SUMMIT LEGAL AID



2025-2026

JUSTICE REPORT

fair housing LAW CENTER

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2025–2026 Justice Report

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THANK YOU TO OUR COVER PAGE ARTIST!

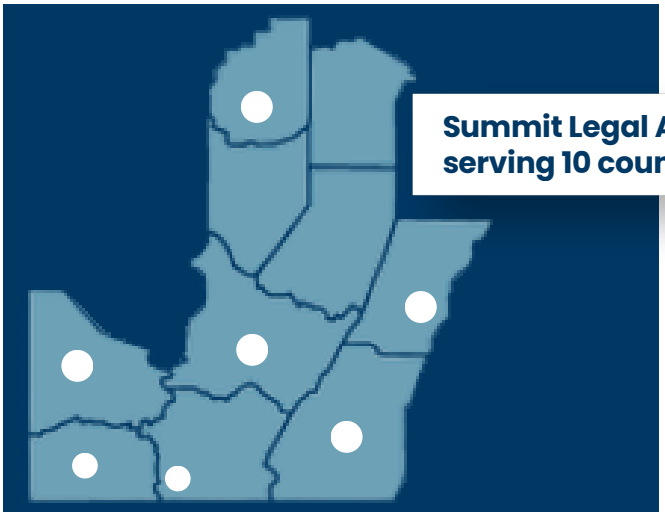
WHO WE ARE

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.

Civil justice touches nearly every part of our lives. When someone faces eviction, domestic violence, the loss of essential benefits, or the threat of foreclosure, the consequences reach far beyond a legal problem. They can affect a family's safety, financial security, health, and future. Access to an attorney can mean the difference between facing these challenges alone and finding a path forward.

At Summit Legal Aid, we believe that everyone deserves a fair chance to protect what matters most, regardless of their income or circumstances. Throughout the fiscal year, our attorneys and staff worked alongside individuals and families across our service area, helping them navigate difficult legal challenges and regain stability. From July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, Summit Legal Aid handled **6,876 cases** and helped clients recover or avoid more than **$2.39 million** in financial losses. We also expanded our Driver's License Restoration Program to serve all 10 counties, bringing critical assistance closer to people whose ability to drive can affect their access to employment, healthcare, education, and daily necessities.
The year's accomplishments are only part of the story. Our work also revealed the growing and changing legal needs of our communities.

In the pages that follow, you will see the impact of our work across housing, family law, domestic violence, and economic stability. You will learn how our services help people protect their homes, keep their families safe, access essential resources, and move toward a more secure future. You will also see the dedication of our staff, the strength of our community partnerships, and the difference that supporters and volunteer attorneys make in expanding access to justice.



Our mission is to provide civil justice to vulnerable people in need of legal help by keeping families protected, homes secured, and finances stabilized.

Brian V. Gorman, Esq.
Executive Director

Since July 1, 2023

19,272
Legal Cases Handled

45,677
People Helped

$3,996,014
Monthly & Lump Sum Dollars Recovered for Clients

OUT & ABOUT

17,303

People reached at community resource events across our service area, in addition to community education presentations and clinics hosted by Summit Legal Aid.



























MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

In the summer of 2025, Summit Legal Aid and Neighborhood Legal Services conducted a comprehensive needs assessment across our shared 14 counties. The findings paint a **sobering picture of the challenges facing residents**.

The study identified a **rapidly growing justice gap**, leaving thousands of families on the brink of crisis, as persistent barriers like childcare and transportation turn manageable legal issues into regional challenges.

The key findings reveal a significant demographic shift: **in nearly every surveyed county, almost one in four residents is now over the age of 65**. This aging population is struggling with fixed incomes and relentless inflation, as well as an increasing susceptibility to fraud, theft, and unfair business practices. Many working households continue to struggle with financial instability due to costs of housing, utilities, food, and healthcare increasing legal vulnerability. Nearly 40% of respondents reported household income near or below the legal aid eligibility threshold, and a third relied on benefits like SNAP or Medicaid. The report's data shows that, of the ten counties Summit Legal Aid serves, six have **higher poverty levels than the state average**, with all but one of the ten having a median income lower than Pennsylvania's median income.

Demand for legal aid in the Summit region is escalating, underscoring the financial difficulties faced by many Western Pennsylvanians, further highlighted by a significant **28% rise in homelessness** between 2021 and 2024. In this report, you will find that Summit Legal Aid is reporting another significant increase in cases handled this year, with housing, economic, and family stability sitting at the core of regional needs.



"This report gives us a very clear picture of the situation on the ground in our region of Pennsylvania and how legal problems often affect people's stability and overall well-being. **Whether it's an elderly neighbor being exploited or a family unable to pay utilities due to a sudden medical crisis, the need for civil legal aid has never been more urgent.** It's not just a need for services. It's a regional challenge of isolation and a lack of awareness that these lifelines exist. We are focused on stepping in to ensure that people dealing with complicated legal systems have the necessary representation and tools to protect their rights and stabilize their lives."

Brian V. Gorman, Esq.
Executive Director

Nearly **4 in 10 respondents** report household income near or below the legal aid eligibility threshold
33% of households rely on public benefits such as SNAP or Medicaid
Many working households continue to experience **financial instability**

TOP LEGAL NEEDS IDENTIFIED

By community members, partners, and staff

HOUSING
- Evictions
- Unsafe conditions
- Habitability issues
- Foreclosure risk

FAMILY SAFETY & STABILITY
- Domestic violence
- Custody
- Divorce
- Protection from Abuse

ECONOMIC SECURITY
- Debt collection
- Utilities
- Public benefits access & retention

BY THE NUMBERS

July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

$7,770,703
Total Revenue & Support

Pennsylvania IOLTA Board
$2,724,951

Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network
$1,278,004

Legal Services Corporation
$2,048,583

Other Grants (Federal, State, Municipal)
$1,119,367

Contributions
$562,147

Interest
$37,651

Salaries	$4,477,764
Employee Benefits	$1,690,132
Space Costs	$364,080
Contract Services	$233,481
Equipment	$87,082
Litigation Costs	$18,372
Supporting Services	$1,131,359
Total Program Expenses	**$8,001,980**



PRACTICE AREAS

HOUSING

- Federally Subsidized Housing
- Private Landlord/Tenant
- Public Housing
- Mobile Homes
- Housing Discrimination (Fair Housing Law Center)

Family

- Protection from domestic and/or sexual abuse
- Adoption
- Child Custody and Visitation
- Divorce/ Separation/ Annulment
- Guardianship
- Name Change
- Child Support
- Juvenile: Neglected, abused, dependent children
- Elder financial abuse, wills, estate planning

Consumer Rights and Taxes

- Bankruptcy
- Collections and Creditor Harassment
- Unfair practices, loans, contract warranties
- State and Federal tax assistance

Health and Public Benefits

- Public Utilities
- Medicaid
- Medicare
- Home and Community-Based Healthcare
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Social Security
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)

