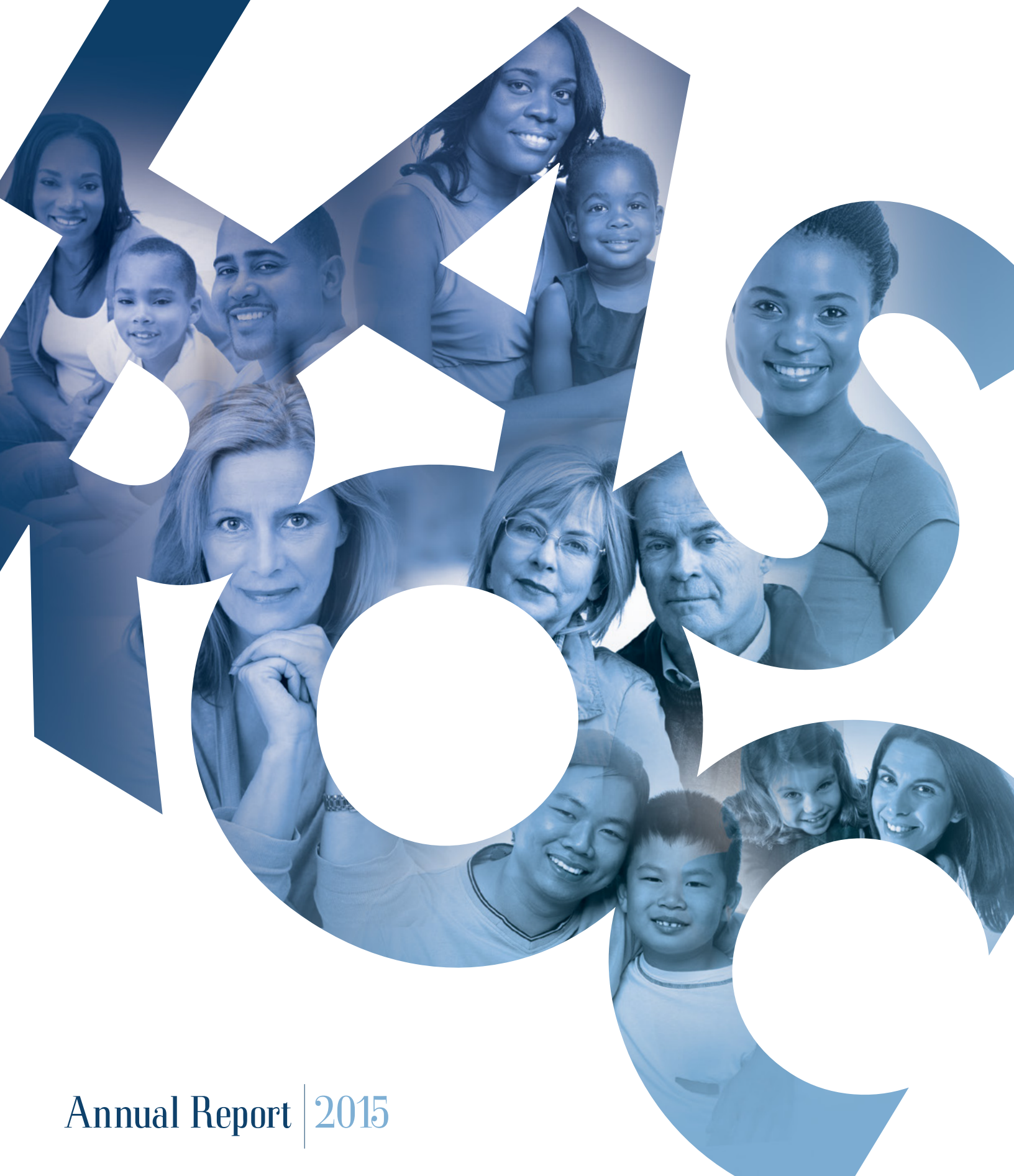




The Legal Aid Society  
of ROCHESTER, NEW YORK



Annual Report | 2015



## Dear Friends,

This has been a year of significant change for The Legal Aid Society of Rochester (LASROC). Our former CEO, Alan Harris, retired in November 2014 after many years of dedicated service, and new CEO Carla Palumbo succeeded him, completing a transition that had been several years in the making. LASROC is fortunate to have a history of committed, creative, and visionary leaders working with its Board and staff to provide the highest quality civil legal services to the Rochester community.

This year, almost 9,500 people who otherwise could not afford it received LASROC representation in family, immigration, housing, and educational cases in Monroe and its 13 surrounding counties. Additionally, as the only mandated provider of legal services to children in Family Court, LASROC has advocated for the truly vulnerable, our children, in cases ranging from abuse and neglect to persons in need of supervision. Our attorneys work tirelessly on behalf of our clients with outstanding results, some of which you will read about in this report.

