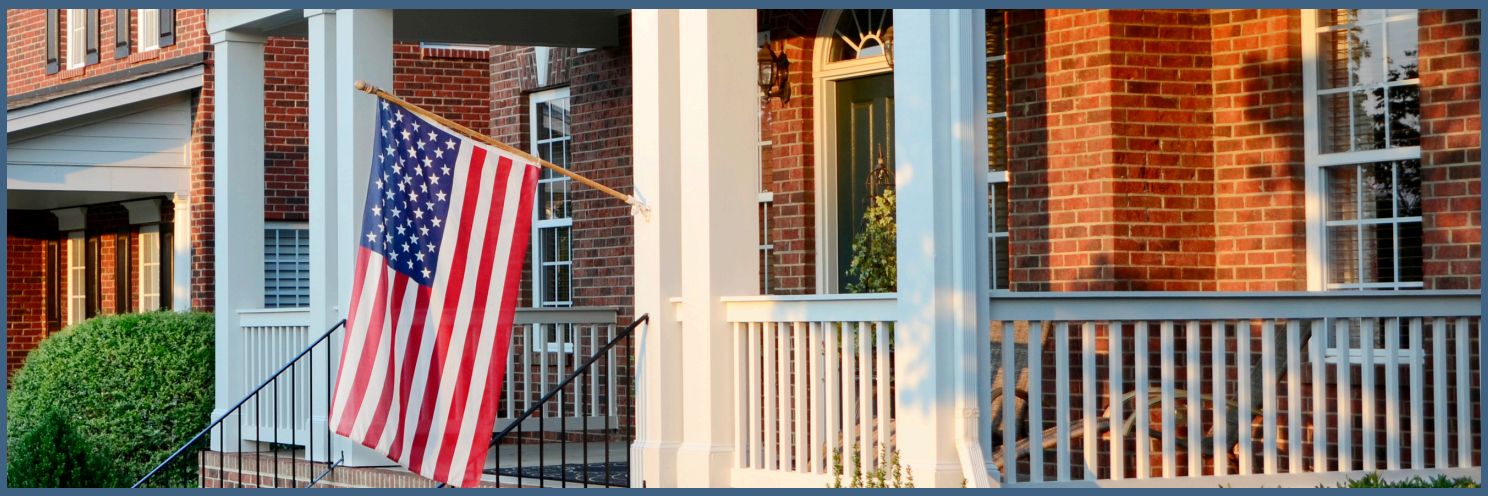
Safe and stable housing is the foundation for family well-being, economic opportunity, and community stability. When housing is lost, the consequences are immediate and far-reaching.
Summit Legal Aid plays a critical role in preventing these outcomes by protecting the rights of renters and holding property owners accountable under the law. Our housing advocates help tenants prevent illegal evictions and lockouts, enforce safe and habitable living conditions, and ensure that landlords meet their legal obligations to provide safe and sanitary housing.
We also defend the rights of tenants living in federally subsidized or public housing, and mobile home parks, where losing a home can mean losing a community and a vital support network. In addition, our work helps uphold the principles of the Fair Housing Act, protecting individuals and families from discrimination based on race, color, disability, familial status, sex, and national origin.

This year, we saw a **9% increase** in the need for help with housing legal matters, demonstrating the essential role we play in preventing homelessness and preserving housing stability.

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Landlord/Tenant Issues, such as Eviction & Habitability:	909
Federal Housing & Public Housing:	281
Mortgage Foreclosures & Lending:	104
Homeownership/ Real Property:	43
Mobile Homes:	34
Protection Against Housing Discrimination:	170
Other Housing	28
Total:	1,569





Helping People Stay in Their Homes

When Brandan came to Summit Legal Aid, he was facing foreclosure and the possible loss of his home. He fell behind on payments because of circumstances beyond his control, including serious medical issues and the loss of his business. Even when Brandon tried to make payments, his lender refused them. At a time when he was already under enormous stress, the threat of losing his home made the situation overwhelming to face alone.

That's when Summit Legal Aid stepped in. Our attorney filed for a foreclosure diversion to pause the foreclosure and provide a chance for our client to reach a resolution with the mortgage lender, giving him the breathing room he desperately needed. An agreement was made, and Brandon received a reinstatement figure from his mortgage lender. He was able to gather the funds, make the reinstatement payment, and stop the foreclosure.

Because of our help, the mortgage foreclosure was dismissed, and Brandon didn't have to face homelessness in the middle of a health and financial crisis. His story is a reminder that foreclosure can happen to anyone, and with the right help, he was able to regain control of his life, preserve his stability, and begin moving forward with dignity.