Employment

- Employment Discrimination
- Wage Claims and FLSA Issues
- Employee Rights
- Unemployment Compensation
- Criminal Record Clearing
- Driver's License Restoration

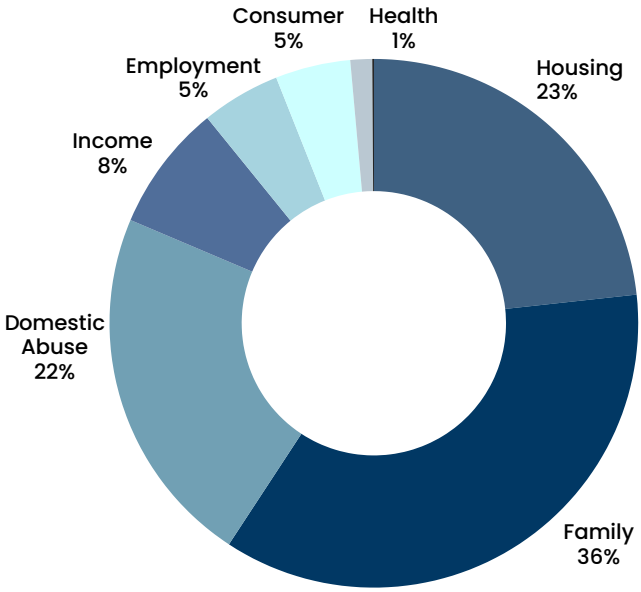
IMPACT AT A GLANCE

6,875
Cases Handled in FY2025-26

15,558
Clients & Household Members Helped

$796,006
Monthly & Lump Sum Dollars Recovered for Clients

Case Type	Amount	
HOUSING	**1,600**	Mortgage foreclosure, unlawful eviction, and denial of access to public or government-subsidized housing
FAMILY	**2,473**	Child support, child custody, parental rights, divorce, juvenile law, and guardianships
DOMESTIC ABUSE	**1,523**	Protection from Abuse and Protection for Victims of Sexual Violence
INCOME SUPPORT	**534**	Social Security Disability, SSI, unemployment compensation, and public benefits
EMPLOYMENT	**332**	Expungements, pardons, discrimination, wage claims, driver's licenses, and agricultural worker issues
CONSUMER	**316**	Illegal taking of property, wage garnishment, denial of credit, predatory and fraudulent consumer practices, federal & state taxes
HEALTH	**92**	Healthcare coverage, eligibility and coverage issues, and Medicare/Medicaid/CHIP-related issues
OTHER	**6**	Individual rights, Estate Planning



6 OUT OF 10 SUMMIT COUNTIES
Have **Poverty Rates** Higher than the State Average of 12%

9 OUT OF 10 SUMMIT COUNTIES
Median Income is **Lower** than the State Average Median Income of $77,545

Households Helped by County

County	Households
Armstrong	221
Cambria	924
Clarion	224
Fayette	1,576
Greene	503
Indiana	271
Jefferson	215
Somerset	376
Washington	1,152
Westmoreland	1,365
Other	49

83%
Of all households helped had incomes at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level

83%
Of households helped were single-income households

76%
Of our clients were women

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

HELPING FAMILIES

2,478
Family Law Cases Handled

6,687
Clients & Household Members Helped

Family law cases increased 8% over the previous year and have **risen 25%** over the past three years. These cases often arise during some of the most difficult periods in a person's life. Disputes involving custody, family relationships, and personal safety can have lasting consequences for parents and children, particularly when families lack the financial resources to obtain legal representation.

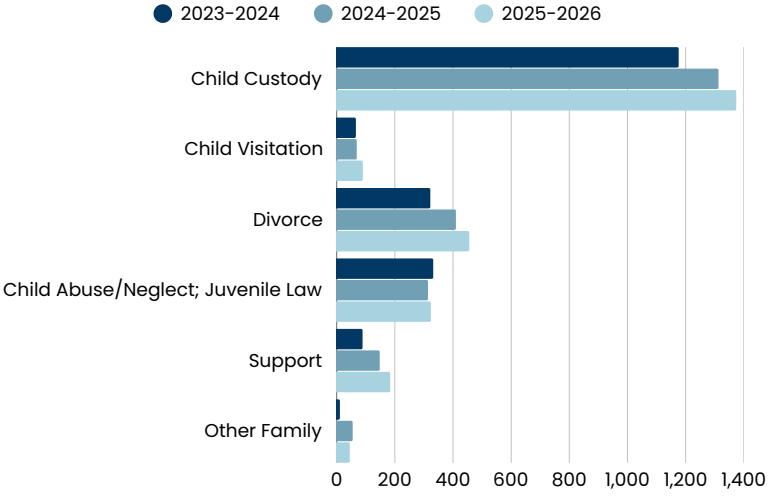
For parents navigating custody disputes and other family law matters, access to legal assistance can help them understand their rights, participate more effectively in court proceedings, and work toward outcomes that support their children's well-being and family stability.

The growing demand for family law services also reflects the interconnected challenges many of our clients face. A family experiencing financial hardship may simultaneously struggle with housing insecurity, domestic violence, or difficulties accessing public benefits. When these issues overlap, resolving a legal problem in one area can be an important step towards stability in others.

As demand grows, Summit Legal Aid remains committed to helping clients navigate these challenges with dignity and work towards safer, more stable futures for themselves and their children.

"Summit Legal Aid made it easy and very comfortable for me to talk about my situation."

Cases Handled over Time



"From the beginning, Summit Legal Aid showed genuine compassion, professionalism, and dedication to doing what is best for the children."

Family, Safety, and a Fresh Start

Rebecca Collins* came to Summit Legal Aid after her estranged husband repeatedly violated their custody order, preventing her from seeing her child for an extended period of time. He also interfered with the child's schooling and access to necessary medication while making harmful comments about our client to the child in an effort to damage their relationship. Worried about her child's well-being and running out of options, she turned to Summit Legal Aid for help.

Our attorneys worked to enforce the custody arrangement and restore the scheduled exchanges. But the violations continued, and the situation grew increasingly frightening.

Rebecca's estranged husband began threatening her, raising serious safety concerns in light of his history of abusive behavior. Summit Legal Aid recognized that Rebecca also needed protection. Our attorneys helped her obtain a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order and represented her at the hearing, standing beside her as she sought safety and accountability.

The court found her estranged husband in contempt for violating the custody order.

After an extended period of separation, our client was finally able to see her child again. Summit Legal Aid also helped her take another important step toward independence by filing for divorce, allowing her to begin moving forward from a painful and abusive chapter of her life.

For Rebecca, the outcome meant more than resolving legal disputes. It meant reconnecting with her child, taking steps to protect their safety and well-being, and reclaiming the opportunity to build a future free from the control and intimidation of the past.