As proud as we are of our achievements, the LASROC team has never been one to rest on its laurels. We have big plans to make sure that

Sincerely,

June M. Castellano

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "June Castellano".

Chair, Board of Directors



Carla M. Palumbo

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carla M. Palumbo".

President and Chief  
Executive Officer



we remain at the forefront of civil legal services in meeting the changing needs of our clients. In 2015-16, we will pursue additional programs in the areas of immigration legal services, elder law and workforce revitalization, while expanding services to victims of domestic violence who often fall through the cracks. We will also continue to integrate technology into our operations, making our office more efficient for staff and more accessible for clients.

None of this would be possible without the support of our community partners. We are fortunate to have strong working relationships with Willow Domestic Violence Center (formerly ABW), Volunteer Legal Services Project, Rochester Housing Council, Empire Justice Center, LawNY, the City of Rochester, the County of Monroe, United Way, and the Monroe County Bar Association, among others, all of whom work together for the benefit of our clients.

On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors of The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, NY, we thank you for your ongoing commitment to our agency. We look forward to continuing to ensure the best possible legal representation for those who can afford it the least.

# Programs and Accomplishments



## Civil Division

In addition to providing representation to 4,794 individuals in 2014-15, LASROC saved taxpayers an estimated \$1.4 million. Our attorneys and staff also gained more than \$3.3 million for our clients by obtaining income through child support and maintenance awards, preventing improper judgments and foreclosures, and assisting with credit repair.

Our **FAMILY LAW UNIT** provides legal representation to victims of domestic violence and litigants seeking assistance with divorce, custody, visitation and child support. The Family Law Unit assisted 2,655 individuals in 2014-15.

- **Domestic Violence Legal Services** provides legal services and counseling to victims of domestic violence in Monroe, Genesee, and Orleans County Family Courts to obtain and enforce orders of protection to prevent continued violence. The Domestic Violence Program also provides legal representation in divorce, custody, or visitation cases when domestic violence is the predominant issue. Our focus is on the victims of interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual assault, family violence and elder abuse.

Through our funding partners we also provide representation for victims in housing, immigration, privacy, crime victim's compensation and other civil matters such as name changes, which enhance the safety and well-being of victims of violence. This program focuses on other civil legal needs which, if left unresolved, compromise victim safety.

- **Child Support Program** provides representation in Supreme Court matrimonial actions and Family Court child support actions to obtain and/or increase child support, medical insurance coverage, child care expenses, and uninsured medical expenses.
- **Limited Means Program** provides affordable civil legal representation to people of moderate means in the area of family and matrimonial law. Clients pay a flat fee retainer based on a sliding scale at the onset of their cases.
- **Assigned Counsel Program** provides assigned counsel in Supreme Court matrimonial matters where custody, visitation or domestic violence is an issue.

Our **GENERAL LAW UNIT** provides legal representation to litigants seeking assistance in the area of immigration, or those referred by the Monroe County Health Department collaborative, which provides legal services to clients with AIDS/HIV. The General Law Unit assisted 822 individuals in 2014-15.

- **Immigration Legal Services Program** provides legal representation and technical assistance in immigration-related matters to persons residing in a 14 county area of western New York. Representation includes cases involving asylum, permanent residence, removal defense, meritorious appeals, extension of immigration status, and work authorization. We also provide two outreach clinics to migrant farm workers in Brockport and Alton. Representation was provided to 818 individuals from 55 different countries.
- **Department of Health Program** provides legal services in the area of family law, housing and immigration to clients with HIV/AIDS.

Our **HOUSING UNIT** provides a continuum of housing and transactional services, from eviction prevention to first time home buyer assistance. The Housing Unit represented 1,317 individuals this year.

- **Tenant Advocacy Program** provides representation to qualified tenants who face eviction in Rochester City Court. We offer in-court intake at the beginning of the Rochester City Court's Landlord Tenant Part calendar.
- **Foreclosure Prevention Program** provides legal representation to homeowners in foreclosure. Representation includes loan modifications, short sales, deeds-in-lieu of foreclosure, or bankruptcy as part of a plan to save the home.
- **Home Ownership Initiative** provides representation for home purchases, home preservation matters, consumer credit issues and complex legal cases. It also addresses illegal evictions, home purchases, foreclosure prevention, and bankruptcy. The primary goal of the Home Ownership Initiative is to create or maintain sustainable homeownership.
- **Landlord Services** provides alternative dispute resolution and mediation services to eligible landlords and tenants who reside in the City of Rochester. It also provides landlords with training and pro se clinics designed to raise the quality of housing and increase housing stability in city neighborhoods.