Fair Housing Law Center

Carrie, a legally blind Section 8 tenant, awoke one morning to the blaring of her carbon monoxide detector. Unable to see what was happening, she climbed out of her window onto the roof and cried out for help. A neighbor called 911, and while the fire department found no immediate danger, they discovered the detector was outdated and had never been installed properly.

Instead of fixing the problem, the landlord reacted with anger, threatening to evict Carrie and treating her with hostility and disrespect. Already shaken, Carrie no longer felt safe in her own home. She also feared that an eviction on her record would follow her, making it harder to find another place to live.

That's where our Fair Housing Law Center stepped in. We explained her rights: a landlord's threats are not the same as a legal eviction notice. Armed with this knowledge, Carrie had the time and confidence to secure safe, stable housing without the shadow of eviction hanging over her future.

This case shows why fair housing rights matter: no one should be punished or intimidated for speaking up about unsafe conditions.

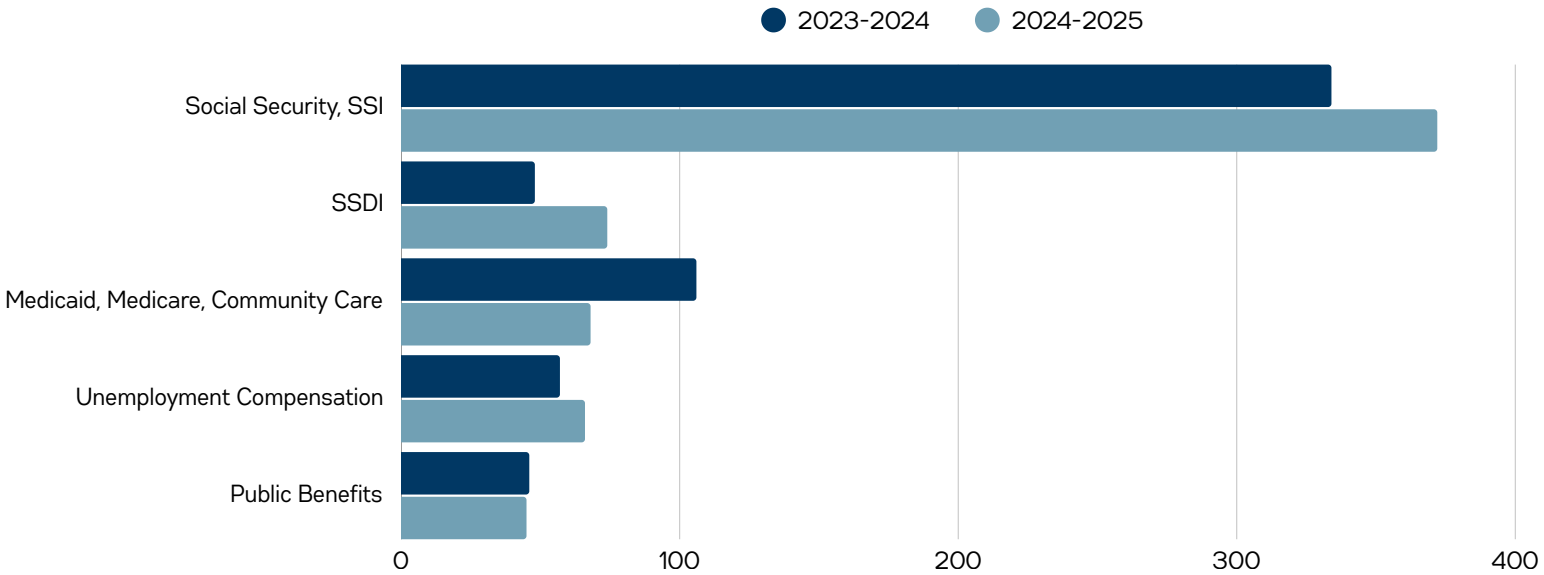
INCOME SUPPORT & HEALTH

Access to basic necessities, such as food, health care, income, and utilities, is fundamental to survival and dignity. Sudden denials, terminations, or reductions in benefits can threaten a family's stability, leaving them without income, food, or medical coverage when they need it most.
Summit Legal Aid ensures that vulnerable residents are not left behind by errors or systemic barriers. Our advocates help clients appeal wrongful denials, restore benefits that were improperly cut, and secure access to essential assistance that supports their health, safety, and well-being. We also help clients understand their rights and responsibilities under these programs, empowering them to maintain long-term stability.
The impact of this work extends far beyond individual households. When people have access to food, medical care, a stable income, and energy assistance, they are better equipped to work and care for their families.