*Name has been changed for client privacy

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PROTECTING SURVIVORS

1,523
Domestic Violence Cases Handled

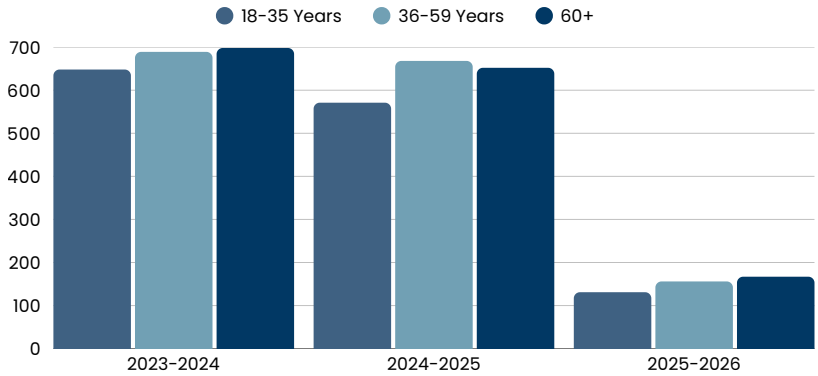
3,564
Clients & Household Members Helped

Domestic violence can affect every aspect of a person's life, from personal safety and family relationships to housing, employment, and financial security.
For survivors with limited financial resources, navigating the legal system without representation can create additional barriers to obtaining protection and rebuilding their lives.
Although older adults represent a smaller share of domestic violence cases, the need for assistance among this population is growing.

27%
Increase over 3 years in domestic violence cases involving older adults

These trends highlight the importance of ensuring that older survivors can access legal assistance that recognizes their unique circumstances, including potential dependence on caregivers, financial vulnerability, disability-related barriers, and concerns about maintaining safe housing.
Legal assistance can help survivors understand their options, pursue available legal protections, and navigate court proceedings during periods of uncertainty and risk. It can also help address related civil legal problems that may prevent a survivor from achieving greater independence and security.
Summit Legal Aid's work recognizes that safety is not limited to the immediate threat of violence. Survivors may also need stable housing, reliable income, access to healthcare, and the ability to make decisions free from coercion or abuse.
By helping clients address these interconnected legal needs, we support their efforts to pursue safety, protect their families, and build more secure futures.

Domestic Violence Cases Over Time - By Age



Safety after Unspeakable Trauma

Sarah Mitchell* experienced a violent sexual assault at the hands of someone she believed was a friend. The attack left her with severe physical injuries and emotional trauma. She lost consciousness multiple times and was unable to move afterward. In desperate need of help, she reached out to a friend, who took her to the hospital. Law enforcement was contacted, and a report was filed.
Although she survived the attack without life-threatening brain injuries or broken bones, the consequences did not end that night.



She continues to live with nerve damage that affects her ability to walk, along with the emotional scars of an experience that forever changed her sense of safety and trust.
When our client sought a Protection From Abuse (PFA) order, she faced the prospect of confronting her attacker in court and reliving the details of an already devastating experience.
The defendant had legal representation, and our client needed someone to stand beside her, protect her interests, and ensure her voice was heard.
Rather than requiring Sarah to endure the additional emotional burden of a courtroom hearing, our attorney negotiated a three-year protection order, the maximum duration available. This agreement provided our client with an important legal safeguard while sparing her the added trauma of having to recount her experience in court.

*Name has been changed for client privacy

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

SECURING HOUSING

1,600
Housing Cases Handled

3,328
Clients & Household Members Helped

Safe, stable housing remains a pressing concern across Summit Legal Aid's 10-county service area. In FY 2025–26, housing matters increased 2% from the previous year and **11% over the past three years**. Behind these numbers are individuals and families facing eviction, unsafe living conditions, discrimination, and the possible loss of homes they have worked hard to maintain.

The challenges facing homeowners are particularly concerning. Ejectment cases, which involve legal proceedings to remove someone from a property, **rose 43%** in the past year and have **increased 329%** over three years. The number of clients aged 36–59 facing ejectment increased 50% in FY 2025–26 and has **risen 650% over three years**, demonstrating that the threat of losing a home extends beyond older adults and younger families.

Evictions accounted for 68% of private landlord-tenant cases, with eviction matters increasing approximately 9% in FY 2025–26 and 26% over three years. Cases involving housing maintenance and habitability increased 6% during the past year, reflecting continued concerns about the condition and safety of rental housing.

Public housing cases increased 15% in FY 2025–26 and 64% over three years, while public housing eviction cases rose 35% in the past year.

Mobile home cases increased 74% in FY 2025–26, representing a **195% increase** over three years. Mobile home lot-rent eviction cases have **increased 170%** over the same period.

350%
Increase in clients facing Housing Discrimination based on race over 3 years

68%
Of all Landlord/Tenant cases were Evictions

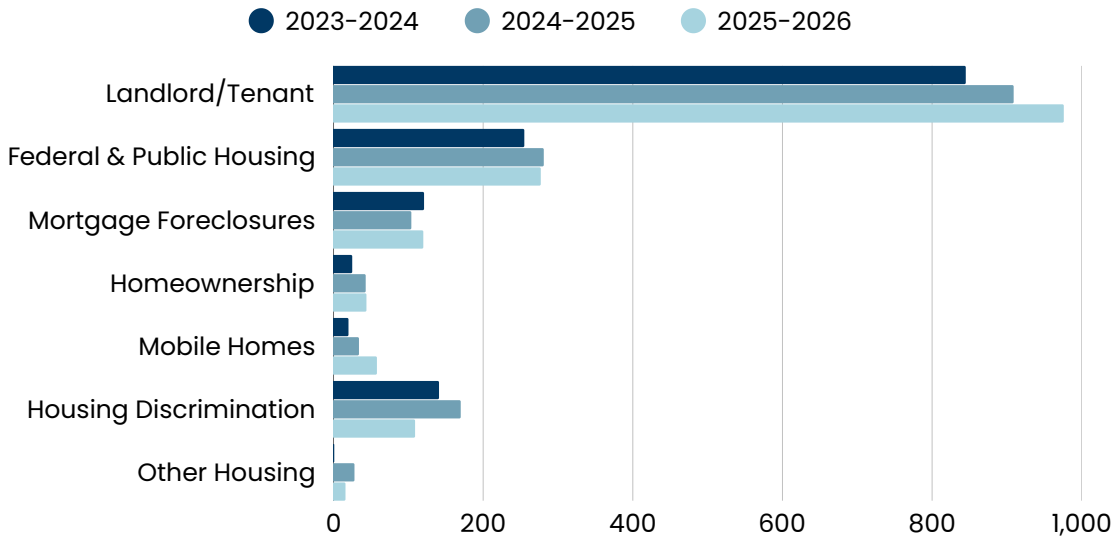
329%
Increase over 3 years in Clients Facing Ejectment from their Homes

70%
Of all Housing Discrimination Cases were for clients who identified as having a disability.