## Juvenile Justice Division

Provided representation to 4,672 individuals in 2014-2015.

- Our **Attorney for the Child Unit** provides legal representation to children who are involved in proceedings before the Monroe County Family Court. The child may be the respondent in a Person In Need Of Supervision or Juvenile Delinquency matter. The child may also be the subject of a child abuse, neglect, custody, visitation or foster care petition. The Attorney for the Child is appointed only by an order of a Family Court Judge.
- Our **Educational Law Program** provides legal representation and advocacy for youth and their families in education matters in Monroe, Genesee and Livingston Counties. This includes representation for Committees on Special Education (CSE), school suspensions, reasonable accommodations for children with disabilities, eligibility for school enrollment, enrollment for homeless students, and access to appropriate school or community services.





# Client Highlight

## Gerardo Vazquez-Mentado v. U.S. Border Patrol

The Legal Aid Society of Rochester Helps U.S. Citizen Fight Wrongful Arrest

The day started out like any other for Gerardo Vazquez-Mentado in September, 2009. Mr. Vazquez-Mentado was driving with his wife and children to his brother's house in Oswego County, where they were meeting to go to work. On the way, he was pulled over by the U.S. Border Patrol, and things quickly took a downward turn.

Despite Vazquez-Mentado showing his valid driver's license, Patrol agents told him to get out of his car and that he was under arrest.

"When I asked why, they told me it was because I was illegal and they were taking me in," Vazquez-Mentado said. "I kept telling them that I was a citizen, that I had documentation, but they told me I was lying. They would not listen."

Handcuffed, his children left crying in his van, Vazquez-Mentado was taken to the Border Patrol station in Oswego, where he was held until his wife came with his documentation and he was let go – with no apology, no explanation.

"That was my main concern," Vazquez-Mentado said. "I just wanted an apology. I just wanted them to admit that what they did was wrong."

Mentado-Vazquez was prepared to put the experience behind him until he talked more with family and friends over the next few weeks. Many encouraged him to pursue the matter legally, to keep the same thing from happening to others and to hold Border Patrol agents accountable. It was at that point that one of his friends told him about "Wally."

Wally is Walter Ruehle, who leads the Legal Aid Society of Rochester's Immigration Legal Services Program. Ruehle had been hearing about aggressive Border Patrol enforcement in the area, and he thought that Mentado-Vazquez's case was a perfect example of what can happen to U.S. citizens when government bureaucracy goes awry. Ruehle took the case as lead counsel, brought in colleagues from the Worker Justice

Center and Empire Justice Center for their expertise, and filed suit against the U.S. government in 2012.

Over the next three years, the team worked tirelessly to take the case through the court system. Sometimes Vazquez-Mentado thought about giving up. "I would ask Wally, 'is this worth it?'" But he kept saying yes, that we were going to do it. I never would have been able to do it without him."

Finally, in November, 2014, a settlement was reached in the case. While the Border Patrol did not publicly admit that they had acted wrongfully, Ruehle and Vazquez-Mentado hope that the settlement acts as a deterrent to overzealous law enforcement. "Hopefully, this case sends a message to local Border Patrol agents to investigate first, and not arrest, U.S. citizens," Ruehle said.

For Vazquez-Mentado, who will celebrate his 20th year of U.S. citizenship in 2018, the experience of working with Legal Aid changed how he and his friends think about life in the United States. "Now," he said, "when we talk about things that happen in the community that are not right, we know that there is something we can do about it."



# Board of Directors/Staff



## Officers

June M. Castellano, Chair  
Kathryn L. Smith, Vice-Chair  
Thomas M. Farace, Treasurer  
Richard N. Chapman, Secretary  
Carla M. Palumbo, President and CEO

## Directors

A. Vincent Buzard  
Jose Cruz  
Hon. Evelyn Frazee  
Charles P. Inclima  
John Horvath  
Donald W. O'Brien, Jr.  
Michael R. Parrinello  
Dr. Heidi Witmer Smith  
Samuel O. Tilton  
Robert T. Turner

## Management Team

Carla Palumbo, President & CEO  
Kathia Cason, Director, Civil Division  
William Davis, CFO & Director of Personnel  
Stephen Weisbeck, Director, Juvenile Justice Division  
Alan S. Harris, President & CEO (Retired)  
Patricia Harris, Assistant Director, Finance & Personnel (Retired)