This year, we saw a **6% increase** in cases involving health and income support, as more individuals and families faced barriers to accessing life-sustaining programs like food assistance, Medicaid, and disability benefits

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Social Security, SSI:	372
SSDI:	74
Medicaid, Medicare, Community-Based Care	68
Unemployment Compensation:	66
Utility Assistance, Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance:	45
Total:	625





Restoring Vital Home Health Care for a Client in Need

After a serious injury, Robert depended on home health care to manage daily tasks and live safely at home. For more than ten years, he received these vital services through Pennsylvania's Medical Assistance Waiver program. Then, without warning, Robert was told that he no longer qualified for home health care. The state had labeled him "Nursing Facility Ineligible," meaning that he could no longer receive the care he needed to remain in his home.

Robert tried to appeal the decision, but the appeal paperwork was never received by the Office of Long-Term Living (OLTL) in Harrisburg. Suddenly, he was left without personal assistance, putting his health and independence at serious risk.

When Robert reached out to Summit Legal Aid, our Public Benefits Paralegal immediately stepped in. We contacted the OLTL and secured a new eligibility assessment. Pennsylvania uses what's called the Functional Eligibility Determination (FED) process to decide if someone qualifies for nursing facility-level care. This involves an in-depth assessment that looks at five key areas: thinking and memory, mood and behavior, ability to perform daily tasks, continence, and medical needs.

After the new assessment, the state found that Robert was indeed eligible for care once again, and his home health services were reinstated.

When Robert was later told that there would be a delay before care resumed, our paralegal worked with the Pennsylvania Health Law Project to correct the record and ensure that his home health care services resumed immediately.

It was unknown as to why Robert's benefits were suddenly denied after more than a decade of consistent care. Due to Summit Legal Aid's intervention, Robert regained the support that allows him to live safely and with dignity in his own home.

CONSUMER

Financial instability can trap individuals and families in a cycle of poverty that's difficult to escape. Unexpected hardships like medical bills, job loss, or a family emergency can quickly spiral into overwhelming debt. For many of our clients, even a single unpaid bill can lead to aggressive debt collection, wage garnishment, or the threat of losing essential utilities.

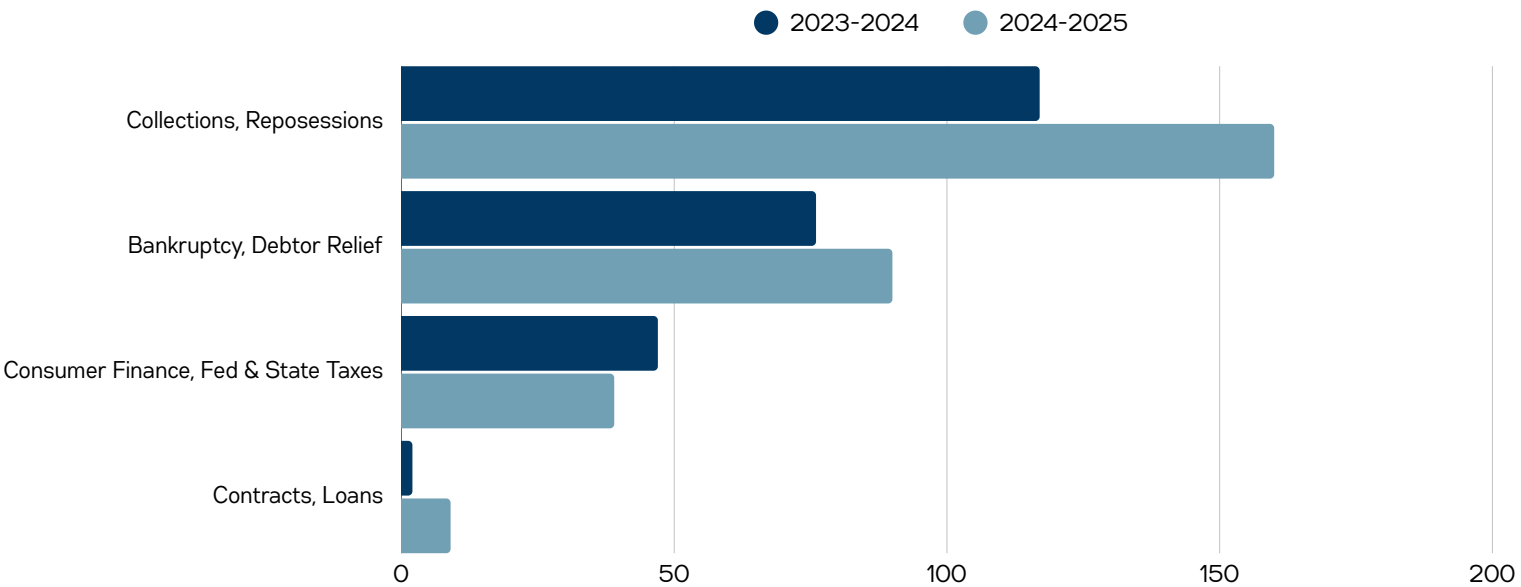
Summit Legal Aid works to help level the playing field for vulnerable individuals and families facing these financial challenges. Our advocates assist clients who are dealing with debt collection, creditor harassment, bankruptcy, or predatory and fraudulent consumer practices. We also help those struggling with state or federal tax issues, ensuring they understand their rights, avoid unfair penalties, and access available relief programs.