63%
Of all housing cases handled were for clients at risk of homelessness*

90
Foreclosure Cases Closed in FY2025-26

Housing Law Cases Over Time



$356,669
Dollars Recovered

$225,185
Financial Penalties Avoided

Mortgage foreclosure, landlord/tenant, utilities, and other housing

*Clients facing eviction, ejectment, & mortgage foreclosure

ACCESS TO SECURING HOUSING JUSTICE

Protecting more than Housing

Melanie Krane* rented a room in a house under a verbal agreement. Over time, her landlord repeatedly increased her rent without notice, making it increasingly difficult to keep up with payments. After moving Melanie into the basement at a lower rate, her landlord again continued raising the rent while restricting her access to the rest of the house. The basement had no kitchen, leaving Melanie to prepare meals on a hot plate. Her privacy was also routinely violated, with the landlord entering her living space without notice and imposing arbitrary fines.

After losing her job, Melanie fell behind on rent, and her landlord threatened to take her to a homeless shelter if she could not pay. Then, without warning or her consent, the situation escalated even further. While Melanie was away, her landlord had her belongings moved to a storage facility outside of town. Some of her possessions were missing, her metal bed had been scrapped, and a dresser that had belonged to her deceased mother was destroyed.

She was also served with an eviction notice.

Melanie was ready to move forward, find a safer place to live, and put this painful experience behind.

Already struggling with significant health conditions, including arthritis, an autoimmune disease, and bronchitis, Melanie suddenly found herself without a safe place to return to or many of the personal belongings that made her living space a home.

Thankfully, her church stepped in to help her secure a hotel while she figured out what to do next.

Summit Legal Aid helped Melanie understand her rights and options, and our attorneys explained that forcing a tenant out by removing their belongings and denying them access to their home can constitute an illegal constructive eviction. Although Melanie was understandably hesitant to pursue further action, she was deeply concerned that an eviction on her housing record could make it even harder to secure housing in the future.

Summit Legal Aid negotiated directly with Melanie's landlord and successfully secured the withdrawal of the eviction.

For Melanie, this outcome meant more than avoiding an eviction on her record. It meant being able to leave a frightening and unhealthy living situation without carrying the additional burden of a formal eviction that could threaten her future housing opportunities.

She was ready to move forward, find a safer place to live, and put this painful experience behind her.



*Name has been changed for client privacy

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PROTECTING BENEFITS

568
Health & Benefits Cases Handled

997
Clients & Household Members Helped

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 public benefits, as more individuals and families faced barriers to accessing life-sustaining programs like food assistance, Medicaid, and disability benefits

"I had trouble understanding why my SNAP benefits changed. Summit Legal Aid was knowledgeable and explained everything to me, and was so genuine and caring. Thank you for your help."





"Starting Medicare and this new chapter of my life has been confusing and overwhelming. You helped alleviate those emotions by taking the time to listen and explaining everything for my particular situation. Thank you!

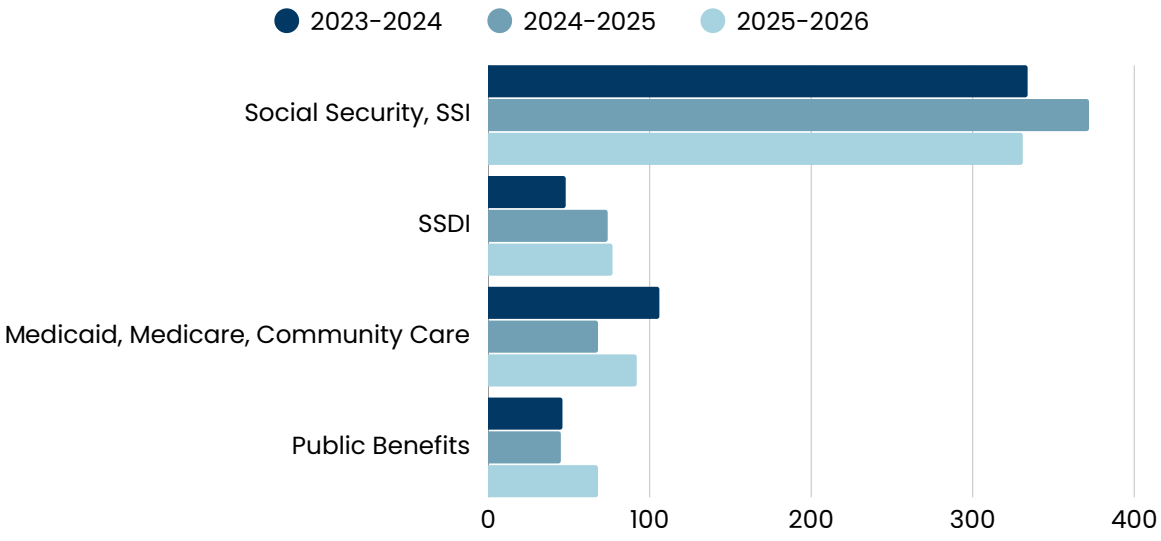
61%
Of cases involving Medicaid were for clients facing the loss of their healthcare benefits

53%
Increase in clients facing TANF, LIHEAP, SNAP, and Welfare insecurity in FY2025-26

73%
Of Social Security Disability Insurance cases were for clients facing eligibility barriers

171%
Increase over 3 years in Clients Facing Utility Hardship

Health and Public Benefits Cases Over Time



$1,056,140
Health & Public Benefits Recovered

$58,016
Financial Penalties Avoided

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PROTECTING BENEFITS

Maintaining Independence

Our client had received Social Security benefits since childhood because of multiple medical and physical impairments. As he reached adulthood, however, his continued eligibility came under review, putting the benefits he depended on at risk. His challenges included significant hearing and vision loss, along with other conditions that made everyday activities difficult and prevented him from maintaining employment.

As if the possibility of losing his benefits wasn't stressful enough, our client was also facing an alleged overpayment, creating another financial burden at a time when his stability was already uncertain.

60 DAYS TO APPEAL

Summit Legal Aid stepped in to help. Our attorneys worked closely with his medical providers, gathered extensive medical documentation, and built a case demonstrating the severity of his impairments and his continued need for benefits. Through legal advocacy and representation, we successfully challenged the termination of his benefits and addressed the overpayment.

The outcome was life-changing. Our client received $9,622 in back benefits, had his overpayment resolved, and secured the continuation of his full monthly Social Security benefits.

For someone who relies on these benefits to navigate daily life, this was about much more than winning an appeal. It was about protecting his financial security, preserving his independence, and ensuring that he would not lose the support he needed because of a complicated benefits process.