## Administration

David Erb, Systems Administrator  
Kathleen James, Director of Operations  
Sara Oberman, Grants Coordinator  
Sasha Okolo, Human Relations Manager  
Aaron O'Neal, Finance Manager  
Marianne Naylor, Administrative Assistant  
Barbara Fachini, Receptionist  
Yolanda Irizarry, Receptionist  
Leslie Torres, Receptionist

## Civil Division

Walter Ruehle, Attorney, Program Director, Immigration Program  
Zachary Pike, Attorney, Program Director, Housing Unit  
Angela Szewczyk, Attorney, Program Director, Family Law Unit  
Brenda Campbell, Attorney, Director of Special Projects  
Daniel Burke, Senior Attorney  
Cynthia Nolan, Senior Litigation Attorney  
Vivian Aquilina, Staff Attorney  
Denise Buscemi, Staff Attorney  
Leigh Ann Chute, Staff Attorney  
Meagan Dean, Staff Attorney  
Michael Furlano, Staff Attorney  
Christa Hibbard, Staff Attorney  
Mark Muoio, Staff Attorney  
Lauren Pienkowski, Staff Attorney  
Shannon Pozzuolo, Staff Attorney  
Yolanda Rios, Staff Attorney  
Maria Alessandra, Legal Assistant  
Jamee Bennett, Legal Assistant  
Ariel Cruz, Program Coordinator  
Angela Jackson, Intake Coordinator  
Inca Mang, Legal Assistant  
Mary Miller, Legal Assistant  
Yolanda Montalvo, Accredited Representative  
Amber Niewiemi, Legal Assistant  
Tami Politza, Legal Assistant  
Nancy Whiting, Legal Assistant  
Joan Bernhard, Legal Assistant (Retired)

## Juvenile Justice Division

### ATTORNEY FOR THE CHILD

Tanya Conley, Supervising Attorney, Appeals and Training  
Deral Givens, Supervising Attorney  
Tamara Casey, Attorney  
Tonia Ettinger, Attorney  
Jennifer Hilburger, Attorney  
Gerard LaRusso, Attorney  
Kathleen Perrault, Attorney  
Kristen Porpora, Attorney  
Maria Reed, Attorney  
Katie Woodruff, Attorney  
Eric Huppert, Investigator  
Lindsey Jackson, Supervising Social Worker  
Patrice Battle, Social Worker  
Elizabeth Escobar, Social Worker  
Jacqueline Klube, Social Worker  
Michelle Rivera, Supervising Secretary  
Prudence Banker, Secretary  
Yolanda Irizarry, Clerk  
Judith Borzilleri, Clerk  
Pamela Bayer, Attorney (Retired)  
Sandra Quarrie, Supervising Social Worker (Retired)

### EDUCATION LAW PROGRAM

Laura Calla, Advocate  
Stewart Atkin, Advocate



# 2013-14 Financial Statement

These figures are preliminary and subject to audit. Financial records are audited by Thaney & Associates, CPA's, P.C.

## Revenue

1. NYS Government Grants (OCA, OCFS, DCJS)	\$3,050,228.00
2. New York State Interest on Lawyer's Accounts	\$575,000.00
3. United Way of Greater Rochester, Monroe and Livingston Counties	\$291,911.00
4. Youth Bureaus - Monroe and Livingston Counties	\$62,095.00
5. Foundations	\$10,000.00
6. Case Fees	\$122,040.00
7. Monroe County, City of Rochester	\$146,085.00
8. US Dept of Justice - VAWA GTEA	\$122,140.00
9. US Dept of Justice - VAWA LAV	\$91,165.00
10. Fundraising & Special Events	\$64,529.00
11. Miscellaneous/Interest/Other Income	\$74,575.00