By intervening early, Summit Legal Aid can help clients stabilize their finances, stop harassment from creditors, and prevent the loss of income or property. These legal protections don't just solve immediate crises. They create long-term stability, allowing families to rebuild credit, maintain housing, and work toward financial independence.

This year, we experienced a **27% increase** in consumer-related cases to help clients facing aggressive debt collection, predatory lending, and financial exploitation.

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Collections, Reposessions, Garnishments, Harassment:	160
Bankruptcy, Debtor Relief:	90
Consumer Finance, Federal & State Taxes:	39
Contracts, Loans:	9
Total:	557



EMPLOYMENT

Economic stability begins with opportunity, but for many low-income individuals, legal barriers stand in the way of employment, education, and self-sufficiency. Summit Legal Aid helps to remove those barriers so people can move forward and break the cycle of poverty.

Our advocates assist clients in applying for expungements, pardons, and record sealing under Pennsylvania's Clean Slate Act, giving individuals a chance to rebuild their lives. Clearing a criminal record can mean the difference between unemployment and a steady job, between instability and independence. For many, it represents a second chance to provide for their families.

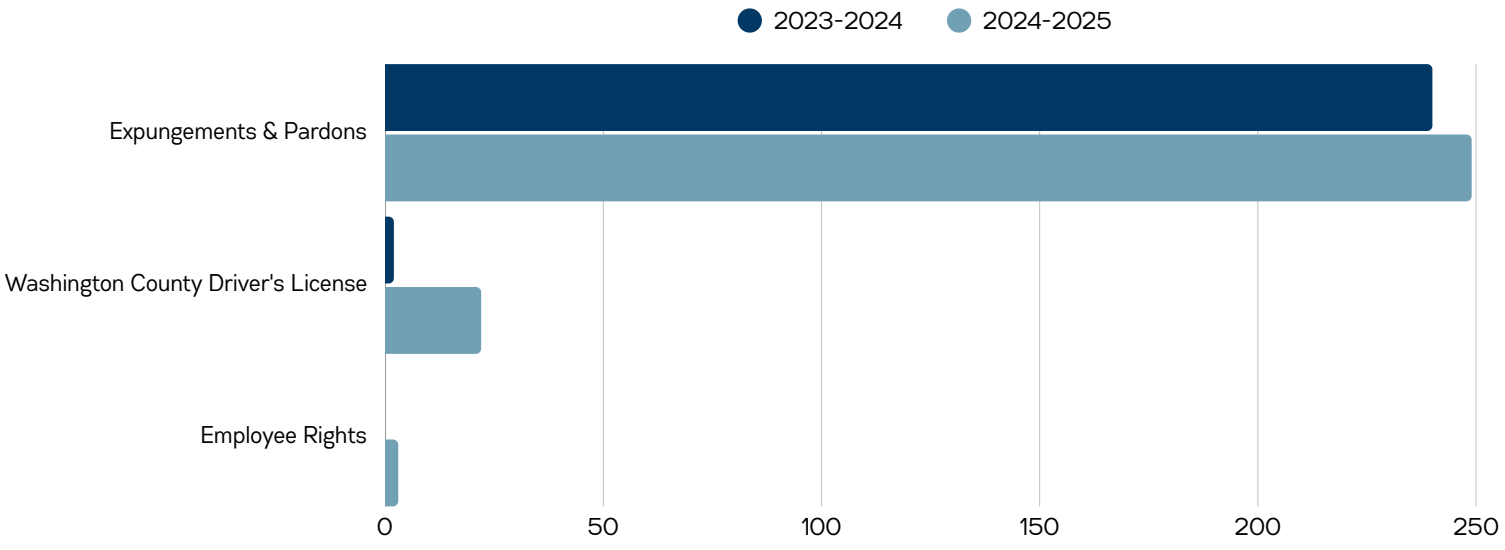
Through the Washington County Community Foundation, Summit Legal Aid also helped clients with driver's license restoration, addressing another major barrier. In our rural region, where public transportation is limited or unavailable, a driver's license provides access to work, education, healthcare, and other necessities.