Helping a Mother Provide for her Children

Our client had been granted emergency custody of her minor children, and the court directed her to enroll them in counseling to help address the challenges they were facing. But there was an obstacle: she could not get the children the medical coverage they needed to access therapy. Because the children's father had already included them on his Medicaid and SNAP applications in another county, the County Assistance Office in our client's county would not transfer their benefits without a final custody order. In the meantime, our client was struggling to provide food for her children and obtain the healthcare coverage necessary to follow the court's instructions.

Her own circumstances made the situation even more difficult. Recently diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, she was also navigating a pending Supplemental Security Income (SSI) claim while trying to care for her children and secure their future.

Summit Legal Aid stepped in to help untangle the complicated benefits issues. Our attorneys worked directly with the County Assistance Offices to coordinate the transfer of the children's benefits to their mother, ensuring she could access the resources needed to feed her children and obtain medical coverage for their care. We also provided legal assistance with her custody matter, helping her navigate the court process during an already challenging time.

For this mother, the assistance meant more than resolving paperwork or transferring benefits. It meant being able to provide food, pursue counseling for her children, and focus on their health and well-being without having to fight through a complicated government system alone.



*Name has been changed for client privacy

ACCESS TO CONSUMER & TAXES JUSTICE

316
Consumer Cases Handled in FY2025-26

624
Clients & Household Members Helped

Financial hardship can quickly become overwhelming when debt, creditor pressure, repossessions, or tax problems threaten a family's ability to make ends meet. For people already living on limited incomes, these challenges can put their homes, transportation, savings, and long-term financial security at risk.
Consumer Rights and Taxes matters represented 5% of Summit Legal Aid's caseload in FY 2025–2026, **increasing 6%** over the previous year and **34%** over the past three years. Some of the most significant increases involved debt-related problems. Collections and repossessions **rose 30% in one year and 119%** over three years, while cases involving creditor harassment increased 107% in one year and **263% over three years**. These trends reflect the growing financial pressures facing individuals and families across our region. Summit helps clients understand their rights, respond to creditor actions, explore available options, including bankruptcy when appropriate, and address federal and state tax issues. This assistance can help people make informed decisions, protect their resources, and work toward a more stable financial future.
The need for tax-related legal assistance is also growing among older adults. Cases involving clients age 60 and older increased 11% in FY 2025–2026 and 25% over three years. For older adults living on fixed or limited incomes, resolving tax problems and protecting their financial resources can be especially important to maintaining independence and security.

220%
Increase in clients ages 60+ facing collections problems

107%
Increase in clients facing creditor harassment

71%
Of clients facing Sheriff or Constable sales were ages 36-59

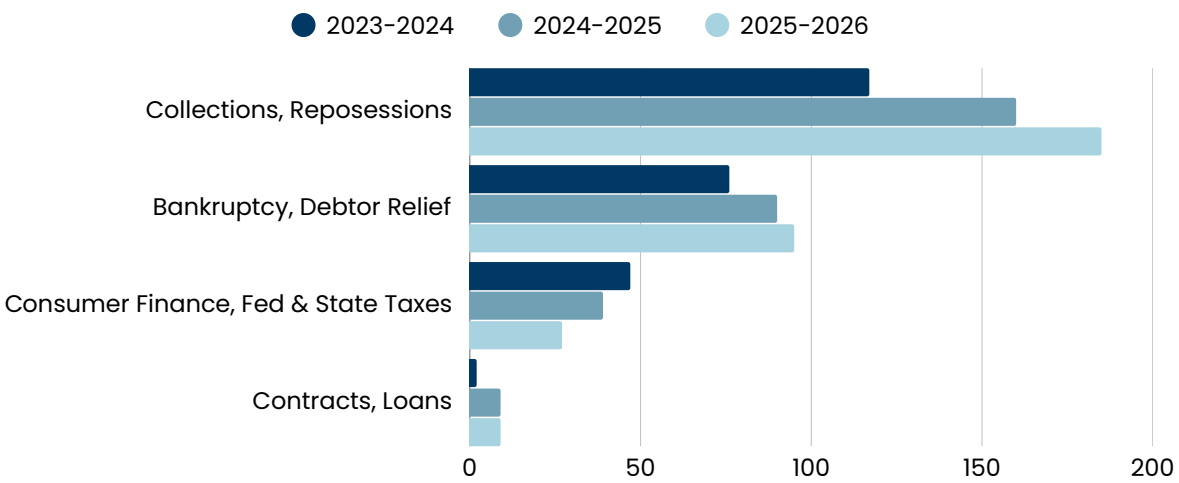
"I was facing collections from a creditor and I didn't know what to do. Summit Legal Aid helped me so much, and I appreciate my attorney for everything he did. Thank you!"



84
Bankruptcy Cases Closed in 2025-26

$150,802
Bankruptcy & Consumer Penalties Avoided

Consumer Rights & Taxes Cases Over Time



ACCESS TO SECOND CHANCES JUSTICE

390
Employment Cases Handled in FY2025-26

667
Clients & Household Members Helped

A driver's license, a clean criminal record, and fair treatment in the workplace can make an enormous difference in someone's ability to earn a living and support their family.

Yet legal barriers involving license suspensions, criminal records, and unpaid wages can stand in the way of employment and financial stability.

Employment and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) matters increased 18% over the previous year and 30% over the past three years.

Driver's license restoration cases grew significantly as Summit Legal Aid expanded to all 10 counties.

For people living in rural communities, losing the ability to drive can mean losing access to work, healthcare, education, and even basic necessities.

Through this expanded program, Summit Legal Aid helps eligible individuals navigate the process of restoring their driving privileges, including pursuing probationary, occupational limited, and ignition interlock licenses when appropriate.

Summit Legal Aid's work also helps people address the lasting effects of a criminal record and understand their workplace rights. By helping individuals clear eligible records, recover unpaid wages, and overcome barriers to employment, we help create opportunities for people to move forward, support their families, and contribute to their communities.

"Summit Legal Aid's expertise gave me the power I needed in an otherwise hopeless situation."

51%
Of employment cases handled were to help remove barriers to employment through criminal record clearing