## TOTAL OPERATION REVENUE

**\$4,609,768.00**

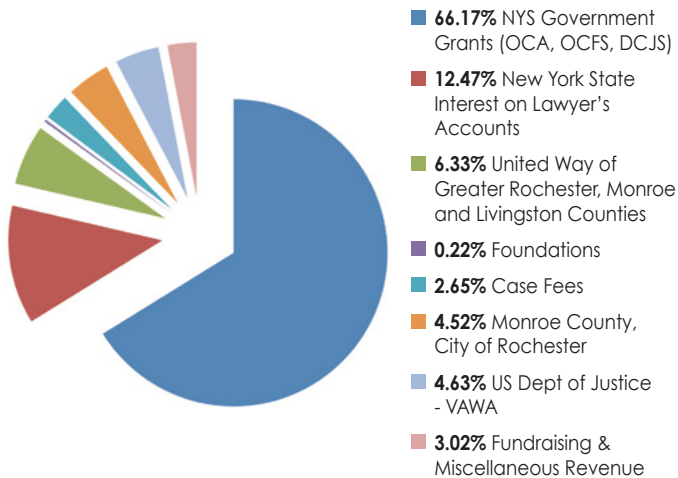
## Expenses

1. Salary	\$3,233,452.00
2. Payroll taxes and Benefits	\$670,425.00
3. Contractual Expenses	\$43,171.00
4. Collaborative Partners	\$161,145.00
5. Supplies and Postage	\$106,670.00
6. Occupancy	\$228,563.00
7. Travel, training and dues	\$111,206.00
8. Equipment purchases	\$11,682.00
9. Insurance, Recruitment, other miscellaneous expenses	\$23,798.00
10. Specific Assistance on behalf of client	\$18,671.00

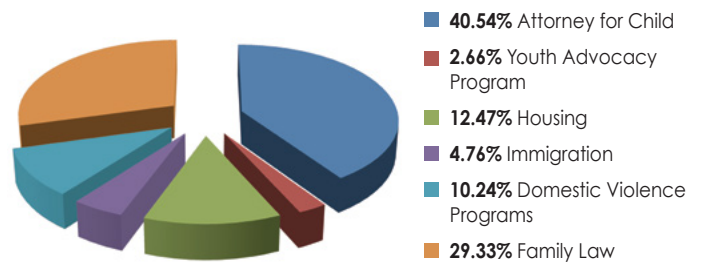
## TOTAL FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

**\$4,608,783.00**

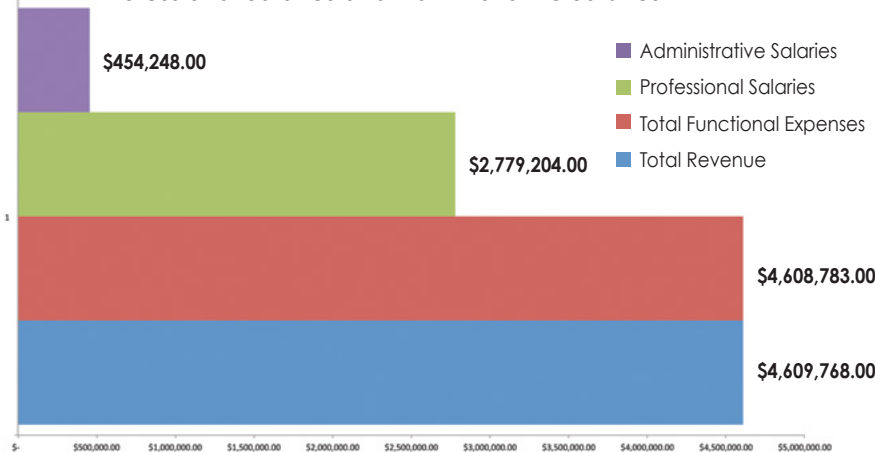
### How Our Funds Arrive



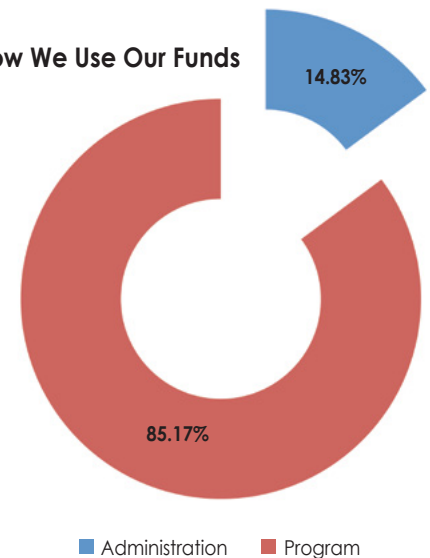
### Nature of Our Programs



### Comparison of Total Revenue, Total Functional Expenses, Professional Salaries and Administrative Salaries



### How We Use Our Funds





The Legal Aid Society  
of ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

The Legal Aid Society of Rochester, New York  
One West Main Street, Suite 800  
Rochester, NY 14614



# Mission

**The Legal Aid Society of Rochester** is a not-for-profit organization that provides direct civil legal services, including lay advocacy and related human services, to adults and children. We ensure that those who seek justice have an opportunity to receive a fair and full hearing. We obtain legal solutions that have a beneficial impact on our clients and the community.

**The Legal Aid Society of Rochester** believes in the guarantees of due process and equal protection as promised in our State and Federal constitutions.

To ensure that those rights have real meaning, we will strive to provide a highly qualified and zealous advocate to anyone who cannot otherwise obtain representation in civil legal matters.

We will create an environment in our community that values access to legal counsel, so every person is treated with dignity, equality, and fairness.