In the coming fiscal year, this driver's license restoration program will expand to all ten counties served by our organization, ensuring that more people in our service area have the opportunity to regain independence and stability. By removing these barriers, we empower individuals and families to move beyond poverty and achieve financial security.

We saw a **9% increas**e in cases related to protecting the rights of employees and removing barriers to employment

Legal Matters Handled in 2024-2025

Legal Matter	Number of Households Helped
Barriers to Employment: Expungements and Pardons:	249
Barriers to Employment: Driver's License Restoration (Washington County):	11
Employee Rights:	3
Total:	263





Helping a Client Access Disability Benefits and Dignity During a Critical Time

Paul was diagnosed with terminal cancer. He made several attempts to apply for disability benefits at the local Social Security Administration (SSA) office, but instead of receiving the emergency interview Paul was entitled to, he was told to apply online.

For someone battling a life-threatening illness without steady access to a computer or the digital skills many take for granted, this was an impossible barrier. Like so many low-income individuals, Paul was caught in a system that increasingly relies on technology, even for those without easy access.

When Paul turned to Summit Legal Aid, we immediately stepped in. Our staff assisted our client with completing a Compassionate Allowance application, a process designed to expedite benefits for individuals with severe medical conditions, and filed an official notice to represent Paul. He returned to the SSA office with the documentation and finally received an appointment within a week. Within a month, his disability benefits were approved.

This case is a reminder that access to technology often determines access to justice. For many low-income individuals, lack of internet, devices, or digital literacy can delay or even prevent them from obtaining life-sustaining benefits. Summit Legal Aid bridges that gap by ensuring that no one is left behind simply because they can't navigate a complicated online system.

Removing Barriers for a Fresh Start

When Alex came to Summit Legal Aid, he was facing a major roadblock to rebuilding his life. Six old criminal cases on his record made it nearly impossible to find steady employment and move forward. Despite working hard to turn things around and move on from his past, his criminal history remained a barrier.

Summit Legal Aid reviewed his record and prepared and filed petitions to have all six cases sealed under Pennsylvania's Clean Slate Act. With the District Attorney's consent, the court approved the petitions, completely sealing the client's record from public view. Now, those cases will no longer appear on a Pennsylvania background check, removing one of the biggest barriers to pursuing new opportunities.

Thanks to this outcome, Alex can finally apply for jobs, housing, and education with confidence, free from the stigma of a past that no longer defines them.



To protect the identities of our clients, Summit Legal Aid uses stock images and pseudonyms.

SCHEDULE OF REVENUE, EXPENSES, & NET ASSETS

SUMMIT LEGAL AID

2024-2025 Fiscal Year

Revenues and Support:

	2025	2024
Contracts and Grants:	$7,033,619	$6,103,000
Contributions of Cash & Other Financial Assets:	$63,140	$87,911
Contributions of Nonfinancial Assets:	$408,981	$575,873
Interest Income:	$24,562	$15,757
Excess of Assets Acquired over Liabilities Assumed in Donation of Laurel Legal Services, Inc.:	$0	$104,004
Total Revenues and Support:	**$7,530,302**	**$6,886,545**

Expenses:

	2025	2024
Program Services:	$7,189,708	$6,198,502
Management and General:	$340,469	$498,494
Fundraising::	$0	$628
Total Expenses:	**$7,530,177**	**$6,697,624**

2025 Change in Net Assets: $125

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

SUMMIT LEGAL AID

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"Everyone deserves representation, especially those who cannot afford to hire an attorney. It is an honor to represent those who never thought they would have someone in their corner helping them. Their issues usually involve children, and helping to make their family's life better because they got help from me through the PAI Program is something that continues to make me passionate about continuing to practice."
-Maurenn Kroll, Esq., Westmoreland County

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Phone: (814) 226-4340
Fax: (814) 226-5531

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Fax: (724) 836-3680

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227 Franklin Street
Suite 400
Johnstown, PA 15901
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Fax: (814) 535-3377

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203 West Union Street
Somerset, PA 15501
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Suite 200
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