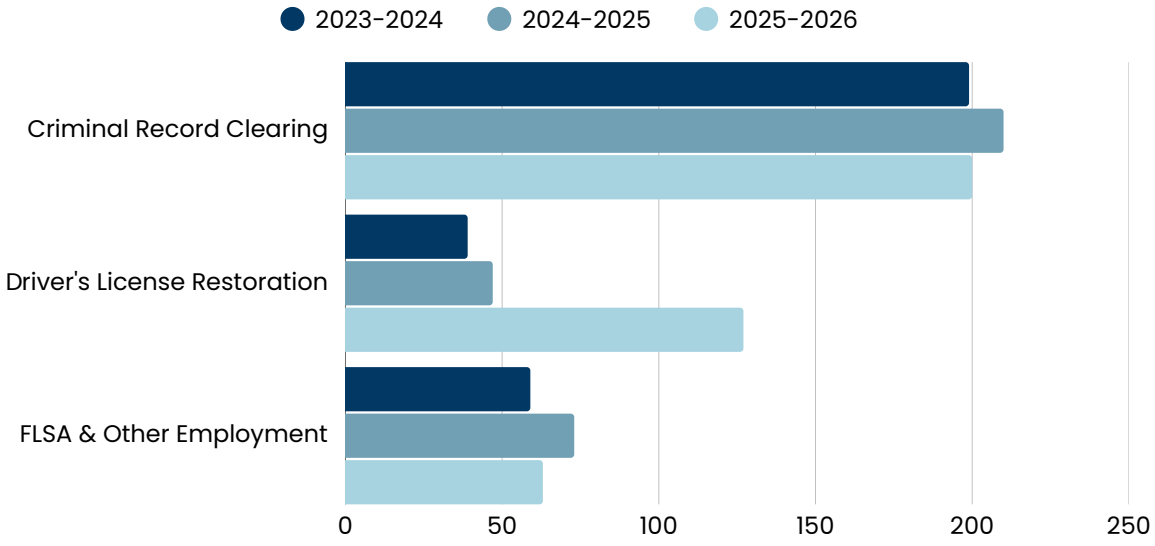
174
Expungement Cases Handled in 2025-26

20
Pardon Cases Handled in 2025-26

1050%
Increase in Driver's License Restoration cases with the expansion of services across our 10-county region

127
Driver's License Restoration Cases Handled in 2025-26

Employment Cases Over Time





ACCESS TO SECOND CHANCES JUSTICE

Tara Parker* is a lifelong resident of Westmoreland County who had an accident in 1996 after hitting another car while turning around a blind corner. There was some cosmetic damage to the vehicle, so information was exchanged. A judgment was entered against her in 1997 by the individual who was hit. Tara, who was going through a divorce and raising three children, moved back to her parents' home to regain her footing, and she did not receive the notice of judgment.

Two years later, Tara was rebuilding her life after her divorce. She was in her own home and looking at going back to school while working and taking care of her children. She misplaced her driver's license and went to get a new one, but this was when she learned that her driver's license had been indefinitely suspended. It would cost her almost $800.00 to pay the judgment fee, but her money went towards paying for her family's necessities: food, utilities, rent, medical care, and clothing.

"I was a single mom with three little boys. I didn't have that kind of money."

Tara's youngest son is disabled and required travel to Pittsburgh for his care. Access to reliable transportation in rural Westmoreland County for medical appointments, childcare, employment, and groceries was a lot more difficult in the late 90s. Uber and Lyft weren't available, and taxis were costly. In order to provide for her children, Rebecca made the difficult decision to continue driving without a license when she was unable to secure rides from friends.

For nearly thirty years, Tara drove without a license, but in March of 2025, Rebecca was pulled over for paint peeling from her license plate. The Magistrate told her that she had six months to pay the judgment and restoration fee to get her license back. Tara worked to save enough money, but she didn't know what to do next. That was when she contacted Summit Legal Aid.

Tara wasn't sure how her experience would be, but Summit Legal Aid worked extensively with her to help her meet her restoration requirements. In October of 2025, Tara was able to get her license back. It was a huge relief to finally have help and have a weight lifted from her shoulders. In January, she found a better employment opportunity, which was something she was unable to do without her driving record being cleared.

"It is a tremendous relief."



*Name has been changed for client privacy

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PAI & PRO BONO

181
Cases Referred to Private Attorneys in FY2025-26

367
Clients & Household Members Helped

Through its Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Program, Summit Legal Aid brings together the resources and expertise of private attorneys and local bar associations to help expand access to justice.

By connecting eligible individuals with private attorneys who provide legal assistance at no cost, the PAI Program extends Summit Legal Aid's reach by creating opportunities for more people to receive the guidance and representation they need. Through individual case referrals and legal clinics, participating attorneys help individuals and families address critical civil legal problems that affect their homes, finances, safety, and futures.

This work is made possible by the generosity, dedication, and professional commitment of attorneys across our service area. Their willingness to share their time and expertise strengthens our local legal community while helping bridge the gap between the need for legal services and the resources available to meet that need. Every referral accepted, clinic attended, and case handled represents another opportunity for someone to understand their rights, resolve a legal challenge, and move forward with greater stability and peace of mind.

156
Cases Closed in 2025-26

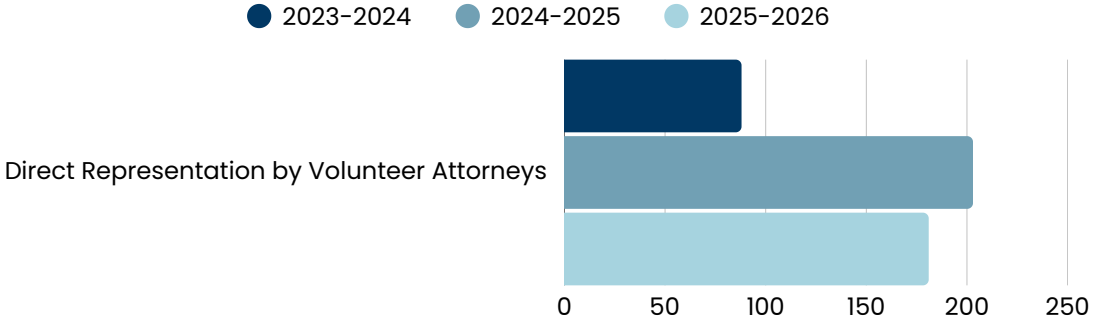
82%
Of cases handled by private attorneys were for clients facing domestic violence

67%
Of cases handled by private attorneys were in Cambria County through a new partnership

Private Attorney Involvement (PAI) Attorneys

Zubin Billimoria
Jaci Blackwell McCracken
Marshall Chriswell
Lauren Darbouze
Amy Dougherty
Patrick Dougherty
Andrew Dructor
Kelly Eshelman
AnnMarie Everett
Allen Fiechuk
Molly Maguire Gaussa
Andrew Gleason
Bobby Gordon
Christine Guthrie
L. Dawn Haber
MariAnn Hathaway
Russ Heiple
Matt Jaynes
Jim Jeffries
Tom Kostolansky
Maureen Kroll
Josh Larkin
John Lovette
Matt Madvay
Marcus Martin
Ashley Morgan
James Natale
Bryan Pavina
Jessica Phillips
Jack Puskar
Tim Ross
Tyler Shultz
Joe Sutton
Steve Taczak
Vincent Tiberi
Randy Wisnouse
Adam Yarussi

Cases Handled by Private Attorneys Over Time



"I was very nervous until I met my attorney. I was listened to, and I knew they truly cared about me. I feel like my child and I are now safe. Thank you so much!"

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

LEGAL CLINICS



7/25/2025: Clean Slate Legal Clinic
Greene County

Adam Belletti
Elizabeth Cole
Lukas Gatten
Barbara Griffin
Joyce Hatfield Wise
Jessica Phillips
Tim Ross
Marissa Stewart

10
People Helped

8/1/2025: Back to School & Custody
Westmoreland County

Elizabeth McCall
Bruce Tobin

14
People Helped

4/24/2026: Clean Slate & Driver's Licenses
Washington County

John Bitoni
Jeff Brooks
Andrew Ructor
Keith Emerick
L. Dawn Haber
Brianna Joyner
Samantha Lynn
Josh Larkin
Heike Mills
David Wolf
Adam Yarussi

80
People Helped

5/15/2026: Driver's License Restoration
Fayette County

Rep. Charity Grimm Krupa (co-host)
Ethan Carter
Nicholas Clark
Shane Gannon
Anthony Gentile
Gregory Kunkel
Tyler Shultz
Vincent Tiberi

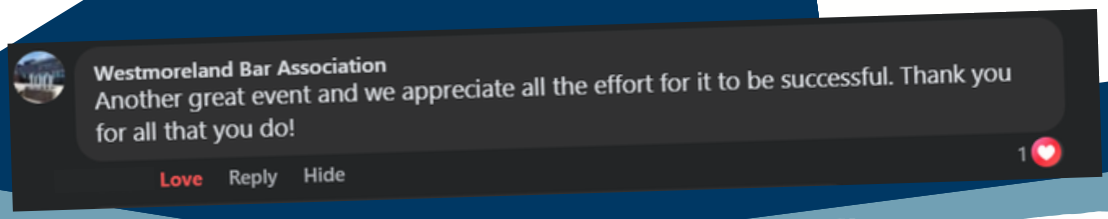
16
People Helped

IN THE NEWS

Summit Legal Aid used a mix of news stories and social media to raise awareness of civil legal aid's local impact.

8,688 Impressions
276 Shares





Tax clinic set on IRS audits, denied claims and penalties

New Study Highlights the Critical Need for Free Legal Aid



Demand for legal aid in the Summit region is escalating, underscoring the financial difficulties faced by many Western Pennsylvanians, further highlighted by a significant 28% rise in homelessness between 2021 and 2024. Obstacles to accessing legal assistance are substantial

Lost driver's license? New program helps navigate process of regaining privilege

Program to restore drivers licenses expands in Southwestern Pa.

"Our clients, who are lower-income people, are really hard hit because they can't get to work, they can't get to medical appointments, they can't get to drug and alcohol treatment," Enck said.

Summit Legal Aid helps with free, personalized assistance for qualified residents to navigate restoration requirements, appeals and probationary, occupational limited and ignition interlock licenses. The pilot program in Washington County helped 63 people over 2½ years through funding from the Hillman Foundation and the Washington County Community Foundation.

TRIB | LIVE

90.5 WESA Pittsburgh's NPR News Station

HERALD-Standard

THE PUNXSUTAWNEY SPIRIT

COURIER EXPRESS

ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Access to justice means more than having an attorney available. It means ensuring that every person who seeks help is treated with dignity, understood, and given the opportunity to participate fully in the legal process. At Summit Legal Aid, we recognize that our ability to serve clients effectively begins with understanding the diverse experiences, challenges, and barriers they face.

The Access to Justice Committee

Our Access to Justice (A2J) Committee brings together attorneys, paralegals, and management to promote awareness, strengthen staff knowledge, and identify ways to make our services more accessible and responsive to the communities we serve. Through educational opportunities, staff trainings, and timely information shared throughout the year, the committee helps ensure that our approach to legal services reflects the needs of real people facing difficult circumstances.

In July, 2025, we celebrated **National Disability Independence Day**, commemorating the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, which prohibited discrimination against those with disabilities. To follow up, a month later, trainers from Temple University's Institute on Disabilities provided a training aimed at improving communication with clients with disabilities and mental health challenges, best meeting clients 'where they are,' and advocating with and for clients with disabilities and mental health challenges. They returned on 10/30/26 to engage our staff in example scenarios to hone in on our skills, discussing situations such as trauma, mental health conditions, communication disability, and financial exploitation. Staff left prepared to work more effectively with clients at all levels, regardless of whether/not they have a disability.

Our clients need legal advocates who can understand their circumstances while helping them navigate the civil justice system.

As immigration-related concerns and enforcement activity increased, the committee also helped ensure staff had timely, reliable information to better understand immigration status, individual rights, and Summit's client-centered protocols. Through an Immigration 101 training, staff explored policies and best practices, emphasizing the protection of clients' rights, respect for universal freedoms, and fair treatment when individuals seek legal assistance.

The committee also recognizes that caring for others requires caring for ourselves. During Mental Health Awareness Month, staff participated in **When Helping Hurts: Understanding the Impact of Compassion Fatigu**e, led by Sharice Nance of Vitamin C Healing. Legal aid professionals regularly work with individuals experiencing trauma, violence, poverty, housing instability, and other life-altering challenges. While this work is deeply meaningful, the emotional demands can take a toll. Staff explored practical wellness strategies, learned how to recognize and address compassion fatigue, and developed ways to support their own well-being and that of their colleagues.

12+	3	1
Timely educational resources shared throughout the year	Staff training sessions to build skills & better understand client needs	Staff wellness training to recognize & address compassion fatigue



REMOVING BARRIERS

For individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, speak limited English, or face other communication barriers, simply asking for legal help can present significant challenges. We believe those barriers should never stand in the way of someone receiving the assistance they need.
Through a technology upgrade grant from the **Washington County Community Foundation**, Summit Legal Aid has taken important steps toward making our services more accessible and inclusive.

The Pilot Project

In Washington County, we introduced three tablets equipped with mobile hotspots and interpretation technology to help staff better communicate with clients who are deaf or hard of hearing and those with limited English proficiency (ESL).
Using on-demand video interpretation services through Global Wordsmiths, these tools allow staff to access interpretation resources during client interviews, intake appointments, and community outreach activities, helping individuals communicate more comfortably and participate more fully in conversations about their legal needs.
Faced with aging technology, computers were also purchased for legal staff serving Washington County through this grant to better accommodate the needs of our clients.



Justice is only accessible when everyone has the opportunity to be heard.

In FY2025-26, Summit Legal Aid assisted 14 clients who required interpretation services, including nine in Washington County.
This new project will allow us to expand our accessibility in the years to come.



This investment reflects our commitment to meeting people where they are, recognizing that everyone communicates differently, and finding practical ways to ensure language and hearing barriers don't prevent someone from accessing legal assistance.
For someone facing eviction, navigating a family law matter, seeking protection from abuse, or trying to secure essential benefits, being understood can make all the difference. By investing in accessible technology and communication resources, Summit Legal Aid is working to ensure more people can be heard, understand their options, and take the next steps to protect their rights.

We thank the Washington County Community Foundation for their support in making this project possible.

IN LOVING MEMORY

The Honorable Joseph P. Moschetta
August 18,1937 - January 4, 2026
Judge Moschetta was among those who established Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid and served for decades on its Board of Directors, including as President. He continued to generously make lasting contributions, for which we are forever grateful. He was dedicated to and enthusiastic about helping the less fortunate, always voicing his gratitude for legal aid workers.
https://www.warcofalvofuneralhome.com/obituary-posts/2026/1/5/the-honorable-joseph-p-moschetta

James R. McDonald
November 16, 1935 - July 16, 2026
James dedicated his life to standing up for equality, and among his many contributions to the community, he was a founding member of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Legal Aid Society, now Summit Legal Aid. James "Cookie" McDonald's legacy will continue to live on through our work.
https://www.lantzfh.com/obituary/James-McDonald

Elaine M. Rager
December 8, 1965 - June 18, 2026
Elaine dedicated nearly four decades of her professional life to the legal field, working as a paralegal since 1987. At the time of her passing, she was employed by Summit Legal Aid in our Greensburg office, where she continued her lifelong commitment to helping others. She was respected for her diligence, compassion, and unwavering dedication to those she served.
https://www.georgeigreenfuneralhome.com/obituaries/elaine-rager

John E. Perrott, Esq.
April 28, 1952 - August 12, 2026
John believed in fairness, justice, and kindness, and he dedicated nearly 40 years to working with Summit Legal Aid in Uniontown, helping those who needed it the most. He was a mentor and good friend to each of his co-workers, with his booming voice and spirited personality bringing a smile to everyone's faces. While John will be sorely missed by his friends and loved ones, his memory will live on through each of us who had the pleasure of knowing him.
https://www.hastingsfuneralhome.com/obituaries/john-perrott

Debra L. Hartman
June 25, 1957 - September 11, 2026
Debra (Debbie) dedicated nearly 45 years to working in legal aid. When Summit Legal Aid was Laurel Legal Services in Greensburg, Debbie was the first person that people saw and talked to. She answered questions and conducted intakes for clients in need of help.
https://www.kepplegraft.com/obituaries/debra-hartman

THE JUSTICE GAP

The Legal Services Corporation (LSC) defines the justice gap as the difference between the civil legal needs of low-income Americans and the resources available to meet those needs. In Western Pennsylvania, **the need for civil legal aid far exceeds the help currently available**.

Between July 1, 2025, and June 30, 2026, 5,236 evictions were filed across Summit Legal Aid's 10-county service area. During that same period, Summit Legal Aid handled 860 eviction cases, helping people or families facing the possibility of losing their homes, disrupting their employment, uprooting their children, or experiencing homelessness.

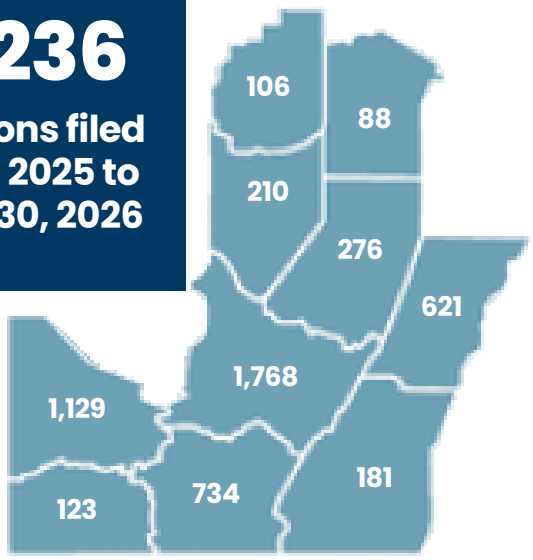
Housing instability can become a recurring cycle for families already struggling to make ends meet, and having legal assistance can be critical for helping individuals to understand their rights, navigate complicated legal processes, and work toward lasting stability. While we work tirelessly to help as many people as possible, these numbers illustrate just how many individuals may be navigating the legal system **without the guidance or representation they need**.

This is not an isolated challenge. We continue to see increasing demand for help with housing instability, family law matters, domestic violence, public benefits, consumer debt, and other legal issues that threaten a person's safety and financial security.

The challenges ahead extend far beyond housing. Significant federal changes to public assistance programs are expected to place additional pressure on families already struggling to make ends meet. According to projections compiled by The Pittsburgh Foundation, **54,000 residents** across 10 counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania (6 of those counties serviced by Summit Legal Aid) could lose Medicaid coverage, while another **29,000** could lose SNAP benefits. The region is also projected to lose $18 million in annual public housing operating funds. These reductions threaten access to healthcare, prescription medications, food assistance, and affordable housing, which are resources that many families depend on to remain healthy, employed, and financially stable.

An estimated **250,000** residents rely on both Medicaid and SNAP. Of those, **55,000** also depend on federal housing assistance, and **19,000** rely on federal energy assistance. When one source of support disappears, families are often forced to make impossible choices between paying rent, buying groceries, filling prescriptions, and keeping the lights on.

5,236
Evictions filed July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026



When multiple forms of assistance are threatened, the consequences can be devastating. These pressures will not affect families alone; they will place additional demands on food banks, healthcare providers, shelters, community organizations, and other already-stretched resources.

The challenges ahead are significant, but we are committed to doing everything we can to meet them, but we can't do it alone.

As the need for legal assistance grows, the resources available to provide it remain stagnant, are being reduced, or are at risk.

Data for Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties

https://civilcourtdata.lsc.gov/data/eviction/pennsylvania
The Pittsburgh Foundation, A Warning for Pittsburgh's Working Families, prepared June 2026

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Thank you for Helping to Make Justice Possible

Every investment in Summit Legal Aid helps to connect another person with the legal assistance they need to protect their home, preserve their benefits, escape an unsafe situation, or build a more stable future. It helps to ensure that someone facing the complicated civil justice system does not have to face it alone.
The need is real, and the consequences of going without legal help can be life-changing.

Thank you for standing with us, believing in our mission, and helping to make justice possible for all.

summitlegal.org/donate

SUMMIT LEGAL AID

Central Administration
10 West Cherry Avenue
Washington, PA 15301
Phone: (724) 225-6170
Fax: (724) 250-1078

Clarion County
231 West Main Street
Clarion, PA 16214
Phone: (814) 226-4340
Fax: (814) 226-5531

Westmoreland County
16 East Otterman Street
Greensburg, PA 15601
Phone: (724) 836-2211
Fax: (724) 836-3680

Cambria County
227 Franklin Street
Suite 400
Johnstown, PA 15901
Phone: (814) 536-8917
Fax: (814) 535-3377

Somerset County
203 West Union Street
Somerset, PA 15501
Phone: (814) 443-4615
Fax: (814) 444-0331

Fayette County
45 East Main Street
Suite 200
Uniontown, PA 15401
Phone: (724) 439-3591
Fax: (724) 439-6491

Greene County
63 South Washington Street
Waynesburg, PA 15370
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Fax: (724) 852-4189

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